**THE SEXUAL AND ROMANTIC EXPERIENCES OF LGB+ INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITES**

**Alan Santinele Martino, Meghan Robbins**

**University of Calgary**

**Objectives:** A growing body of literature addressing the sexual health of people with disabilities has primarily focussed on heterosexual and cisgender people and ignored the unique positioning of disabled people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans\* (LGBT+) (Dinwoodie, Greenhill, & Cookson, 2016; Santinele Martino, 2017, 2020). The pervasive heteronormativity and cisnormativity in the literature, coupled with ableist assumptions that disabled people cannot identify as LGBT+, has obscured the rich array of sexualities and gender identities among disabled people (Jungels & Bender, 2015; Santinele Martino, 2020). Despite LGBT+ disabled people having sexual and romantic desires (McClelland et al., 2012), there continues to be a dearth of understanding about their experiences (Dinwoodie et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2018) and intimate lives (McClelland et al., 2012; Toft et al., 2019). This exploratory project seeks to understand the sexual health knowledge and needs of adults labeled/with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Alberta, Canada.

**Methods:** This study will conduct semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 adults labeled/with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Alberta (Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton). This study follows a disability studies approach in which, instead of relying on medical records, we seek participants who self-identify as having a developmental and/or intellectual disability. There will be a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. Inveovo will be used in the analysis.

**Results:** Our preliminary findings suggest that intellectual and developmental disabilities lead to masking and mirroring, which causes individuals to not understand or identify their sexualities until later in life. Sexual scripts are followed by individuals, but they are lacking. Sexual scripts are learned in a heteronormative fashion and never include queer identities or relations. This is found to be due to a significant lack of sexual education, leading individuals to have to do their research and causing the internet to be the only source of information. This can be an exceptional source of information but can also lead some to problematic experiences and knowledge. There is little to no representation of queer disabled voices on the internet and in the media, especially for women and people of colour. The final major theme of the preliminary findings is queer spaces are generally accepting of those with disabilities, but lack of accessibility can lead to individuals being left out and forgotten in these spaces.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** This paper provides some insights into queer disabled voices and the intersection of the two identities. Disabled queer individuals report their experiences’ everywhere from being magical to facing double the amount of discrimination and setbacks. This study aims to expand the cisnormative sexuality research conducted on individuals with disabilities, allowing them to share their uniquely queer experiences and how they navigate their intersecting identities. The goal is to understand their experiences and provide valuable insight to service providers, caregivers, and those struggling with their own identities. Queer spaces that allow for accommodation and accessibility are much needed and can provide safe spaces for those grappling with this intersection of identities. Queer disabled literature is necessary for this population and can provide support and guidance, which has been found to not exist.

**Correspondence:**

**Alan Santinele Martino, Ph.D.**

**University of Calgary**

**2500 University Dr NW**

**Calgary, AB T2N 1N4**

[**alan.martino@ucalgary.ca**](mailto:alan.martino@ucalgary.ca)

**Meghan Robbins**

**University of Calgary**

**2500 University Dr NW**

**Calgary, AB T2N 1N4**

meghan.robbins@ucalgary.ca