

sExtraordinary Beings

Exploring Sex and Intimacy Within the Disabled Community



sExploration 2024



“Prejudice is a far greater problem than any impairment; discrimination is a bigger obstacle to overcome than any disability.” — Paul K. Longmore

Sexuality and disability are not mutually exclusive. Although persons with disabilities (PWD) are often unfairly infantilized and desexualized, it is important to acknowledge that they are just like most people: sexual beings, with feelings, needs, and desires regarding sex. Sex and sexual function can be difficult to address for some, and conversations about sex with PWD may seem especially off limits. Participants can expect to explore and uncover practical applications and theory regarding sexuality and individuals who live with congenital or acquired disabilities. Changes in ability status are inevitable within the human lifespan, and understanding the stigma associated with disability status is relevant and impactful. We will also ask, “Who is sex really marketed for?” and “Why aren’t people with disabilities being included in research surrounding sexual health and well-being?” Join us to learn more about sExtraordinary Beings!

sExploration : Sexual issues can be as difficult for clinicians to address as they are for clients to share. While it is easy for them to go unrecognized, they are present across the lifespan. The annual **sExploration** series are designed by PASD as catalysts for discussions on integrating sexuality issues into all levels of our work: assessment, consultation, research, clinical practice, and teaching.

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

All presentations & discussions will be held from **12:00 – 12:50 pm CDT/CST.**

Date	Day	Topic	Location
March.04	Mon	2024 Display Opens	5th Floor Hallway
March.06	Wed	Sexual & Reproductive Health in The Context of Spinal Cord Injury	324 & Zoom
March.11	Mon	2024 Posters go on display	5th Floor Hallway
March.11	Mon.	Sexual Pleasure Demonized in the Crip-Queer Community & How to Fix That	324 & Zoom
March.12	Tues	sExploring Inter-abled Dating: a Rom-Com Book Discussion	324 & Zoom
March.13	Wed	2024 POSTER FAIR presentations	5th Floor Hallway
March.20	Wed	Neuroqueer(ing): The Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, and Neurodivergence	324 & Zoom
March.21	Thurs	Netflix and Chill: Exploring Disability Representation in <i>Sex Education</i>	323 & Zoom
March.28	Thurs	Seeing the sExtraordinary in PWD - Survey Results & Discussion	323 & Zoom

Hybrid events can be attended using this link:

<https://tcsedsystem-hipaa.zoom.us/j/98573525907?pwd=NzNRUHBFdVgxalpms0hib1B2TDk5dz09>

The link and our program may be accessed through this code:



PARTICIPATE!

Extraordinary Beings: Portrayals of Sexual Expression in the Disabled Community

5th floor interactive display

It is rare to see images portraying persons with disabilities (PWD), let alone in a sexual context. If these images depicted able-bodied individuals, they likely wouldn't provoke much thought. This year's sExploration aims to emphasize the fact that, just like everyone else, persons with disabilities are sexual beings, and as such, their sexuality deserves acknowledgment, visibility, and acceptance.

Please complete this survey before and after viewing the images. In addition, consider how these images make you feel, what emotions they convey, whether you have seen similar images before and in what context(s), and how might normalizing these types of images, particularly in the media, affect psychologists' approaches to working with clients in the disabled community.

The results will be presented during the Thursday, March 28th discussion.

Display Coordinator: Samantha Myers is currently enrolled in her first year of the Psy.D. Clinical Psychology program at The Chicago School. She earned her Bachelor of Arts & Science from McMaster University in 2020. With a background in research spanning four years, Samantha has focused her studies on sexual health within the LGBTQ+ community, emphasizing areas including fertility and reproductive rights, sexual health dynamics within couples, as well as the impacts of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSIONS

Presentation Sexual and Reproductive Health in The Context of Spinal Cord Injury

Wednesday, March 6th Room 324 & Zoom **FREE pizza!**

Spinal cord injury (SCI) affects over 300,000 people in the U.S., with significant mental health consequences, including effects on sexuality and reproductive health (SRH). People with SCI (PwSCI) experience poorer psychosexual esteem compared to their able-bodied counterparts, influenced by social messages of attractiveness and gender norms. Barriers to accessing SRH services among this population include discriminatory attitudes from health care providers, infrastructure-derived barriers, and financial obstacles to care. This presentation will provide an overview of the mental health challenges experienced by PwSCI relating to sexuality, intimacy, and reproductive health, as well as highlight clinical implications for professionals working with this population. **Presenter:** [Nicole \(Nikki\) Sharf, M.A.](#) (she/her) is a third-year clinical psychology doctoral student at The Chicago School. She received her B.S. in Psychology at the University of Florida. Her clinical and research interests include women's health, sexuality, and rehabilitation outcomes in the context of injury, chronic conditions, and disability. She is currently writing her dissertation on the lived experiences of women with SCI in accessing SRH services post-injury. nsharf@ego.thechicagoschool.edu **Moderator:** Alex Combs, M.S. (he/him) is a first-year student in the Clinical PsyD program. Prior to beginning his doctoral program, Alex spent several years working in various behavioral health settings, with a focus on children, adolescents, and adults experiencing serious mental illness and neurodevelopmental disorders.

Display 2024 Posters

Monday March 11th through Friday, March 29th 5th floor

Posters will be on display in the 5th floor hallway. Please stop by and take a look. Poster authors will discuss their results on Wednesday, March 13th. **Poster Coordinator:** Molly Schwibinger (she/her) is a first-year doctoral student in the Clinical PsyD program. Molly graduated from Lakeland University in Wisconsin with a B.A. in psychology in 2020 and has worked in the mental health field in various settings since. Her clinical interests include sexuality, childhood obsessive compulsive disorder, and first-episode psychosis.

KEYNOTE Presentation



Sexual Pleasure Demonized in the Crip-Queer Community and How to Fix That

Julie L. Williams, Psy.D., ABPP

Monday, March 11th Room 324 & Zoom

This workshop will be an introduction to the Queer-Crip at the intersection of sexual pleasure in a world in which sexual freedoms and pleasure are treated as experiences to be suppressed and controlled. Moreover, when the Crip-Queer enters the sexual narrative, the suppression is profound and one more manifestation of systemic homophobia and ableism. It is important to understand that the systemic ableism and homophobia is not only present in conservative spaces but also evidenced in supposed inclusive and liberatory spaces where one or the other identity is edited out of the narrative.

This workshop will in simplistic terms demand an unapologetic reclaiming of the whole being: the Queer-Crip. To this end, liberation theory, disability affirmative and feminist therapy will be critiqued and then expanded to offer ways to target the harm done by psychologists and the others who have knowingly and unknowingly colluded with systemic homophobic and ableist sexual oppression. **Presenter:** **Julie Williams, PsyD, ABPP**, is a board-certified rehabilitation psychologist and professor of psychology at Wright State University School of Professional Psychology, Dayton Ohio. She earned her bachelor's degree in rehabilitation from Wright State, her master's in rehabilitation counseling from Ohio State University, and her PsyD in clinical psychology from Wright State. Prior to receiving her doctorate degree, Williams worked for the State of Ohio Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation for nine years. Following her doctoral work, she did her internship and postdoctoral work in neuroscience rehabilitation at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. Her clinical work and teaching centers around understanding psychological pain that is created by and maintained by systems of oppression. julie.williams@wright.edu

Book Discussion **sExploring Inter-abled Dating: a Rom-Com Book Club!**

Tuesday, March 12th Room 324 & Zoom

FREE snacks!

Join us for a good conversation about the novel **Get a Life, Chloe Brown** by Talia Hibbert. This book showcases life and love with chronic illness, which tie into the themes of intimacy and disability of this year's sExploration. We at PASD know that students read a lot for classes already, but this light and fluffy rom-com provides opportunities for both fun reading and insightful discussion. This book is available on Kindle Unlimited, Audible, and wherever you buy books! **Moderator:** Brynn Guth (she/her/hers) is a first-year doctoral student in the Clinical PsyD program. She graduated from Luther College in Decorah, IA with a B.A. in psychology as well as a minor in Spanish and is now focused on studying the intersection of psychology, human sexuality, and disability. Her additional research and clinical interests include assessment, culturally competent bilingual therapeutic services, the intersections of spirituality and psychology, and the impact of perfectionism on relationship patterns.

Presentations **2024 Poster Fair**

Wednesday, March 13rd 5th Floor Hallway

Poster authors will be present to describe and discuss their work from 12-1 pm. **FREE pizza & snacks!**

Entries listed alphabetically by lead author.

We Have Sex Too: Biopsychosocial Influences in Sexual Trajectories for Persons with Cerebral Palsy

Alex Combs, M.S.

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It is typical for intimate and sexual relationships to develop during adolescence. There are biological, psychological, and social factors that can collectively influence adaptive and maladaptive behavior during sexual development. Research has focused intently on these factors and how they affect sexual development in able-bodied adolescents and young adults. However, less research focuses on persons with congenital disabilities, such as cerebral palsy. People with cerebral palsy may be hindered in the development of social, intimate, and sexual relationships by several factors (Weigerink et al., 2006). This poster is intended to survey relevant research that explores such biopsychosocial influences on sexual needs, sexual esteem, and sexual developmental milestones, specifically for persons with cerebral palsy.

Invisible Disabilities: Chronic Illness and its Impact on Intimacy and Identity

Brynn Guth, B.A.

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Disability takes many forms in our society, and not all of them are visible to others at first glance. Chronic illness impacts millions of people from all backgrounds, and while not all people with chronic illness view their health conditions as disabling, the physical and mental toll that these illnesses take have a large impact on identity perception and intimacy. This poster seeks to examine the impact of physically based chronic illness on intimacy and identity by examining the existing literature. Identity, physical intimacy, emotional intimacy, age of illness acquisition, and quality of medical care are all themes found within the existing literature that have implications for treatment in the clinical mental health setting. Historically, this group of individuals have been excluded from the discourse surrounding ability and sex, and when included, a narrow diagnostic pool is examined, most frequently consisting of cancer patients. This presentation aims to provide information on a broader range of chronic illnesses for helping professionals while initiating discussion on a population that frequently slips through the cracks of our health system.

Attitudes on Sex and Sex Education for Individuals with Down Syndrome

Sarah Ismail B.S.

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This poster expresses the need for sex education programming for individuals with Down Syndrome (DS). It examines the societal stigma surrounding sex found in a multitude of settings including medical (Appel, 2010), as well as the attitudes held by the caretakers and guardians of individuals with DS (Foley, 2014). I will look at how these attitudes act as barriers to safe sex for with DS and propose direction for future research.

Exploring Sexual Education Among Individuals with Intellectual Disorders

Katheryn Kiser, B.A.

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All individuals navigate sexuality throughout their lifespan, including those with intellectual disabilities. Many people believe that sexuality only includes physical actions such as intercourse or biological changes as the body matures. However, sexuality encompasses intimacy, pleasure, relationships, sexual preferences, and expression. There is a lack of a comprehensive sexual education program in place for individuals with intellectual disabilities because some parents and professionals do not think it is necessary to educate in these areas. There is a need to explore where the current curriculum stands, what is lacking, and what areas of education in sexuality could be improved on.

Unveiling Implicit Bias: Exploring its Impact on Sex within the Disabled Community

Jaime Langosch, LPC & Natalie Dolan, MS

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This poster unravels the intricacies of implicit bias in the context of disability and sexual intimacy. Through the accompaniment of an interactive implicit bias test, we will uncover shared perspectives and foster a deeper understanding of societal attitudes. This presentation will accompany the interactive component to serve as a reflection and support our dissection of the subtle biases that influence how we perceive, interact, and explore sex with individuals with disability. It will explore the psychological dimensions of preconceived notions, understanding their profound effects on attitudes, behavior, and inclusivity.

Comparing reactions to Netflix's *Love on the Spectrum*

Lior Litvack B.A., Talia Kottler B.S. & Lily Stone B.A.

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Utilizing online sources such, blog posts and social media, as well as peer-reviewed articles this poster will compare and contrast reactions to the Netflix show *Love on the Spectrum* (U.S. version). Since its debut in May, 2022 there have been strong reactions from both within and outside of the Autistic community to the relationships formed on the show and the discussions about sex within this population.

Interabled Love: Exploring Relationship Satisfaction in Couples With Caregiving Dynamics

Samantha Myers, B. Arts Sc.

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An interabled relationship generally refers to a romantic partnership where one individual has a disability, while the other does not. When the partner without a disability assumes the role of the caregiver, the dynamics of the relationship can become both complex and challenging (Tapia-Fuselier et al., 2022). This presentation aims to explore the nuanced interplay of caregiving in interabled relationships, examining how this unique dynamic influences the overall relationship satisfaction of the couple, including, but not limited to, emotional and physical intimacy. This presentation will synthesize and critically evaluate the existing literature, identify gaps in the current body of knowledge, and highlight avenues for future research and potential clinical applications. The overarching goal of this presentation is to provide valuable insights to the evolving discourse on caregiving dynamics within interabled relationships, in hopes of enriching the knowledge base of clinicians.

Examining Psychological Assessment Practices of Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals

Colin Rubright, MA

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Psychological assessment, or a comprehensive analysis of an individual's psychosocial functioning, is an integral part of the diagnosis and treatment planning of individuals displaying signs of cognitive, developmental, and emotional disorders or disabilities. The tools and practices of psychological assessment were developed with little consideration for individuals with gender identities outside of the cisgender male-female binary. Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals are those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and therefore are not cisgender. The TGD community has often been required to seek psychological assessment to access gender affirming care for much of the past century. This presentation will include a critical review of relevant literature, and a summary of current, evidence-based best practices for the psychological assessment of TGD individuals.

Breaking The Silence: Exploring Intimacy and Relationships in The Deaf Community

Sebastian Salinas, B.S.

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This literature review will explore unique aspects of dating and sexuality in Deaf individuals. The Deaf community constitutes a cultural minority with cultural values and history that are both unique and complex (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). In line with this, qualitative research suggests that Deaf college students have unique dating scripts (Clark et al., 2017). Crucially, research has also identified disparities in healthcare for Deaf adults, and in sex and relationship education (SRE) for Deaf children (Goldstein et al., 2010; Meador & Zazove, 2005; Suter, McCracken, & Calam, 2009). Deaf individuals at the intersections of different cultural identities can have unique experiences with sex and dating (Bridwell, Chapple & Gray, 2021; Crume & Smith-Warsaw, 2020) Thus, intersectionality will also be discussed.

Treatments for SSRI-Induced Sexual Dysfunction in Females: A Review of Current Literature

Molly Schwibinger, B.A.

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Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are a common medication for treatment for depression and other mental health diagnoses, but many people report side effects relating to sexual functioning. Over 17.7% of cisgender women in the United States regularly take antidepressant medications, which is higher than men's rates at 8.4% (National Center for Health Statistics, 2018). Women are likely struggling with acquired sexual dysfunction from SSRIs, but media and advertisements regarding sexual dysfunction are targeted towards men almost exclusively. Women should understand the ways in which their sex lives may be affected while on an SSRIs and clinicians should be able to talk about this openly with their clients regarding this category of psychotropic medication. Current literature on treatments for SSRI-induced sexual dysfunction in females is reviewed here and common themes are assessed and discussed, along with potential gaps in research.

Presentation **Neuroqueer(ing): The Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, and Neurodivergence**

Wednesday, March 20th Room 324 & Zoom

FREE pizza!

Since Judy Singer published her master's thesis on the neurodiversity paradigm in 1997, there has been a shift in the conceptualization of neurobiological "conditions" from one of pathology that clients should be cured from, to one of difference/disability that should be accommodated. While much progress has been made in depathologizing variations in human nervous systems, there is still work to do in regard to the infantilization and desexualization of people with disabilities, particularly autistic individuals. Multiple studies have shown autistic folks are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than their allistic counterparts. Which begs the question, why do we see significant overlap in these identities? In this presentation, we will explore the interplay between neurodivergence and sexual/gender minority status, and discuss clinical implications that apply to budding and experienced clinicians alike. **Presenter: Sobie Sobieski, B.S.** (they/them) is a first-year student in the Clinical Psy.D. program. They graduated from Indiana University Southeast with a B.S. in psychology and now focus their studies on the intersection of psychology and nontraditional family structures. Their research and clinical interests include gender identity, family systems, neurodivergent informed care, and neoecological theory. msobieski@ego.thechicagoschool.edu **Moderator: Alex Combs, M.S.** (he/him) is a first-year student in the Clinical PsyD program. Prior to beginning his doctoral program, Alex spent several years working in various behavioral health settings, with a focus on children, adolescents, and adults experiencing serious mental illness and neurodevelopmental disorders.

Film Discussion **Netflix and Chill: Exploring Disability Representation in Sex Education (2019)**

Thursday, March 21st Room 323 & Zoom

FREE snacks!

The goal of this event is to examine the representation of the intersection of disability and sex in media using clips from the show *Sex Education (2019)*. A brief discussion will follow the cessation of the screening to share opinions on how participants felt watching the clips, the importance of representation in modern media, and whether the show challenged any potential previous expectations. **Moderator: Sarah Ismail (she/her)** is a first-year student in the Clinical Psychology Psy.D. program at The Chicago School. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Psychology in May 2023 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her clinical interests involve working with underrepresented and protected child and adolescent populations.

Discussion **Pillow Talk: Seeing the sExtrordinary in Persons with Disabilities**

Thursday, March 28th Room 323 & Zoom

Does a simple exposure to persons with disabilities in a sexual context impact the perceptions of psychologists? We will examine the survey responses from the "Portrayals of Sexual Expression in the Disabled Community" display and delve into the broader implications of visually representing and normalizing the fact that persons with disabilities are, like most people, sexual beings. **FREE pizza!** Sponsored by PRIDE Queer Collective

FURTHER READING & VIEWING

How to Improve Sex Education

Psychology Today, August 2016

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evidence-based-living/201608/how-improve-sex-education>

Disabled? You Can Still Enjoy Satisfying Sex

Psychology Today, Castleman 2022

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/202208/disabled-you-can-still-enjoy-satisfying-sex>

Sexuality and Adults with Developmental Disabilities

<https://www.kennedykrieger.org/stories/making-difference/inspiring-stories/sexuality-and-adults-developmental-disabilities>

Sex Education in Schools Needs an Upgrade

National Education Association, May 2018

<https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/sex-education-schools-needs-upgrade>

Seeking Intimacy

American Psychological Association, Collier, 2017

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/12/seeking-intimacy>

Sex and Intellectual Disabilities

American Psychological Association, 2017

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/12/seeking-intimacy-sidebar>

Advocating for Sex Education in Your Community

Planned Parenthood

<https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/sex-education/advocating-sex-education-your-community>

Supporting Disabled People with their Sexual Lives: A Clear Guide for Health and Social Care Professionals

(Book) A straight-talking guide to supporting disabled people with their sexual lives.

https://www.amazon.com/Supporting-Disabled-People-their-Sexual/dp/1849053960/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1512267198&sr=1-1&refinements=p_27%3ATuppy+Owens

Sex Ed for People with I/DD (Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities)

(YouTube) A 10 episode series of short videos created with and by people with disabilities covering topics such as gender, healthy relationships, genitals, puberty, consent, masturbation, sex, etc.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuEvYNNQ-dHeVhbyeJHx9s8oqsvBk621v>

The MA+ Guide: A Guide to more Accessible Sexuality-Related Assistive Technology

(PDF) A "collection of ideas" about ways to use or adapt sexuality and positioning products for folks of all abilities, written by an occupational therapist.

<https://www.pdfFiller.com/64309793--The-MA-Guide-The-more-accessible-guide-to-sexuality-equipment->

Sex Ed for Self-Advocates

A sex education resource written specifically for people on the autism spectrum age 15 and up. Includes videos, articles and quizzes on a wide variety of sexuality topics. Created by Organization for Autism Research.

<https://researchautism.org/self-advocates/sex-ed-for-self-advocates/>

RESOURCES

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists www.aasect.org

The Kinsey Institute www.kinseyinstitute.org

Disability and Sexual Health Initiative (DASHI) <https://kinseyinstitute.org/research/disability-sexual-health.php>

Sexuality Education Counselling and Consultancy Agency (SECCA) <https://www.secca.org.au/resources/>

Sexual Health Education for Young People with Disabilities

<https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/resources/fact-sheets/sexual-health-education-for-young-people-with-disabilities-2/>

Sex Ed for Self-Advocates

A sex education resource written specifically for people on the autism spectrum age 15 and up. Includes videos, articles and quizzes on a wide variety of sexuality topics. Created by Organization for Autism Research.

<https://researchautism.org/self-advocates/sex-ed-for-self-advocates/>

Disability Access Chicago School Student Group

Fostering a safe space for students with disability , illnesses, and other struggles that impact learning as well as allies with the aim of: Building and maintaining a supportive community; promoting awareness, knowledge, and understating of diverse invisible/visible disability issues; sharing resources; and advocating for diverse disability issues within the field of psychology.

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PRIDE Queer Collective Chicago School Student Group

Interested in continuing to plan, organize, or participate in events related to sex and LGBTQIA+ topics? Please look join us to promote a culture of safety and acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community at TCS, encourage discussion and education surrounding allyship with diverse communities, and act as a student voice of TCS administration to advocate for LGBTQIA+ student interests. Previous events have included PRIDE month socials, student and professor discussion panels, collaboration with the TCS Diversity & Action Board, and more.

PRIDE is currently interviewing incoming officers for the 2024 – 2025 school year. alemus1@ego.thechicagoschool.edu



2024 Event Planning & Management

- Alex Combs, M.S. (he/him)
- Brynn Guth, B.A. (she/her)
- Sarah Ismail, B.S. (she/her)
- Samantha Myers, B.ArtsSc (she/her)
- Sebastian Salinas, B.S. (he/him)
- Molly Schwibinger, B.A. (she/her)

Braden Berkey, PsyD, CSE (he/him)..... Executive Director
bberkey@thechicagoschool.edu

Ashley Molin, PsyD. (she/her) Program Director

Daniel Warshawsky, B.A. (he/him)Social Media Manager

Projects Advancing Sexual Diversity applies the practice of psychology to further the understanding and acceptance of diverse sexual and gender identities, relationship structures, perspectives, practices and cultures. Utilizing innovative research and interventions, PASD strives to create sustainable change in conditions impacting the health and welfare of sexual, gender and relationship minority individuals, families and communities.

My notes on presentations and displays....