

# Sex Work and Disability

Many years ago sex worker and disability activist Tuppy Owens who founded The Outsiders wrote an essay called "Why Disabled People Make the Best Clients" arguing that from the perspective of mainstream society, people who live with visible disabilities and sex workers have a lot in common. Tuppy's essay was a call for sex workers and people with disabilities to work more closely together both for pleasure and political gain.

Despite a surge in publications about sex work by academics and sex workers, few articles or stories are published that explicitly talk about clients with disabilities.

As is always the case with sex and disability, the best work out there is being produced by people with disabilities themselves.

A short personal essay by 22 year old Nick Wallis, who lives with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, writes about his experience paying for sex. The essay is a simple honest account of his experiences of loss of sexual opportunities and rights, and his choice to pay for sex as way of exploring his own sexuality. It's neither tragic nor triumphant, just the way most of our lives are:

"After mulling things over, I felt I had already attempted to form relationships without success and firmly decided that I wished to experience sex without fear of rejection or the possibility of spoiling an existing friendship... Looking back, I am pleased I had the tenacity and commitment to see it through. The experience, while not emotionally fulfilling, gave me confidence and a sense that I was not missing out. I did not have unrealistically high expectations and perhaps in this respect I was luckier than some of my friends who found their first experience disappointing."

Sex and disability is usually fed to us through so many prejudiced screens that the actual experience of regular people disappears in the process. This serves to both keep ignorant of the experience of others, and maintain the illusory "us" versus "them" dichotomy so important to non-disabled people.

We need to read more stories by people and fewer stories about people.

*by Cory Silverberg*

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*<http://sexuality.about.com>*

In 2007, RhED was approached several times to speak at community forums around disability and sex. RhED referred some of the organisations to speak directly with sex workers in the sex industry who had told RhED that they were happy to speak about their experiences of working with people with disabilities. At the Relationships and Intimacy Conference, a conference for carers of people with disabilities, a RhED team member, Gabby and one of the sex worker reference group members spoke about sex work and disability. The

reference group member also took the opportunity to demystify the industry and challenge the general community's thinking around people who work in the sex industry.

The sex worker, turned public speaker, loved the experience of sharing her knowledge

about brothel etiquette, the pitfalls to look for, what to expect, questions that carers and/or family members need to ask the working girl when they enter the premises. She generally informed them about the inner workings of a brothel so they know what to expect on a visit. She made the point that if you (the carer/family member or the client) are disappointed the first time there will be somebody, somewhere that can meet the needs of the person with the disability, with a sense of fun and adventure.

Channel 31 was so impressed with one of our speakers, that they asked if she would take part in a documentary called Stella No Limits. So now, we have a media star amidst our community!

*Gabby*

