


**Romantic and sexual relationships: Lived experiences of people with complex communication needs. Preliminary findings**

AGOSCI Conference, Melbourne May 17 2017




**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY  
inspiring achievement

Mr. Darryl Sellwood  
Associate Professor Parimala Raghavendra  
Dr. Paul Jewell  
Dr Ruth Walker

**Introduction**

Lived experience of romantic and sexual relationships  
(Preliminary findings)




2

**Systematic review**

- Investigated perceived barriers and facilitators people experience in
  - Socialising
  - sharing intimacy
  - expressing sexuality


Sellwood, D., Raghavendra, P., & Jewell, P. (2017). Sexuality and Intimacy for People with Congenital Physical and Communication Disabilities: Barriers and Facilitators: A Systematic Review. *Sexuality and Disability*, 35(2), 227–244. doi:10.1007/s11195-017-9474-z



3

**Research questions**


- What are the lived experiences?
- What are the barriers?
- What are the facilitators?



4

**Method**


- Critical Hermeneutics phenomenological approach (Lopez & Willis, 2004)
- International recruitment
- Interview questions used ICF framework
- Data coded using NVivo



5

**Results: Participants**

- 9 participants
- 21 to over 70
- Majority females
- Variety of daily activities



6

### Results: AAC Systems

- Dedicated AAC Devices or Tablets
- Pen and paper
- Spelling
- Communication Assistants

### Results: What are Experiences?

- Experience categories
  - Sexual in Nature
  - Physical time together
  - Dating
  - Beginnings of relationships
  - "Let's be friends"

### Results: What were the Barriers?

*The ICF domain: e4 Attitudinal Factors*

- e420 Friends
- e425 Acquaintances
- e410 Immediate Family

### Result: What were the Facilitators?

- e1 Product and Technology Factors
  - e1251 Assistive products and technology for communication (including AAC strategies)
  - e125 Products and technology for communication
- e3 People Factors
  - e320 Friends

### Limitations

- Low numbers
- Little time for exploring deeper
- Representative questionable

### Further Research

- Crip Theory: Queer Theory and Disability Studies
- Opposes ableist oppression
- Illumination by Crip Theory

## Conclusion

- Barriers – attitudinal
- Facilitators – technology and support from friends
- Analysis using Crip Theory
  
- Thanks to participants

A practical tip coming up next ...

## The power of introductions

- Friends introduce you with extra details
  - Your interests
  - Your communication method

## References

- Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive Versus Interpretive Phenomenology: Their Contributions to Nursing Knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(5), 726-735. doi:10.1177/1049732304263638
- McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*: NYU Press.
- Sellwood, D., Raghavendra, P., & Jewell, P. (2017). Sexuality and Intimacy for People with Congenital Physical and Communication Disabilities: Barriers and Facilitators: A Systematic Review. *Sexuality and Disability*, 35(2), 227-244. doi:10.1007/s11195-017-9474-z
- World Health Organization. (2014). International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>

## Questions