

Intimate Links: Applying a Critical Sexuality Framework to Promoting Women's Sexual Health in Spinal Cord Rehabilitation Settings

Authors: Raheleh Ghasseminia MS OT/L & Tracy R. Nichols PhD



BACKGROUND

- Disparities in sexual health outcomes are amplified for WWSCI in rehabilitation settings
- Sexual healthcare practice is based on cis-gendered male norms and a heteronormative approach
- Paralyzed bodies of WWSCI are rarely if ever discussed or portrayed

CRITICAL SEXUALITY STUDIES¹

- A critical theory examining how power and privilege in systems shape assumptions of sexuality
- Calls for the conceptual analysis of sexuality and the examination of heteronormativity in sexuality research
- Attends to the qualities of marginalized bodies

REFERENCES

- McClelland, S. & Fahs, B. (2016). When sex and power collide: An argument for critical sexuality studies. *Journal of Sex Research*, 53(4-5), 392-416.



Figure 1:
The Social Construction of Sexual Health for Women with Spinal Cord Injury (WWSCI) - The application of Critical Sexuality Studies (CSS) to Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Rehabilitation Systems

PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- This preliminary framework speaks to the lived experience of WWSCI in spinal cord rehabilitation and their sexual health care
- Sexual health outcomes are tied to the power and influence of the SCI rehabilitation system
- Able-bodied, gendered, and heterosexual norms minimize sexual health outcomes as a high priority for WWSCI
- Sexuality research lacks critical examination of rehabilitation systems

APPLICATION OF CSS TO SCI REHABILITATION

- Reconceptualizes current heteronormative and gendered educational materials
- Systematically examines provider bias toward the sexuality of WWSCI
- Disrupts gender disparities in the approach to SCI sexual health education
- Shifts research aims to interrogate gendered biases in institutional and organizational policies