

Call for Proposals: Disabilities, Sexuality, and Human Flourishing

Sep 28, 2026

A special issue of the *International Journal of Disability Policy and Advocacy (IJDPA)*,
Volume 2, Issue 3.

Proposals are due Dec 15, 2026; publication is anticipated in September or October 2027.

About the special issue

This special issue treats sexuality as an essential dimension of disability, personhood, and human flourishing, not a peripheral concern. We invite international, interdisciplinary, and lived-experience contributions on desire, intimacy, embodiment, sexual agency, relationships, rights, health, psychological wellness, spirituality, and belonging.

Disability scholarship and policy have rightly focused on access, education, employment, health care, and independent living. Sexuality and intimate life, however, remain at the margins of research and practice. People with disabilities still meet assumptions that they are asexual, undesirable, dependent, or incapable of making decisions about intimacy (Liddiard, 2018; McCarthy, 1999). Asexual people, in turn, must seek recognition within a medicalized view of sexuality that treats low or absent desire as disordered (Gupta, 2017; Hille, 2023).

These assumptions shape health care, sexuality education, family relationships, residential services, public policy, and everyday chances to form meaningful relationships. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms equal rights in relationships, family life, and health (United Nations, 2006). Yet barriers to accessible sexual and reproductive health information and services persist (WHO & UNFPA, 2009).

The issue understands flourishing as the capacity to live with dignity, exercise agency, experience intimacy and pleasure, form relationships, participate in community, and become more fully oneself. It does not minimize vulnerability, exploitation, unequal power, or the complexities of consent. Instead, it asks how rights, care, protection, and self-determination can be held together without diminishing the personhood of people with disabilities.

Framework and guiding questions

The issue is grounded in four linked ideas. Contributions should speak to this framework.

- **Personhood.** People with disabilities are whole human beings whose identities and possibilities cannot be reduced to diagnosis, impairment, care needs, or institutional categories. Personhood is relational, grounded in recognition, dignity, and shared humanity (Watson, 2023).
- **Sexual agency.** People should have meaningful opportunities to understand, express, communicate, and make decisions about sexuality and intimate relationships, with support when needed.

- **Intersectionality.** Disability and sexuality are shaped by race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, culture, religion, nationality, class, and other dimensions of identity and power.
- **Human flourishing.** Flourishing includes intimacy, pleasure, love, belonging, spiritual wholeness, self-determination, safety, and participation in relational and community life.

We especially welcome work that takes up one or more of these questions:

1. What does human flourishing mean when considered through disability, sexuality, and intimate life?
2. How do ableism and cultural norms shape who is recognized as desirable, relational, and sexually autonomous?
3. How are sexual agency, consent, privacy, and intimate citizenship supported or restricted in families, institutions, health systems, and communities?
4. How do intersecting identities influence experiences of embodiment, desire, vulnerability, intimacy, and belonging?
5. How can professionals and institutions affirm autonomy while responding ethically to vulnerability, unequal power, and the risk of exploitation?
6. How do national, cultural, legal, and spiritual contexts shape disability, sexuality, relationships, and reproductive rights?
7. What can first-person narratives teach scholars, practitioners, and policymakers that conventional research may overlook?

Topics of interest

We welcome scholarship from disability studies, sexuality studies, counseling, psychology, education, public health, medicine, rehabilitation, social work, law, policy, theology, and the humanities. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Disability, desire, embodiment, and sexual personhood
- Sexual agency, autonomy, consent, and supported decision-making
- Sexual ableism, and cultural constructions of beauty and desirability
- Disability and LGBTQIA+ identities, including asexuality and ace-spectrum identities
- Race, disability, sexuality, gender, and intersectionality
- Sexuality education for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Reproductive health, reproductive justice, and parenting
- Dating, partnership, marriage, family formation, and intimate citizenship
- Sexual health care, clinical communication, and professional preparation, including whole-person and partner-inclusive care
- Sexual violence, trauma, safeguarding, and the consequences of overprotection
- Technology, online dating, assistive technology, and sexual expression
- Aging, chronic illness, acquired disability, and intimacy across the life course
- Sexuality, psychological wellness, and relational health
- Disability, sexuality, spirituality, theology, and religious communities
- Representation of disabled sexuality in literature, film, art, and popular culture

- International and culturally specific understandings of disability and sexuality
- Policies and practices that support privacy, relationships, and sexual wellbeing

We particularly encourage submissions from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Indigenous communities, and other settings underrepresented in this scholarship. We also seek work reflecting physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, psychiatric, and acquired disabilities, and diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, cultures, and relationship forms.

Manuscript Requirements and Types of contributions

In shaping the issue, the editors will seek a purposeful balance of theory, empirical research, policy and practice, and first-person narrative, together with international, cultural, disciplinary, disability, gender, sexuality, racial, and life-course diversity. Particular value will be placed on work that avoids deficit-oriented framings and recognizes disabled people as knowledge producers.

The issue seeks contributions that balance theory, research, policy, practice, and lived experience. Final composition depends on submissions received and peer review. Therefore, we encourage a diverse range of contributions, including:

- Conceptual and theoretical manuscripts
- Qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and participatory research studies
- Policy analyses
- Practice-focused and professional development articles
- Narrative and Lived-Experience Essays

We invite disabled people to write about their own experiences of desire, being desired, dating, disclosure, partnership, intimacy, sexuality, identity, spirituality, or reclaiming the body after illness, injury, or trauma. Narratives may also examine family or professional overprotection, institutional restrictions, or cultural and religious messages about disability and sexuality.

Narratives are treated as substantive knowledge, not illustrations of academic arguments. Editors will support each writer in preserving their voice while meeting journal requirements, with attention to informed consent, respectful language, privacy, and accessibility throughout.

We welcome established scholars, early-career researchers, practitioners, advocates, and disabled writers. Participatory and co-produced research is strongly encouraged.

Full scholarly manuscripts must follow journal requirements, including APA style, double spacing, and a maximum length of 30 pages per article.

How to submit a proposal

Send a proposal or structured abstract by Dec 15, 2026, to lwwatson@ncat.edu. Please include:

1. A working title and the contribution type (conceptual, empirical, policy or practice, or narrative).
2. A structured abstract of up to **500 words**. For scholarly work, state the purpose, framework, methods or approach, and expected contribution. For narratives, describe the experience and themes you plan to write about.
3. The national, cultural, and policy context of the work.
4. For research, how people with disabilities informed the question, method, interpretation, or recommendations.
5. Each author's name, affiliation (if any), email, and a bio of up to 100 words.

Authors whose proposals are accepted will be invited by January 15, 2027, to submit full manuscripts. An invitation does not guarantee publication; all scholarly manuscripts undergo peer review.

Editorial standards and review

Scholarly manuscripts receive academic peer review under journal policy. Reviewers are chosen for subject knowledge, methodological competence, cultural awareness, and familiarity with disability-affirming scholarship. Authors and reviewers are asked to follow these trauma-informed principles of trust, power, communication, and relational accountability (Corey & Watson, 2025):

- Use respectful, current, and contextually appropriate disability language, honoring individuals' preferred language.
- Avoid deficit-based, tragic, inspirational, or sensational portrayals of disability and sexuality.
- Recognize disabled people as knowledge producers, and include their perspectives whenever claims concern their lives.
- Address consent, power, privacy, safety, and safeguarding without equating protection with the denial of autonomy.
- Avoid presenting Western assumptions as universal; explain the cultural and policy context of each contribution.
- Report research ethics approval and informed consent procedures where applicable.

Key dates

Date	Milestone
December 15, 2026	Proposals or structured abstracts due
January 15, 2027	Invitations to submit full manuscripts
April 15, 2027	Full manuscripts and narrative submissions due
May–June 2027	Peer review and editorial assessment
July 15, 2027	Revised manuscripts due
August 2027	Final decisions, copyediting, and issue assembly
September or October 2027	Anticipated publication

Guest editors

- **Lemuel W. Watson, EdD, DSS** — Edward B. Fort Distinguished Professor of Leadership Studies, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University; Senior Scientist, the Kinsey Institute, Indiana University at Bloomington.
- **Jennifer A. Piatt, PhD, CTRS** — Professor and Chair of Graduate Health Professions, Indiana University Indianapolis; co-founder, Kinsey Institute Disability and Sexual Health Initiative.
- **Ali Corey, PhD** — Associate Professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Elon University.
- **Jessica J. Hille, JD, PhD** — Assistant Director for Education, the Kinsey Institute, Indiana University Bloomington.

Questions about fit, format, or accessibility support are welcome before the deadline.
Contact Lemuel W. Watson at Lwwatson@ncat.edu.

References

- Corey, A., & Watson, L. W. (2025). Navigating change and trauma: Essential leadership insights for higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, 6(1), 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.61186/johepal.6.1.169>
- Gupta, K. (2017). What does asexuality teach us about sexual disinterest? Recommendations for health professionals based on a qualitative study with asexually identified people. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 43(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2015.1113593>
- Hille, J. J. (2023). Beyond sex: A review of recent literature on asexuality. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 49, 101516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101516>
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- McCarthy, M. (1999). *Sexuality and women with learning disabilities*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>
- Watson, L. W. (Ed.). (2023). *Exploring personhood in contemporary times: From leadership to philosophy*. Emerald Publishing.
- World Health Organization, & United Nations Population Fund. (2009). *Promoting sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities: WHO/UNFPA guidance note*. World Health Organization. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/44207>