



# Intimacy and Disability

Abilities Expo 2008  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

## Myths about Sexuality & Disability



# Presenter

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# MYTH: Talking about sexuality isn't natural, proper, necessary.

If not discussed we cannot...

- identify/confront myths;
- transfer knowledge/facts;
- challenge stereotypes;
- reduce prejudice;
- discuss opinions;
- exchange preferences;
- promote diversity; or,
- grow as individuals or communities.

**To realize our sexual freedom, our goal must be to infuse the dominant sexual culture with the richness of our own experience. We must celebrate our differences from those without disabilities [and/or aging]. We must see our differences in appearance and function, which are the [effects of disability and/or aging], also contain the seeds of our sexual liberation.**

*Barbara Faye Waxman*

"It's Time to Politicized Our Sexual Oppression," The Disability Rag, March/April 1991  
Introduction Page 1 "The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability: For All of Us Who Live with Disabilities, Chronic Pain, and Illness". Kaufman, Miriam; Silverberg, Cory; and Odette, Fran. Cleis Press, 2nd edition (2007 Nov 28).

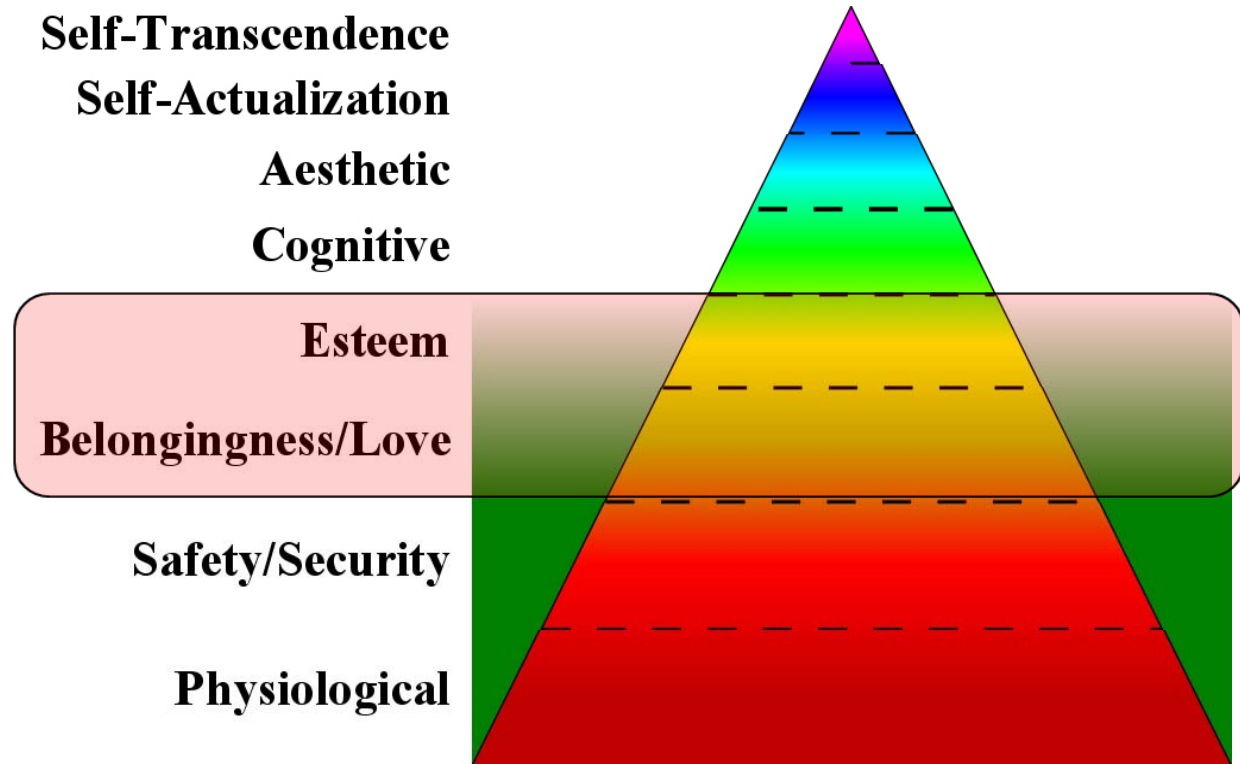



**MYTH: People experiencing disability/aging (PED/A) aren't sexual.**

- All People Are Sexual in One Way or Another – Basic Components of Human Nature
- Disability/Aging May...
  - Alter Personal Expression
  - Create Learning, Change, and Growth
  - Alter Activities
- Disability/Aging Does Not Eliminate Sexuality

**MYTH:** PED/A have more important things to worry about than sexuality.


## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs





**MYTH:** PED/A shouldn't express sexuality if living in institutions, group homes, or with parents.

- WHAT? WHY NOT?
  - Too “childlike”? “Inability” to provide consent?
  - Disrespectful to other residents, direct support professionals?
- Most people express sexuality in these environments.
- Denies freedom of expression.



**MYTH:** PED/A are undesirable /  
bad choices for partners.

**Assumption:** unable to be recreationally, intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially, sexually, parentally, etc. supportive or satisfying.

**ANYTHING** Is Possible with...

- **Assistive Technology**
- **Direct Support Professional Services**
- **Willingness, Desire, Open-mind, Creativity, and Flexibility**

**MYTH:** PED/A can't express “real sexuality”.

## **SEXUALITY ≡**

- not limited to genitals or genital-oriented activities
- involves biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual variables of life
- affects personality development and interpersonal relations
- includes self-perception, self-esteem, personal history, personality, concept of love and intimacy, body image etc.



**MYTH:** PED/A can't have  
“real sex”

**“Real Sex” > biological intercourse**

**ANYTHING** Is Possible with...

- **Pharmaceutical Technology**
- **Assistive Technology**
- **Direct Support Professional Services**
- **Desire, Willingness, Open-mind, Creativity, and Flexibility**



# **OTHER SEX-RELATED MYTHS**

- Sex should be spontaneous.
- Satisfying sex requires a firm penis.
- Quality sex ends with an orgasm.



## **OTHER DISABILITY/AGING MYTHS**

- PED/A are not sexually adventurous.
- PED/A are “perverts”.
- PED/A don’t get sexually assaulted.



# **Additional Resources**

- **Web:**

<http://www.precisainc.com/events/abilitiesexpo2008/>

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THANK  
YOU