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Special Focus Introduction: "Healthy Sexuality"

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This special focus issue for the Canadian Journal of Disability Studies brings together three essays that destabilize normative requirements for "healthy sexuality", calling into question the ways in which some people are institutionally held outside of or beyond the capacity for maintaining a sexuality at all, never mind a "healthy" one. With particular practices and identities subject to pathologization at the intersection of medicalization and education processes, disabled persons and disabled sexualities are bound up in the institutionalization of sexuality as an officially recognized public problem.

In the current political climate in Canada, and particularly though not exclusively in the province of Ontario, current misplaced resentments are actually a kind of logical extension of the basic, inherent *conservatism* of sex education programmes, rooted as they are in eugenic concerns and a compulsory heterosexuality updated only to the point of a marginally acceptable homonormativity in the present Ontario curriculum. Although popular news media regularly render "sex ed" as a matter of liberalism which is then cast either as a social benefit or a social threat, depending on the writer's commitments, the actual paradigm that informs "sex ed" is defined by public health officials as a matter of *grave* concern (Adams, 1997), acceptable only if it is "healthy", i.e., if it serves to promote "healthy relationship bonds" (See, for example, the research priorities of applied health programmes throughout Euro-America) framed by judgements about honesty and intimacy in which, for example, it is a criminal matter not to share one's HIV+ status with a partner, and in which intimacy for non-monogamous relationships is

not even discussed as a possibility, and in which BDSM practices remain vulnerable to prosecution as matters of assault and abuse.

Each of the three assembled essays addresses in some manner the techniques for silencing and delegitimizing the expression of a set of sexual desires, and/or practices, and one essay in a particular reversal of the usual modes for marginalization examines how homosexual desire is rescued from its delegitimation as "perversion" by rescripting it as a form of "disability" that requires what its author, John Smilges, maps out as a nefarious use of culturalist understandings of disability in the "ex-gay" movement that he argues "situates disability under the sole authority of the medical establishment [with] ex-gays actively offer[ing] up their rhetorical agency in exchange for a diagnosis." As with sex education curricula that focus on the threats of unregulated sexuality, and undisciplined desire, Smilges shows how the ex-gay movement attempts to distance itself from the more well-known (and odious) "conversion therapy" advocates, and also to distance itself from queer identifications and human rights based on identity claims by rendering homoerotic desire as a form of cognitive disability that carries with it a host of threatening co-morbidities. Using the TLC "reality" television program *my Husband's Not Gay* as the site for analysis, Smilges takes up Tobin Siebers' conceptualization of disability masquerade to arrive at a "queercrip" unpacking of this particular form of activist stance. Citing one particular narrative from the series as exemplary, Smilges focusses on Tom, arguing that he typifies the strategy of "ex-gays" who cast their queerness as a form of disability from which they wish to be freed, and cautiously reminds readers that "... the medical model of disability is not so long gone from queer memory that it cannot be resurrected, inflicting the very harm that queercrip coalitions are intended to counter." What Smilges' essay gives us then, is an overview of the manner in which the queercrip rhetoric (largely developed by Robert McRuer in

Crip Times and Crip Theory) can be repurposed for uses that do nothing to interrogate either homophobia or ableist discrimination.

Cara Goldberg's essay, "Fucking with Notions of Disability" brings our attention to the ableist construction of "consent" in contemporary Canadian law as a particular act: a clear statement repeatedly given throughout the course of each sexual encounter. This way of framing consent, Goldberg argues, borrowing Susan Wendell's concept of the "myth of control" to question the legal demand for a particular and consistent match between cognition and utterance for consent to be given *and* for that consent to be valid. Contesting the manner in which this mandate can be impossible to meet consistently for disabled persons, Goldberg then moves to address BDSM practices as "cathartic", by which she means that they are expressive and facilitate a form of agency that does not rely on the myth of control and its attendant disavowal of disability.

At the heart of Goldberg's work is a concern that the general excessive focus on sex as a threat, all other concerns (for pleasure, for agency, intimacy, self-love and self-regard) are dismissed, and because of this persons with disabilities are excluded from the conversation that nonetheless informs the discourses *about* sexuality and disabled persons (in which sexuality is cast once again as a public concern, a threat to the body of the putatively child-like body and subjectivity of the disabled person, and a threat to the reproductive and familial health of the larger community around the disabled person). For all our declarations in daily life that sexuality is a private matter, this essay, like Smilges', demonstrates clearly that privacy is not a right extended or offered to persons with disabilities. This is in part, as many readers of *CJDS* will already be aware, because the personhood of those with disabilities is already discounted or erased entirely by both our common conversations, and formal discourses of health and law.

The third paper in our special focus series, "Opposing Forces? Autism and dating, romance and sexuality in the mainstream media" rounds out our set of papers, providing a corrective view of filmic and news media narratives that repeatedly cast autistic persons as incapable of romantic and/or sexual relationships. In her paper, Emily Brooks argues that common representations of autistic people encourage the view that autistics are *not* people in the adult sense, that they are unpalatably different, and deficient, thus feeding a public view of autistic people as unsuited to – or even dangerous in – intimate, personal relationships. To remedy this, taking what readers may recognize as a "nothing about us without us" approach, Brooks calls for the centering of autistic voices that can challenge the medicalized, desexualized and infantilizing view of autistics. Citing the work of Jordynn Jack, Brooks also offers readers an insight into the view of "autistic gender" as a unique identification that "...pushes past a gender continuum and toward a copia" even though, as Brooks notes, autistic people are "often written out of the [LGBTQIA] story".

This special focus issue of the *CJDS* is encouraging to me as an editor in part because it arrives in publication on the heels of the recently convened Egale Identities Conference in Toronto (June 23-25, 2018) where, in spite of the best efforts of Egale to fund and support a disability focused pre-conference only a small handful of 2SLGBTQIA disabled persons came to talk about matters of sexuality, desire, needs, and human rights. The reasons why so few came are not entirely clear yet, though I suspect that finances and travel accessibility will figure prominently in the barriers for disabled queers. Nonetheless, Egale (and scholarly organizations like it, along with other human rights organizations) know that the time is beyond past to centre the voices of disabled persons in discussions about disabled sexualities. The essays in this special focus issue provide 3 points of ingress into a larger, global discussion that is emerging. I

encourage the readership to read all of the contributions assembled here and consider how they can inform everyday practices regarding the intersection of queerness, the defining of well-being, and how sexualities, and disability identities are experienced, embodied and embraced (or not).

Works Cited

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