

# Attributions About Sexuality and Romantic Involvement of Physically Disabled College Students: An Empirical Study

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*ABSTRACT:* Attributions of able-bodied college students concerning sexuality and romantic involvement of physically disabled and able-bodied college students were compared in this study. Ninety-nine able-bodied college students provided information on their previous contacts with disabled people, rated their degree of comfort with both physically disabled and able-bodied peers, and predicted the responses of physically disabled (wheelchair user) and able-bodied male and female college students on a variety of measures. These dealt with: social anxiety, gender role stereotyping, romantic relationships, sexual attitudes and sexual interest and behavior. Results indicate that physically disabled students were perceived as more socially anxious, less gender role stereotyped and less likely to be dating. Males, unlike females, attributed greater interest in sexual activities to disabled than to able-bodied students. Results also indicate that comfort with disabled students was significantly lower than with able-bodied students. Previous close contact with physically disabled people was only marginally related to comfort with wheelchair user students and was unrelated to attributions concerning their sexuality and romantic involvements. The implications of the findings for future research and for the integration of physically disabled students into college life are discussed.

Higher education for physically disabled people is viewed by many as the key to maximizing their potential, leading a more fulfilling life and becoming self-sufficient in a world that behaves harshly to those who are "different" (Brown, 1977). In response to the new awareness of disabled people (Fichten & Hines, 1984), including increasing recognition of the need for higher education, many institutions have recently removed architectural barriers, thereby permitting increasing numbers of wheelchair users to attend colleges and universities.

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In addition to the academic experience of college life, integration of students into the university milieu involves socializing and seeking out relationships with same and opposite sex members. Full integration into both facets of college life seems especially important for disabled students. The success of integration could determine whether a student will finish his/her degree and whether other disabled students will venture into higher education. Unfortunately, little is known about disabled college students (Mitchell, 1982) or about able-bodied college students' attitudes toward their disabled peers (Stovall & Sedlacek, 1983).

While there have been many attitude change campaigns designed to foster acceptance of disabled people as equals, little mention has been made about accepting them as sexual beings (Mayers, 1978). For a variety of reasons, society seems unable to grapple with the idea of disabled people having the same emotional needs and desires as the rest of the population (Greengross, 1976). When one becomes permanently disabled, physical attractiveness, ability and interest in sex are often regarded as impaired (Cole & Cole, 1983; Zola, 1982). Yet, disabled persons, especially disabled young adults, have the same needs for the expression of love, both emotional and sexual, as do non-disabled young adults (Cole, 1981; Sandowski, 1976). Sexual drive and frequency of sexual activity may be altered but sexual activity and impulses continue to be of vital importance in the lives of disabled people (Ford & Orfirer, 1967).

Societal assumptions regarding the sexuality of disabled people can have consequences for the disabled person's self concept, since the way that people evaluate themselves and their actions is heavily influenced by others' expectations (Bartel & Guskin, 1980). Expectations about another person can affect how that person is treated and, in turn, how that person responds (Beaily, 1981; Scott, 1969). Thus, in addition to affecting self-concept, expectations can sometimes cause self fulfilling prophecies.

The disabled person's self-concept influences his/her sex life (Ferguson-Gregory, 1974). As the self-concept is formed, in part, by the reactions of others, sexual adjustment of disabled people is expected to be poor (Singh & Magner, 1975). For example, in a study by MacDougall and Morin (1979) on the sexual attitudes and self-reported behavior of congenitally disabled adults, it was found that although disabled people as a group do have the need for an emotional and sexual life, they are highly likely to have been restricted in that domain. The same authors view society's inaccurate assumptions and misconceptions about the sexuality of disabled people as the largest

obstacle responsible for the stunting of their sexual expression. Landis & Bolles' data (cited in Robinault, 1978) on women between the ages of 17 and 30 also shows that, when compared to able-bodied females, disabled women are limited in their sexual activity and social behavior. Zola (1982), who is disabled himself, is in accord with MacDougall and Morin's conclusions; he believes that lack of sexual expression in disabled individuals comes from learning that no one could or should find a person in such condition sexually attractive.

Negative stereotypes attributed to disabled people can affect the formation of relationships because attraction is greatly influenced by perceived similarity. Byrne's (1969) definitive review clearly indicates that people like others whom they perceive as having similar characteristics, attitudes and values. As most attitudes toward disabled people are negative and imply deficiencies (e.g., Bender, 1981), similarity between disabled people and the able-bodied individuals who hold these attitudes would be perceived as small.

In two recent studies designed to investigate stereotyping of wheelchair user college students by their able-bodied peers (Fichten 1984; Fichten & Bourdon, 1983), it was found that both male and female disabled students were perceived as having characteristics that were not only different but also less socially desirable than those of able-bodied students. The probability of social contact being avoided under these circumstances seems very high.

It has been well established (e.g., Wright, 1960; 1964) that negative attitudes toward a handicapped person's disability are often generalized to nonimpaired characteristics of the individual and finally to the entire person. One aspect to which negative attitudes can spread is sexuality; this includes a person's full range of personal relationships, including physical and emotional attachment (Gordon & Everly, 1979, ch.8).

Concern with the sexuality of disabled people is a relatively recent phenomenon. Indeed, the topic of sexuality has only recently been included in the training of rehabilitation professionals; in general, the sexual aspect of the disabled person was either avoided or it was automatically assumed that disabled individuals were asexual and had no interest in sexual activity (Eisibill, 1980). Research in this area has mostly concerned itself with spinal cord injured people and has focused on physical and biological capacities for sexual activity and reproduction (Comarr, 1970; Hohmann, 1972). Little information is available about the sexual feelings of disabled people (Mayers, 1978).

Attitudes toward the sexual behavior of disabled people have only begun to be researched (Daniels, 1978). Attitudes of college students

toward sexuality of disabled peers have not been studied (Stovall & Sedlacek, 1983). Although sexuality is now seen as an important issue in counseling of disabled students (Cole, 1981), little work of this nature in higher educational settings has taken place (Mitchell, 1982).

The present investigation involves a comparison of able-bodied college students' attributions about sexuality and romance in the lives of physically disabled (wheelchair user) and of able-bodied college students. Testing involved the use of different instructional sets; these consisted of asking subjects to respond as a "typical" student of their own sex would and then to predict the responses, on a variety of measures, of either an able-bodied or a physically disabled (wheelchair user) male or female university student. The "typical" student instructional set was used to reduce possible social desirability effects as these have been known to influence responding in studies involving attitudes of college students (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1971). Data on stereotyping of physically disabled college students using the "typical student" instructional set have shown that this technique produces valid results (Fichten, 1984).

While the effects of contact with disabled people are uncertain (e.g., Antonak, 1981; Cloerkes, 1979; English, 1971; Evans, 1976; Fichten & Compton, 1984; Rowlett, 1982), it was expected that previous close contact with a physically disabled person would increase comfort experienced with disabled students. In addition, physically disabled students, relative to able-bodied students, were predicted to be viewed as more socially anxious, less masculine or feminine, less likely to be engaged in relationships, and as holding more conservative sexual attitudes and having fewer sexual experiences. Interest in sexual activities, however, was expected to be viewed as more prominent in physically disabled than in able-bodied students. It was expected that this would be especially true of the responses of male subjects. The rationale for this prediction stems from our society being highly sexually oriented. Due to this, disabled people who may not have many opportunities to engage in sexual activity might be expected to manifest greater sexual interest in response to the denial of many of their sexual needs. Male subjects in particular would be likely to attribute strong sexual interest to disabled people because of the inextricable link in our society between a male's identity and his sexuality.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Ninety-nine volunteer McGill University students, 43 males and 56 females, participated in the study. The mean age of males was 22 years; the average for females was 20 years. None of the subjects were physically disabled.

### *Measures*

*General Information Section.* This measure asked questions concerning subjects' gender, age, and absence or presence of physical disability. In addition, previous close contact with physically disabled people and ease with physically disabled and with non-disabled students (6 point scales) were assessed.

*Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory (DSFI)* (Derogatis, 1977). The DSFI is a self-report measure of adequacy of sexual functioning. It consists of 8 subtests; each can be scored separately. The subtests have acceptable psychometric characteristics (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1979). Three subtests were used: Drive (III), Attitude (IV), and Gender Role Definition (VII). Drive scores reflect the frequency of five categories of sexual activity: intercourse, masturbation, kissing and petting, sexual fantasy and ideal frequency of intercourse. Each activity is evaluated on a 9-point scale (from not at all to four or more times a day). The Attitude subtest consists of 15 items dealing with liberalism-conservatism; ratings are made on 5-point Likert-type scales. The Gender Role Definition subtest assesses the balance between the attribution of masculine and feminine traits. Fifteen characteristics of each sex which, by traditional societal standards, are gender stereotyped, are rated on 5-point scales from "not at all true" to "extremely true." The score is the absolute value of the difference between the masculinity and femininity scores. In the present study, data were analyzed using both the absolute value as well as signed scores.

*Social Activity Questionnaire (SAQ)* (Glasgow & Arkowitz, 1975). This eight item questionnaire assesses dating frequency and self-report of comfort and satisfaction with current dating behaviors. Scoring is done on an item-by-item basis. Four questions (#1, 3, 6, 7) were used.

*Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (SAD)* (Watson & Friend, 1969). The SAD, a 28 item true-false questionnaire designed to measure anxiety or distress experienced in a variety of social situations, is one of the most widely used measures of general social functioning (Arkowitz, 1981).

*Love Scale and Liking Scale* (Rubin, 1970). These two scales are 13 item self-report measures that deal with attachment, caring and intimacy (Love Scale) and with adjustment, maturity, intelligence, good judgement and the tendency to view the other person as similar to oneself (Liking Scale). With a particular person in mind, the respondent rates each item on a 9-point scale from "disagree completely" to "agree completely."

*Additional measures.* Two questions were constructed for this study. A "frequency" item inquired about frequency of interest in sexual activities; this item was scored using the same 9-point scale as that of the Drive subtest

of the DSFI. Following Poling's (cited in Robinault, 1978) typology, a "dating" item was also included: presented as a multiple choice question, it read: "I am presently dating" and gave the following as possible answers: no one, a physically disabled person, an able-bodied person.

### *Procedure*

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four hypothetical stimulus person experimental conditions; these were: able-bodied male college student, able-bodied female college student, physically disabled (wheelchair user) male college student and physically disabled (wheelchair user) female college student. Each subject was asked to pretend to be a "typical" college student of his or her own sex and to predict, from that viewpoint, the responses of the hypothetical stimulus person on all measures described above (except the General Information Section).

## RESULTS

### *Effects of previous close contact with a physically disabled person*

A 3-way [2 (Ease with Disabled/Non-disabled)  $\times$  2 (Contact Yes/Contact No)  $\times$  2 (Gender of Subject)] analysis variance (ANOVA) comparison of the effect of close contact with a physically disabled person on ease with disabled and with non-disabled students revealed a significant Ease main effect,  $F(1,93) = 36.91, p < .001$ . This showed that subjects were more comfortable with nondisabled ( $M = 4.97$ ) than with physically disabled students ( $M = 4.21$ ). The Ease  $\times$  Gender of Subject interaction was also significant,  $F(1,93) = 5.80, p < .05$ . The Tukey h.s.d. test shows that females were more comfortable than males with nondisabled students and that both males and females were more comfortable with nondisabled than with disabled students ( $p < .01$  for all comparisons). In addition, the Ease  $\times$  Contact interaction suggests that subjects who had previous close contact with a disabled person, relative to those who did not, were somewhat more comfortable with physically disabled students,  $F(1,93) = 2.92, p < .10$ . Tukey h.s.d. test results show that while there were no differences in comfort with able-bodied students, subjects who had previous close contact ( $M = 4.47$ ) were more comfortable with physically disabled students than those who did not ( $M = 3.92$ ),  $Q(K=4) = 4.71, p < .01$ .

To assess the effects of contact on all variables in this study, 3-way ANOVA comparisons [2 (Contact Yes/Contact No)  $\times$  2 (Gender of Stimulus Person)  $\times$  2 (Gender of Subject)] were made on 12 of the 13 dependent measures. Only scores from the disabled condition were used. Only one of these comparisons revealed a significant Contact

main effect; this showed that on the SAQ item dealing with anxiety in dating situations (# 6), subjects who had previous contact believed that the disabled stimulus person was more anxious ( $M = 1.96$ ) than did people who had no previous contact ( $M = 1.60$ ),  $F(1,38) = 6.61$ ,  $p < .05$ . Only 3 significant interactions (out of a possible 36) including the Contact variable were found; these showed no consistent pattern.

### *Analyses on relationships and sexuality*

Three-way between groups ANOVA comparisons [2 (Gender of Subject)  $\times$  2 (Gender of Stimulus Person)  $\times$  2 (Physical State of Stimulus Person)] were made on all measures to test predictions about social anxiety, gender role stereotyping, relationships, sexual attitudes and sexual drive.

*Social anxiety.* Two measures assessed this construct: question 6 of the SAQ, which asked about anxiety in dating situations, and the SAD scale. On the SAQ, analyses revealed only a significant main effect for Physical State of Stimulus Person,  $F(1,91) = 33.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ; physically disabled stimulus persons were rated as experiencing more anxiety ( $M = 1.80$ ) than able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 1.25$ ). Although ANOVA comparisons on the SAD did not reach significance, certain trends did emerge. One of these also suggests that disabled stimulus persons are seen as somewhat more socially anxious ( $M = 11.33$ ) than able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 9.06$ ),  $F(1,90) = 3.69$ ,  $p < .10$ . The second trend [Gender of Subject  $\times$  Physical State of Stimulus Person interaction,  $F(1,90) = 2.89$ ,  $p < .10$ ] suggests that females ( $M = 6.94$ ), relative to males ( $M = 11.18$ ), rated able-bodied stimulus persons as being less socially anxious than disabled stimulus persons ( $M = 11.20$  and  $11.44$ , respectively).

*Gender role stereotyping.* The Gender Role Definition subtest was scored in accordance with the manual (i.e., the absolute value of the difference between masculinity and femininity scores, intended as a measure of androgyny). It was also scored with the sign of the difference between the two scores left unaltered (i.e., a negative score indicates sex typing in the masculine and a positive score in the feminine direction). This was done because of difficulties associated with the meaning of absolute values; it has been argued that a low absolute value can mean either androgyny or "neuterness" (Heilbrun, 1976).

Comparisons using absolute values show a main effect for Physical State of Stimulus Person,  $F(1,90) = 9.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ; this indicates that physically disabled stimulus persons were seen as more androgynous (or "neuter") ( $M = 6.97$ ) than able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M =$

11.43). Analyses of scores showing directionality of sex typing revealed a significant Gender of Stimulus Person  $\times$  Physical State of Stimulus Person interaction,  $F(1,90) = 11.21, p < .01$ . Seen most clearly in Figure 1, this interaction shows that both male and female disabled stimulus persons were relatively less gender role stereotyped than able-bodied stimulus persons. Tukey's h.s.d. test results show that while able-bodied and disabled females are not perceived differently, disabled males are seen as less sex role stereotyped than able-bodied males,  $Q(K = 4) = 4.86, p < .01$ . In addition, while able-bodied males and females are perceived as significantly different from each other,  $Q(K = 4) = 8.95, p < .01$ , physically disabled males and females are not.

*Relationships.* The following measures pertain to this theme: Questions 1, 3 and 7 of the SAQ, the "dating" item and the Love and Liking Scales.

Analyses on Question 1 of the SAQ revealed a main effect for Physical State of Stimulus Person,  $F(1,87) = 7.04, p < .01$ ; this in-

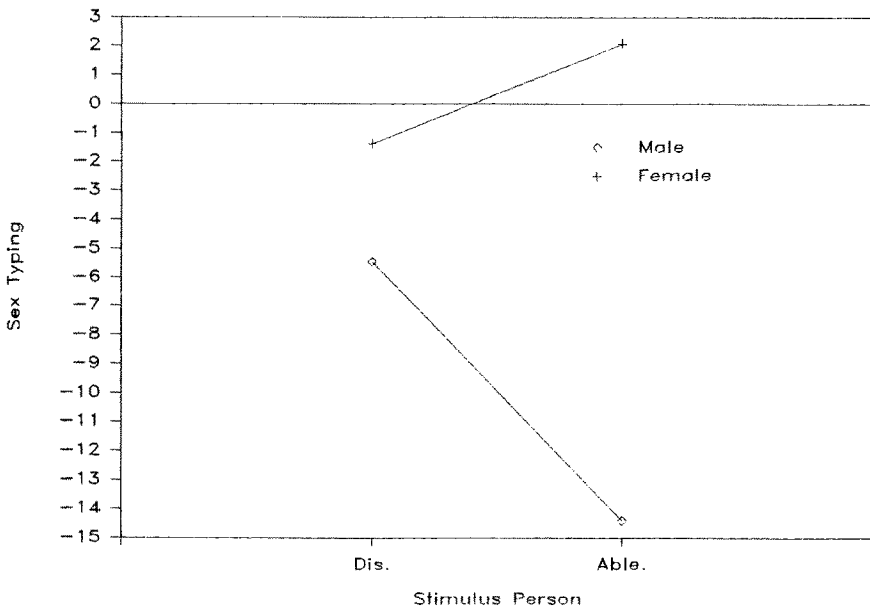


Figure 1. Gender of Stimulus Person  $\times$  Physical State of Stimulus Person interaction on Gender Role Definition scores. Negative scores indicate masculine and positive scores feminine stereotyping.



dicates that physically disabled stimulus persons were rated as having had fewer dates in the past six months ( $M = 9.55$ ) than able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 32.65$ ). The same main effect was found for Question 3 of the SAQ,  $F(1,88) = 14.81, p < .001$ ; here, physically disabled stimulus persons were rated as having had fewer dates in the past month ( $M = 2.06$ ) than able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 6.33$ ). There were no significant differences on the SAQ item which assesses satisfaction with one's present dating frequency (Question 7).

On the "dating" question, physically disabled stimulus persons were viewed as more likely to be dating no one or a physically disabled person than were able-bodied stimulus persons,  $F(1,89) = 8.18, p < .01$ . As Figure 2 indicates, disabled males were also seen as more likely than disabled females to be dating a disabled partner; disabled females were seen as most likely to be dating no one.

On the Liking Scale, a main effect for Physical State of Stimulus Person,  $F(1,89) = 4.03, p < .05$ , indicates that physically disabled stimulus persons were rated as liking their dating partner ( $M = 87.74$ )

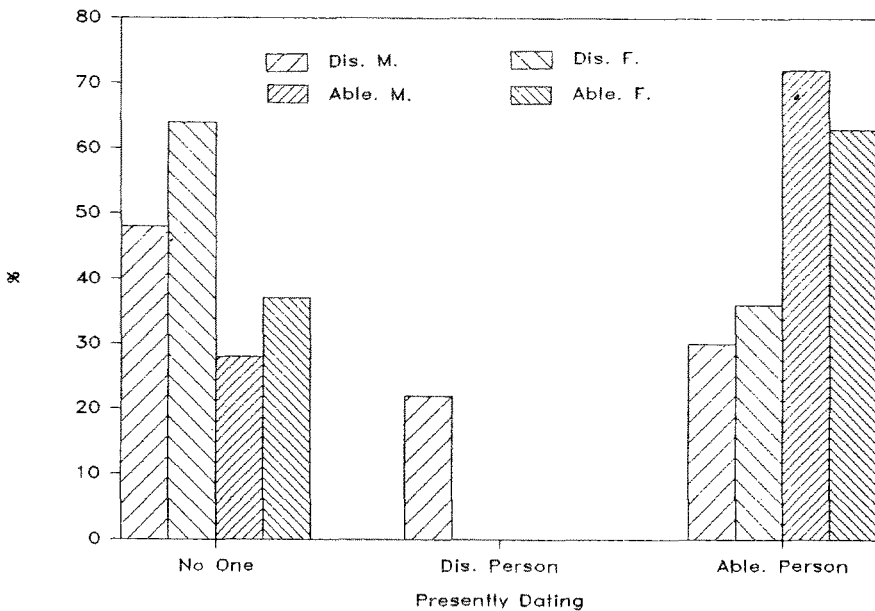


Figure 2. Attributions concerning dating partners of disabled and able-bodied students.

more than do able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 81.42$ ). Analyses on Love Scale scores showed no significant differences.

*Sexual attitudes.* ANOVA comparisons on Derogatis' Attitude subtest revealed no significant differences involving the Physical State of Stimulus Person variable.

*Sexual drive variables.* Two measures of sexual drive were investigated: the Drive subtest of the DSFI and the "frequency" question. ANOVA comparisons on the Drive subtest revealed a significant Gender of Subject  $\times$  Physical State of Stimulus Person interaction,  $F(1,86) = 4.25, p < .05$ . As means in Figure 3 show, male subjects rated physically disabled stimulus persons as having higher drive than able-bodied stimulus persons, while female subjects rated able-bodied stimulus persons as having higher drive.

The "frequency" question asked about the frequency of interest in sexual activities. As on the Drive subtest, on this measure also the Gender of Subject  $\times$  Physical State of Stimulus Person interaction was found to be significant,  $F(1,80) = 4.75, p < .05$ . The means again

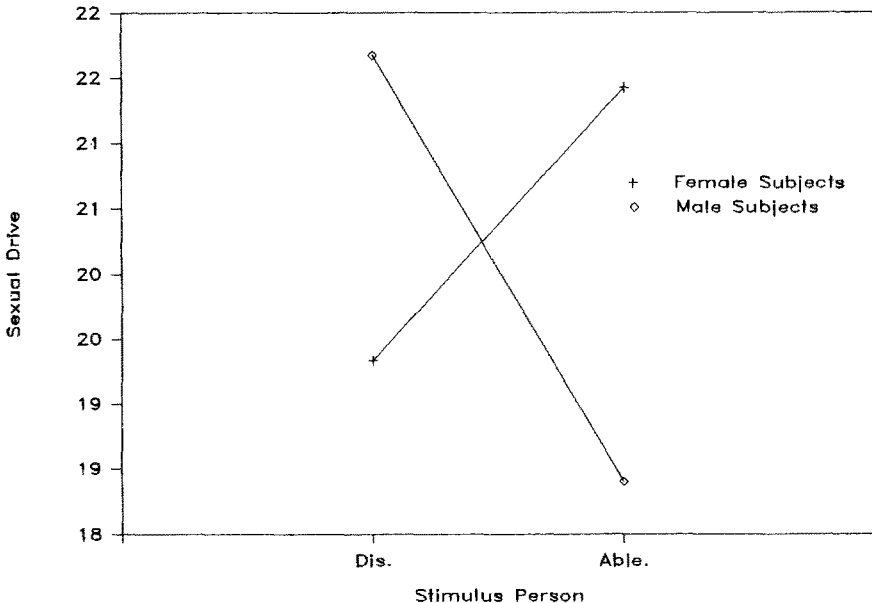


Figure 3. Gender of Subject  $\times$  Physical State of Stimulus Person interaction on Sexual Drive scores. The higher the score, the greater the drive.

indicate that male subjects rated physically disabled stimulus persons ( $M = 4.88$ ) as being more interested in sexual activities than able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 4.06$ ) while female subjects rated able-bodied stimulus persons ( $M = 4.78$ ) as having greater interest than disabled stimulus persons ( $M = 4.03$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Results of this study show that able-bodied students assume that the sexuality and romantic involvements of their disabled peers are different from those of their able-bodied classmates in a variety of ways. Many of these assumed differences are consistent with the reality expressed by disabled people. Indeed, in most instances where able-bodied students' attributions differed from reports concerning the experiences of disabled people it was in the direction of attributing more similarity between disabled and able-bodied students than actually appears to exist.

In most instances where subjects assumed that disabled students differed from the able-bodied, the differences were in a negative or undesirable direction. For instance, social anxiety experienced in situations with members of the opposite sex was, according to prediction, viewed as greater in disabled than in able-bodied students. Physically disabled students were also seen as less masculine or feminine than their able-bodied counterparts. These results are consistent with Mayers' (1978) contention that the able-bodied tend to view the disabled as ugly, asexual and at a great disadvantage in the search for a partner. Halstead's (1978) data also indicate that many disabled individuals feel that they are not sexually desirable. When in social situations with members of the opposite sex, able-bodied people are, thus, likely to expect the disabled individual to feel embarrassed and out of place. As many disabled people believe that they are not sexually desirable, there are likely to be problems with college and university social activities, since these often involve getting to know people, flirting, dating and planning sexual experiences.

Not only were physically disabled students viewed as more anxious about dating but they were also seen as less likely to be dating anyone, especially an able-bodied partner. The assumption that disabled students are less likely to be involved in a dating relationship is consistent with the reality of Halstead's (1978) sample of disabled people: while 58% of the disabled sample complained of lack of partners, only 35% of the able-bodied subjects did so.

It is interesting to note that there were no differences in ratings of able-bodied and disabled students' satisfaction with their current dating frequencies. Both groups were seen as desiring to date somewhat more than they presently were. This, coupled with the finding that physically disabled students are seen as having fewer dates, implies that the subjects do not believe that infrequent dating is disturbing for physically disabled students. Schlesinger's (1976) review of the experiences of disabled people indicates otherwise.

Feelings of love for one's dating partner did not differ for able-bodied and physically disabled students. However, feelings of liking were viewed as being stronger in the case of the physically disabled student for his or her dating partner. While this was not predicted, it is possible that the subjects assumed that, unlike able-bodied individuals who are known to sometimes "fall in love," physically disabled people are seen as having to develop a friendship with a member of the opposite sex before dating ensues and feelings of love can emerge.

Although it was expected that sexual attitudes of physically disabled students would be viewed as more conservative, no such differences were found. Both groups were rated as being somewhat but not extremely liberal. MacDougall and Morin (1979) found that their physically disabled young adult subjects held many conservative views about sexuality. While it is possible that physically disabled college students are not the "norm" of the disabled population, it is equally likely that in this instance the able-bodied students erred in the positive direction in their assumptions. This is an empirical question which needs additional investigation.

As predicted, interest in sexual activities was viewed by males, but not females, as being stronger in physically disabled students than in able-bodied students. This is in contrast to the popular conception that disabled people are asexual. In our society, denial of "normal" activities in a male is more devastating for his identity than it is for a female, whose ability to perform sexually is not as inextricably linked with her identity. Therefore, male subjects were probably projecting their own needs by attributing greater sexual interest to disabled people because they would be denied "normal" sexual experiences.

Female subjects attributed fewer sexual experiences to disabled students than to able-bodied students; this assumption reflects the reality of MacDougall and Morin's (1979) and of Halstead's (1978) samples of disabled people who did, in fact, report fewer sexual experiences. Unexpectedly, males assumed the opposite to be true. This seems odd and may be attributed to the nature of the Drive subtest of the DSFI. While the measure inquires as to behavioral frequency, only

two questions involve couple sexual activities; one question on masturbation and two questions involving fantasy could have been responsible for the noted difference.

Anxiety concerning dating, a view of disabled people as unmasculine and unfeminine, diminished likelihood of dating coupled with a lack of concern with this, and greater liking for one's partner if one is dating suggest that able-bodied students perceive their disabled peers as experiencing considerable difficulty with relationships. Inconsistent findings on sexual interest and activities suggest that able-bodied students see disabled peers as experiencing problems primarily with relationships and only secondarily with sexuality *per se*. The literature on disabled people suggests that there are problems in both the relationship and sexual domains (cf. Robinault, 1978; Schlesinger, 1976).

That there are difficulties for disabled people around romantic relationships is best explained by the lack of ease that able-bodied people feel with, and probably convey to disabled people. In the present study, both male and female subjects reported being less comfortable with physically disabled than with able-bodied students. This discrepancy is not surprising; while certain individuals feel at ease with disabled people, the literature indicates that most people, including college students, find interacting with disabled individuals anxiety provoking and, in some instances, aversive (Fichten & Compton, 1984; Jackman, 1983; Siller, 1976).

If interaction makes students uneasy, dating a disabled person is highly unlikely. Mayers (1978) relates an anecdote that illustrates a frequently made assumption made by able-bodied people. A wheelchair bound young woman had a boyfriend who would wheel her around when they went on dates. Neighbors and family friends assumed this boy to be a relative. They could not picture this girl as an adolescent with interests in boys and could not envision that she would be able to attract an able-bodied boyfriend. If such assumptions are shared by both disabled and able-bodied people, there are likely to be few dating opportunities for physically disabled students.

Able-bodied students' attributions concerning the sexuality of disabled students were, in general, more optimistic than the reality reported in the literature. This suggests that the major problems concerning sexuality faced by disabled people are not directly caused by erroneous assumptions held by their able-bodied peers. Rather, problems are probably due to a combination of inadequate opportunities for developing positive attitudes about one's sexuality and lack of available partners (Florian, 1983; Robinault, 1978).

If future research shows that the experiences of physically disabled college students are, in fact, similar to the experiences attributed to them by the able-bodied, programs which foster positive attitudes toward sexuality for disabled college students should be created. This type of programming is needed because the developmental process of adolescence is often delayed in physically disabled people until their twenties and thirties; this can affect both their social as well as academic adjustment in college (Hall, 1975; Lane, 1967). Since physically disabled students are likely to be preoccupied with discovering their identity as sexual beings, as are able-bodied students (Goldenson, 1978), they would most probably be responsive to such a program. As Mitchell's (1982) study of the effects of a sexual counselling program for disabled college students suggests, such a program can have beneficial effects.

The results show that previous contact with a physically disabled person does not reduce discomfort, eliminate negative attitudes or reduce stereotyping. These findings are consistent with results of previous investigations (cf. Fichten & Compton, 1984; Fichten & Hines, 1984; Fichten, 1984), and support the view that contact per se is not a powerful means of making people more comfortable with disabled individuals or of reducing prejudice.

Many rehabilitation researchers (e.g., Anthony, 1972; Bender, 1981; Yunker & Block, 1979) have suggested that the best method to increase understanding, reduce prejudice and enhance comfort with disabled individuals is to provide able-bodied people with educational information and to have them experience extended close contact with disabled people on an equal status basis. The results of Rowlett's (1982) study on disabled college students provides some support for the view that information plus contact is an effective means of changing attitudes. Institutions of higher education can offer unique opportunities for equal status contact between disabled and able-bodied students. Therefore, while it is important to provide sexual education and counselling to disabled college students, it is equally, if not more important that able-bodied students be encouraged to collaborate with disabled peers, on an equal status basis, in as many ways as possible.

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