

Literature Review of Articles Associated with Physical Disability and Romantic Relationships

Chad Francour

University of Wisconsin- Green Bay

Literature Review of Articles Associated with Physical Disability and Romantic Relationships

According to the Center of Disease and Control there are about 1.5 million TBIs per year and most occur in young males with 85% occurring before age of 25 years (Marini, Glover-Graf, and Millington, 2009). As a result of a TBI a person might be left with a disability. A disability is the presence of physical or mental impairment that limit a person's ability to perform a daily activity (US support of Health and Human Services, 2011). The population that could benefit from this literature review will be those physically disabled individuals who want a romantic relationship with an individual of the opposite sex. The purpose of doing this type of research is to get a better understanding of how individuals with a disability may attract a member of the opposite sex. The knowledge hope to be gained is a better understanding of how an individual with a disability can enter into and maintain a positive romantic relationship. The review will be done on perception, attachment style or attraction, sexuality, and how to maintain a romantic relationship.

Intro

First impression

First impressions are critical to any social interaction. People with physical disabilities (PWPD) are negatively stereotyped by most of society. Those PWPD are then ostracized into having no global self-esteem or worth in various social situations (e.g., meeting new people or engaging in athletics) (Santuzzi, 2011). Santuzzi's (2011) research found that PWPD might have been expecting social pressure and that may deter PWPD from engaging in various social interactions. That may lead people to believe if PWPD has low self-esteem that may result in social inadequacy resulting in avoidant behavior.

Research by Rohmer and Louvet (2009) found the implications of disability (e.g., person in a wheelchair) to be a superordinate social category as compared to gender (e.g., male or female) and ethnicity (e.g., African-American or Caucasian) when other college students were asked to rate the first thing he or she noticed in a picture. The results indicates that a physical disability is more likely to categorize someone more than then gender or ethnicity. Man, Rojahn, and Chrosniak found college students' romantic attraction towards peers with disabilities was influenced by a person's familiarity of the physical disability (Man, et al., 2006).

Other research, has shown a disconnect between the explicit ratings and implicit attitudes regarding romantic attractiveness towards a person with a disability. Miller, Chen, Glover-Graf, & Kranz, (2009) found college students are willing to have close friendships and acquaintances with a physically disabled person, and willing to date, however, had been least likely to marry or have a partnership. The results indicate a more androgynous view of a physically disabled person. A person may wonder are the attitudes towards PWPD in regard to romantic dating positive or negative from an outsider's point of view.

Goldstein and Johnson (1997) established that perception from other individuals influenced the possibility of dating someone with a physical disability. The term 'Stigma by Association' is attributed to the other person dating a physically disabled individual. The common stereotypes (e.g., financially dependent, socially inadequate, or incomplete humans) are thereby transferred from a disabled individual to the other person that has formed a relationship with a physical disability individual. The results found from Goldstein and Johnson (1997) found that those negative evaluations of the nondisabled partner were frequent but subtly expressed in nature.

Lease, Cohen, and Dahlbeck (2007) found that the view of a somatic disability may influence one's initiation into a romantic relationship. As a result the physical disabled person may perceive oneself as sexually inadequate or disability severity affecting one's relationship with a romantic partner. The articles indicate the importance of first impression in attracting another individual and perception of others about a romantic relationship with a physically disabled person.

Attachment

It is believed that the quality of attachment is formed during infancy to produce mental working models which organize cognition, affect, behavior, and self-image in social relationships (Mikulinter, Shaver, and Pereg, 2003). Using a sample of physically disabled individuals; Vilchinsky, Findler, and Werner (2010) tried to bridge the gap between attachment theory and reactions from individuals with no disability. The research was based off of two types of attachment styles; avoidance and anxiety felt by the non-disabled individual. One type that maybe activated is avoidance of the disabled individual (Vilchinsky, et al., 2010). The other style allows for a person to lead his or her mind wander (e.g., pessimistic view) about a physically disabled individual.

The research conducted by Hwang, Johnston, and Smith (2007) identified two terms; dyadic adjustment and dyadic cohesion that should be taken into consideration among persons with or congenital onset of a disability. Dyadic adjustment is overall quality satisfaction of dating a person with a physical disability (Hwang et al., 2007). Similarly secondary dysfunction is the impact that sexual attraction affect towards a physically disabled person may inhibit finding a romantic partner (Dombrowski, Petrick, and Strauss, 2000). Dyadic cohesion is a positive interaction that each romantic partner shares one's personality characteristics. These

factors shed light onto how to identify and hopefully maintain a positive relationship with a romantic partner.

Sexuality

Sexuality is complex issue because it involves all of these different factors that affect how individuals view themselves and behave (Marini et al., 2009.) Dombrowski et al.,(2000) analyzed the impact of sexuality among brain injury individuals in regard to psychosocial development that indicated a physically disabled person should be able to bring these issues to her or his rehabilitation team that sexual issues may appear and should not be ignored (Dombrowski et al., 2000). It is important to understand the influence of society and culture that set up rules to guide sexual behaviors among disabled individuals attempting to attract a member of the opposite sex.

Romantic relationship

Once a physically disabled person finds someone there are some key factors that one should take into consideration for maintaining a positive relationship. Most good relationships have a well-established communication system that helps relieve initial discomfort felt by the nondisabled partner (Chance, 2002). By communicating the limitations in a straightforward manner the nondisabled partner comfort level will increase. It is vital to a successful relationship to show small signs of affection in a comfortable manner for one's partner. The final thing to keep in mind for a disabled person while dating is to take nothing for granted. Cultivate a daily sense of gratitude for one's partner and the thousands of little blessings he or she has brought into one's life. Remember that, if you're happy in your relationship, your partner is doing a thousand little things for you every day to make your to make your relationship work. Never take one's

relationship for granted – a relationship is work of the highest order, and the second you stop it starts to slide away.

There are, however, some obstacles that are harder to overcome. The reactions of one's family can influence relationship satisfaction. The other variables that should be taken into consideration before engaging in a sexual relationship with physically disabled individual are the: lack of accessibility, financial burden, or physical limitations.

Conclusion

The literature review does take a pessimistic view of the world from an insider's perspective about romantic dating among disabled individuals. The paper finds some key information to be cognizant while pursuing and dating a member of the opposite sex. It is hoped that this type of research will find benefit from a person that wants to expand his or her own knowledge base about dating a disabled individual.

References

- Chance, R. S., (2002). To love and be loved: sexuality and people with physical disabilities. *Journal of psychology and theology*, 30, 195-208. doi: 00.91-6471/410-730.
- Dombrowski, L. K., Petrick, J. D., & Strauss, D. (2000). Rehabilitation treatment of sexuality issues due to acquired brain injury. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 45, 299-309. doi:10.1037/0090-5550.45.3.299.
- Goldstein, S. B., & Johnson, V. A. (1997). Stigma by association: Perceptions of the dating partners of college students with physical disabilities. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 495-504. doi:10.1207/s15324834basp1904_6.
- Hwang, K., Johnston, M., & Smith, J. K. (2007). Romantic attachment in individuals with physical disabilities. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 52, 184-195. doi:10.1037/0090-5550.52.2.184.
- Lease, S. H., Cohen, J. E., & Dahlbeck, D. T. (2007). Body and sexual esteem as mediators of the physical disability-interpersonal competencies relation. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 52, 399-408. doi:10.1037/0090-5550.52. .399.
- Makulincer, M., Shaber, P R., & Pereg, D. (2003). Attachment theory and affect regulation: dynamics, development, and cognitive consequences of attachment-related strategies. *Motivation and emotion*, 27, 77-102.
- Man, M., Rojahn, J., Chrosniak, L., & Sanford J. (2006). College students' romantic attraction towards peers with physical disabilities. *Journal of developmental and physiological disabilities*, 18, 35-44. doi: 10.1007/S10882-006-9004-x.

- Marini, I., Glover-Graf, N. M., & Millington, M. J. (2012). Psychosocial aspects of disability: Insider perspectives and counseling strategies. New York, NY US: Springer Publishing Co.
- Miller, E., Chen, R., Glover-Graf, N. M., & Kranz, P. (2009). Willingness to engage in personal relationships with persons with disabilities. *Rehabilitation counseling bulletin*, 20, 1-14.
- Rohmer, O., & Louvet, E. (2009). Describing persons with disability: Salience of disability, gender, and ethnicity. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 54(1), 76-82. doi:10.1037/a0014445
- Santuzzi, A. M. (2011). Anticipating evaluative social interactions involving persons with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 56, 231-242. doi:10.1037/a0024444.
- Vilchinsky, N., Findler, L., & Werner, S. (2010). Attitudes toward people with disabilities: The perspective of attachment theory. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 55, 298-306. doi:10.1037/a0020491.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2011). Health, United States, 2010, with special feature on death and dying. DHHS Pub No. 2011-1232, 221.