Mark Kardash

Professor Zurawik

COM 142: News Reporting

12 May 2020

Dating with Special Needs: Yes. We do feel romance.

Imagine the following situation: A guy likes a girl. Not only does he like her, he is completely crazy over her. She’s in his dreams, in his thoughts all the time, he can’t stop talking about her to his family. It is not only her body that attracts him. She has a heart like no other: A beautiful heart. She is always nice to everyone, and would never hurt anybody. She never utters a bad word, never behaves badly, and never deliberately tries to impress. Always ready to help. Her smile makes the boy’s heart want to sing, and her glance casts a spell so strong that he can see an endless ocean in her eyes. He dreams about them dancing together, alone, or in front of their families, showing affection for each other in public, having fun, hugging and comforting her when she feels bad, and rescuing her from danger like a noble prince would rescue his sweet princess. She is in all of his stories, his fantasies, and his aspirations. She is his muse. His inspiration. In the evenings, he writes poems about her, each one sweeter than the other, praising the kindness of her heart and the pureness of her soul. He wants to be with her so bad. And he hopes, that someday, her noble soul and kind heart will accept him, paying no attention to the big disadvantage he has, unlike others who desire her: He has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth, and had to use a walker to walk around. But that is not even his biggest problem. His condition has made him self-isolate, lock himself in his own thoughts, and be afraid of everything. He doesn’t know how to be attractive to girls. He’s afraid to ask for her phone number, fearing she might misunderstand his intentions, and gets disappointed learning that his friend did get it a year ago. She does not know about his feelings, and neither does his friend. Senior year of high school comes, and he doesn’t even know how to ask her to prom. The greatest thing he manages to do is to ask for her address on social media. Prom night comes, and he doesn’t want to go. He has an extremely bad feeling about this evening. He is afraid of the confirmation of a speculation he’s had for the last few weeks. And yet, he goes, not knowing for what reason. And just as he is sitting there, trying to have fun, and hoping that maybe, after all, his fears aren’t true, there she comes, wearing a flamboyant dress, as beautiful as ever. And by her side, dressed in a fancy suit, he recognizes the person he feared to see the most: His best friend.

What I just described seems like a summary on the back of a dramatic young adult romance novel. And yet, as some of you might already have guessed, it is not. It is exactly what happened to me during the last two years of high school. What did I do after what I saw? Well, I’ll tell you what I did: Nothing. Mostly because my legs started feeling like spaghetti, and my throat felt like it closed itself shut. When my crush and friend came over to say “Hi” to me, I prayed to God for them to leave as I was about to have a major breakdown. Later, tears rolling down my eyes, I went from mentally accusing my friend of stealing my chance to searching the cause of the events in me. And after thinking about it for a while, I realized that I had serious disadvantages. He has a car, a job, is athletic, and, most importantly, he has no visible physical impairments. “Off course!”, I though to myself, “Who the heck would ever be attracted to a disabled person, who has nothing to offer them besides kind sweettalk and poems?” I know I’m being dramatic. I’ve been dramatic all of my life, and I am not writing this to get pity. If anything, maybe to share my pain. The reason I dedicated almost two pages of this article to telling my unfulfilled love story in a sad monologue is because, as I later found out, I wasn’t alone. Many people with physical disabilities often find it more difficult to attract the attention of the opposite sex than their able-bodied counterparts. I am writing this article to put together actual testimonies, to refer to my own perception and miniscule experience, and attempt to help people with similar issues, by declaring an all-out war on the myths and realities surrounding dating with disabilities.

According to Myles Pearson, a former Paralympic athlete, having a disability can negatively impact the level of difficulty you have in attracting the opposite sex. In a Tweet ahead of Valentine’s Day, the rugby champion from Lancashire, United Kingdom, stated:

“The ‘D bomb’ is my disability. Dating is difficult anyway without a disability, but with a disabled card, it’s even more difficult.”

His condition, which he has had since birth, is known as arthrogryposis. It is a muscle-affecting disability that causes bending of the joints. However, he is determined to live a life as fulfilling as any able-bodied person, as he explains his way of thinking:

“A lot of disabled people have adapted to their disability to make their lives easier. For example, if I can’t reach something, then I just climb onto it. I try and adapt to my situation to make my disability invisible. So, we need to look at the person, rather than the chair, or their disability.”

The athlete was in a relationship with a girlfriend for 3 years, but was recently looking for a partner with “humour, intelligence, and someone who is up for an adventure.”, through online dating. While he states that his career has helped his dating life, he also receives diverse responses to his disability from those viewing his dating profile. He has said that it was much easier to meet a person face-to-face, as, with his wheelchair, his condition becomes pretty obvious. But when it comes to online dating, the best advice the champion can give is that: “It’s important for me to be honest, so I always mention my disability again at the earliest chance I get, sometimes it is when I sense the conversation is going well or when we discover common interests.” While he claims that women never openly reject him because of his disability, they often start to slowly “friendzone” him, changing the tone of the messages, or even completely stop responding to his texts. When he actually goes out on a date, he has noticed that people begin to be “too nice” with him, commenting on how “inspirational” he is, playing sports despite his disability. He can also clearly tell when a person is not comfortable with his disability. He claims “…people have patted me on the head when they greet me or act really strange around me.” The athlete claims the problem to exist in huge part due to lack of proper, or any, for that matter, representation of disabled people in the media, which leaves a great stigma, seemingly classifying disability as an “abnormality”. Another misconception he cites is that of disabled people not being able to engage in sexual intercourse. He states that because people with special needs vary in their difficulty to do things, and can actually adapt over time to do things like able-bodied people do, or, at least, their own way. (Parin Begum) But problems do not stop here. It is too often assumed that disabled people do not have a sexual identity at all.

In the article *Desexualizing Disability*, the author states that “There’s a common social attitude that disabled people are not sexual — that something about disability strips people of their sex drive, and that, moreover, disability makes people inherently sexually unappealing, so it’s not like they could find partners even if they wanted them. This is accepted as common knowledge, despite the fact that it creates some extremely harmful social attitudes and social structures.” (Smith). Personally, I was not surprised by finding that out. I actually felt like I finally knew the answer to why nobody has ever openly flirted with me. Yes, I have chatted with girls and they seemed genuinely interested in some of my personality traits. But I have never been given actual hints of romantic interest, something I am sure able-bodied men do get. Here I go again, complaining. But no. As I said, I’m only writing this so that everyone could understand how it feels from a person who has experienced it firsthand. Compared to other people who have disabilities, I have never ever in my life experienced any sort of discrimination, social degradation, or even microagressions. Furthermore, I do realize there are people who are much worse off than myself, as the article states that “The insistence that disabled people are not sexual, for example, plays directly into the denial of sexual abuse and violence committed against disabled people.” (s.e. smith). People who deny these claims seem to believe that since the sexual attraction of able-bodied is completely normal, and people with disabilities do not have a sexual life, they could be treated as life-size sex toys, and this “use” of them cannot and should not be considered assault. It is also believed that people with disabilities do not have any sort of romantic relationships, since they are (supposedly) mentally unable to experience romance. This problem arises even when it comes to professional sexual education. There is currently very little material to educate people with disabilities about sex life, and a big tendency of leaving them out. According to the article, “It’s revolting to witness even respected sex educators who should know better acting like disabled people don’t need sex education — and even more frustrating to know that because disabled people are targeted as victims, they could actually benefit from some unique, focused sexual education that they won’t receive because nondisabled people are too focused on denying their sexuality.” (s.e.smith). While my article is not meant to be exclusively about the denial of sexual pleasures to special needs individuals, and sex is not the only thing I desire from dating, this topic is included because sexual attraction is a major part in relationships, and it is important to understand that, when dating, most of these individuals have the exact same expectations and desires as their able-bodied counterparts.

The disregard of sexual identity, however, is just one of the many ways in whom people with special needs are being minimized as romantic partners. In the article *8 things you only know about dating if you have a disability*, author Marie Claire tells the story of Emma, a woman with cerebral palsy, and Emma’s opinions about dating if someone is disabled. The first thing Emma admits is that a disabled person usually loses their virginity much later than their able-bodied friends. And while this is once again part of the sexual identity question, Emma lost her own virginity at as late as 28 not because she couldn’t have done so earlier, but because, when you’re disabled, it is much more difficult to find a person who would be right for you, and understanding to the way you are (Claire). The second fact Emma offers us is that a date can go extremely wrong once people find out about you being disabled. According to her, there are many people who “chicken out”, afraid they might not be able to handle it. She says that after realizing she’s disabled, people would “make an excuse, or decide that they just weren’t interested. They never explicitly said it was because of the cerebral palsy but I couldn’t help feeling like it was. My disability isn’t obvious when I’m sitting down, so people can miss it at first.” (Claire). Personally, the only thing that tells people about my condition when I’m sitting down is the walker I often use in places like my college and the street. But it is really disappointing to find out that one without a walker could be rejected like that after simply standing up. In my homeland, Ukraine, I had a schoolteacher ask me, with a dramatically distorted face, how I manage to move around at home. I wonder if that would be the immediate question my date would ask if she saw me standing.

Emma also states that, unfortunately, once an able-bodied person sees someone with special needs, they automatically assume the person is single. She recalls instances when she and her boyfriend would go out in public, and the people around them would have her boyfriend mistaken for a friend or brother. This is a common problem among disabled people, and is also referenced to by others. And while I have never felt this assumption on myself, it oddly feels like I have. Again, maybe I’m trying to overdramatize, but it is certainly true that when my classmates started talking to each other about romantic relationships, I never got the chance to participate. Besides occasional comments about how important it is for both partners to respect each other, I couldn’t come up with anything else. I kept wishing there would be someone besides my parents with whom I could actually share my thoughts on the opposite sex, and who would sympathize with my struggles. But years of self-isolating have resulted in my only actual non-family companions being fictional characters from novels, films and TV shows. Don’t get me wrong. My family would love me if I was the world’s nastiest person. But many times I have wondered what the other people in my life think about me. Do they know that I have exactly the same, or perhaps stronger, romantic desires? If they are so interested in gossiping about romantic life, do they ever even wonder why I am alone in a society where dating almost feels like a requirement? Yes. I know. This is turning into an egotistic self-pity essay. But my entire point is, even though I have never explicitly witnessed the assumptions about singleness, something tells me most people think I will forever be alone. And the articles I read are the confirmation of my suspicions.

However, I am here not to complain about how miserable my life is, which, I can assure you, it is not. As said before, I am here to debunk the stereotypes surrounding dating with disabilities, and to do that, I will have to offer as many examples as I can. In the same article I was referring to, Emma confesses that besides the annoying part of staring at you, able bodied people have a habit of patronizing individuals with disabilities. According to her own words, Emma has heard people “say things like, ‘oh, isn’t that nice that you’ve found someone’ when they find out that I have a boyfriend.” (Claire). And while there certainly are people who say such things with the kindest of intentions, there’s an almost obvious subtext that what happened to the person doesn’t usually happen to people with similar problems, and should therefore be celebrated in some sort of special way, as an unbelievable turn of luck. Some people go even further beyond that, asking Emma things like, “Is he disabled or normal?”(Claire). For me, that would be the equivalent of asking someone, “Do you have the flue, or are you normal?”. I’ll leave it up to the reader to think just how much sense that makes. Finally, one of the most annoying things to happen to Emma is when people start praising and idolizing her boyfriend Tom just for *being* her boyfriend. Yes, he most likely has to take extra care of her due to some aspects of her condition. But agreeing to be with her doesn’t make him a hero. It just makes him one of the few people in this society that are “awake” enough to understand that a person with special needs is not a broken piece of furniture remaining on sale because it doesn’t look well with anyone’s interiors. The only other thing Emma mentions are the difficulties of sexual intercourse when you have a certain disability. Emma’s own disability makes getting into certain positions painful. But despite all that, Tom’s love for her does not let him have sex with other women, something Emma herself has suggested to him.

However, Emma is just one example of what things disabled individuals have to go through in their romantic life. In the *Ouch Blog* of BBC News, an article entitled *The awkwardness of dating when disabled*, offers two examples of people with disabilities, and their experiences with romance. After a motorcycle racing accident, 36-year-old Andy Trollope became paralyzed from the chest down. Spending the next four months in the hospital, he made a marriage proposal to his girlfriend, who, six weeks after saying “Yes”, broke up with him saying it was too much to handle (Rose and Hawkins). After quite a long while of crying over a broken heart, Mr. Trollope started to finally go out to nightclubs and bars, where he discovered that he had no difficulty in attracting women. In fact, the wheelchair he had to use seemed to be working to his advantage, as women would sit on his lap when there were no free seats, causing his friends to be almost envious of his luck. According to Mr. Trollope “My mates were saying that they had to get a wheelchair because it was like a "babe magnet" and has probably been one of the best pulling tools I've had.” (Rose and Hawkins). He claims that, besides some awkward moments with sexual intercourse, his disability did not cause any trouble, and most importantly, the women he dated did not have concerns about it. As for online dating, after openly putting a picture of himself in the wheelchair, Mr. Trollope did not have very positive responses. This prompted him to add a message to his profile description stating that "Yes I'm in a wheelchair, yes I've dealt with it, message me if you're interested." Despite this, online conversations did not lead him to an actual date. He said that, at one point, he even visited another website where he invited women over to his house telling them he was on “bed rest”, as he was in bed with a pressure sore for a period of four entire months. He said that it takes trust to invite a complete stranger to your house, but commented that, after one of such visits, “We've ended up having a take-away, a chat and I've asked them to go down and get a bottle of wine out of my fridge.” (Rose and Hawkins). As for the awkward questions he and other people with disabilities often get about sex, Trollope says that “there's a lot more to having sex than penetration. It's more about making love than the actual sex part of it.” As a disabled person myself, I often wish more people realized that.

The second example, a woman named Jennie Williams, has degenerative hearing loss, prompting her to wear two hearing aid devices. She says there are actually advantages to dating someone who is hard-of-hearing, such as the fact that you get tickets to places for extremely low prices, and the fact that many people with hearing impairments are able to lip-read conversations from quite afar. Of course, there are the annoying comments people make about her condition. For example, due to hearing illnesses being often associated with elderly people, some of those Jennie meets often make ignorant comments such as “Oh yeah, my nan wears a hearing aid, we shout at her." (Rose and Hawkins). There are also inconveniences like hearing aid sets giving out what Ms. Williams calls a “feedback whistle” when the two partners are “snogging”. Ms. Williams even recalls an incident when her two hearing devices fell off, and her dog literally swallowed one of them. But even that was not the most disturbing thing Ms. Williams had experienced. After a while of communicating with a man on a dating site, she went out to meet him on the South Bank in her native city of London. After some time of chatting and having a drink, Ms. Williams decided to put on her lip gloss, which caused both of her hearing aids to fall out. Her date, a detective who she calls “Gov”, got curious, and asked her what she needed the devices for. When she explained the reason, he asked her: "Why do deaf people do 'this'?" According to Ms. Williams, “He then put on the offensive act of waving hands in the air, scrunching his face, putting tongue in lower lip and making groaning sounds.” (Rose and Hawkins). If there is a person on this Earth who would be so ignorant about a condition that is not directly visible in a person, it is terrifying to imagine what he could have said to a wheelchair user. As a comment on this ignorant and offensive behavior, Ms. Jennie Williams said: “I thought about throwing my drink in his face but it would have been a waste, so I explained about British Sign Language and the importance of the culture behind it. I don't think he got it all but he was embarrassed and didn't know what to say.” The date ended with “Gov” inviting Jennie for a motorbike ride around the city and offering to buy her dinner. As a conclusion, Jennie admitted that “I am very shallow.” As of today, Ms. Jennie Williams is engaged, and runs *The Love Lounge*, a radio program offering dating, relationship, and sex advice for the disabled community.

In the New York Times article *Dating With a Disability*, author Wendy Lu shares the story of Tabitha Estrellado, a 32-year old woman with muscular dystrophy, a condition where the body is non-responsive to commands given by the brain. Since dating and relationships involve a lot of meaningful gestures, Ms. Estrellado’s illness makes it much complicated for her. She has even said that “If I ever saw the pope, I would ask him to pray that I find love,”. (Wu). According to Dr. Margaret Nosek, director of the Center for Research on Women with Disabilities at Baylor College of Medicine, people with disabilities begin to date much later in their lives, and have a marriage rate much lower than able bodied persons. Philip Cohen, a University of Maryland College Park sociologist, claims that while the first-marriage rate for able-bodied people of ages 18 to 49 is 48.9 in 1,000, it is just 24.4 for people with disabilities. All of this happens despite disabled women being no different in their desires than any everyday person. They like going out and participate in today’s “hookup culture”. However, the difference is that, according to studies, young disabled people experience relationship abuse much more often, and report that abuse much less. In fact, studies show that the amount of abuse is corresponsive with the severity of a woman’s disability. The more serious her conditions are, the more abuse comes their way. Headed by Dr. Nosek in 1992, the National Study of Women With Physical Disabilities discovered among its participants experience in such forms of harassment as when “a person might take the victim’s wheelchair to isolate her. Emotional abuse might involve ridicule or mockery of her body or her disability.” (Lu).

To finally satisfy her need of having someone who cared about her romantically, Ms. Estrellado spent entire months on Tinder, only to find men who wanted sex, but nothing more. Throughout the week, Ms. Estrellado’s six personal aids alter between day and night shifts. That means that even when she secretly hooked up with the men she met through the web, it was extremely difficult. And despite these meetings happening in secret, the truth had to come out when one of her “partners” accidentally dropped her as they were heading for the bedroom. As a result, she was severely injured. While one of her friends was disappointed that she let people use her as a pleasure object, her parents took it in a completely different way. As Ms. Estrellado said, “My mom was happy that I tried to have sex,” (Lu). But the phrase that perhaps shows best to what level of despair disabled people can be driven by this worldwide ignorance is this: “I just wanted to feel something, I only did it because I realized a guy could actually like me in that way. In the hookup world, men don’t care about wheelchairs.” (Lu). This was Ms. Estrellado’s comment after 3 months of recovery, and of wondering if she would ever find love.

In the same article, Lu tells the story of another woman, 28 year-old Ally Bruener, a stand-up comedian with congenital muscular dystrophy, living in Alexandria, Kentucky. According to the author, “Her [Ms. Bruener’s] hope is to break down the misconception that people with disabilities should be treated like children or nonsexual beings.” (Lu). Explaining her point, Ms. Bruener states that, “I still have all the same desires for the future as any other woman my age,”. While performing one of her shows, Ms. Bruener received a very peculiar comment from a woman. Approaching her, the woman stated what she apparently thought was a compliment, “I think it’s great that you joke about sex, like you actually know what you’re talking about.” *Actually?* Yes, Ms. Bruener *actually* knows what she’s talking about. Having been on many dating websites, she is currently talking to several men, and isn’t at all shy about her sexuality. Her boyfriend Noah seems to be a person who is finally genuinely interested in her, unlike her first boyfriend, who found her physically unattractive.

The final person described in the article, 24-year-old Emilie McCauley, has muscular dystrophy as well. However, its level of severity does not require her to use a wheelchair, and the condition is not visible right away. However, a certain level of vulnerability still exists within her when dating. Ms. McCauley met a man through a mutual friend, and exchanged numbers with him. After a period of texting every day, the two entered a romantic relationship. However, the romance did not last long, as the man soon began displaying sexual violence, and “I got into a position where leaving the relationship was extremely difficult and scary,” (Lu). After finally breaking up, Ms. McCauley found a very supportive man who “He wanted to learn about muscular dystrophy and how Ms. McCauley’s other health conditions affected her body, and offered emotional support.” He was also Ms. McCauley’s friend of 10 years, and they often talked about marriage, along with subsequent family life. But then, after more than a year of dating, her boyfriend became overwhelmed with hospital visits and caretaking, decided to break up. According to Dr. Michael Miller, a Cooperstown, New York neurologist, explains that major problems can occur in a relationship when a partner has limited mobility, because “Sometimes, the caretaker resents the fact that they have to do the caretaking,”. When breaking up, Ms. Miller’s partner said that the care needed for her disability was simply too much for him. The Greensville, North Carolina woman said that “He felt like he couldn’t take care of me like he needed to,”. As of now, McCauley has no interest in dating, and rather enjoys to take care of Cassie, her Labrador. For her, Cassie and her family are just the kind of love she needs. She admits that, ““After thinking we were going to spend the rest of our lives together, it makes it hard to want to be with somebody else,”. It can therefore be seen that, if anything, the mishaps in her life seem to have made her stronger and more independent.

But while people with physical disabilities often have a lot of difficulty playing the dating game, we must not forget about those with learning disabilities. In the BBC News article *The Dating World of Disabled People*, the author mentions *The Undateables*, a Channel 4 TV series that tackles the relationship problems of people with special needs. It features a dating agency named Stars in the Sky, that helps disabled persons get together. This includes people with learning disabilities, who are often “forced into sharing relationships with people who they don't have a choice about being with,", as said by caretaker Lydia Jones. That is because "Their peers are the ones they meet at a day service or in supported living accommodation." One of the participants, model Shannon Murray, participated in a publicity campaign for Debenhams. With regard to physical ability, she comments: "I keep a shortlist of restaurants and bars on my Blackberry which don't just have accessible loos but also have completely flat entrances. On a first date I am worried that guys come to the table believing I'm needy or not independent. I need to be completely in control." (*The Dating World of Disabled People* ).That is because she refuses to let herself be disappointed by a person who quietly rejects her before they even begin their date.

While disabled people date both disabled and non-disabled, it should come at no surprise after reading this article that the latter category of partners can express extremely negative attitudes on such dates. A 38-year old woman named Lisa Jenkins was set up to date an acquaintance who was unaware of her cerebral palsy. She describes that, “We entered a bar and he walked straight down the steps in front of us. I tried to walk down but I just couldn't, there was no rail to hold onto." Her date became concerned, asking her if everything was okay. When she explained her condition to him, "I could see the change in his face; he was immediately less attracted to me. It was quite interesting really.” (*The Dating World of Disabled People).* Yes, I realize it myself that dating someone with physical impairments is hard. Sometimes I even wonder if I could provide the care my partner needed if they were disabled. Sometimes I wonder if I have a right to be disappointed with some people. I believe a relationship starts getting unhealthy when a partner is mentally and physically exhausted from being in it. But I believe there is a solution. Ask questions. Prepare yourself. Respectfully talk to your partner about it once you feel the time is right. Read up on the condition to learn how you can help your partner without burning yourself out. Even ask physicians for advice! Whatever you do, it will be much better than to “chicken out” in the middle of a first date. But unfortunately, some people keep it all to themselves, and that results can be extremely disappointing. Ms. Jenkins comments that "I've had guys who fancied me but thought there was something wrong with fancying me. You're supposed to fancy the birds who are 5ft 9in and blonde, after all." In my humble opinion, which feel like I’ve expressed too many times, these individuals have a terrible syndrome that, unfortunately, is so common today: dependence on social standards. Let us imagine for a moment that a guy starts liking an overweight girl. The guy himself is pretty slim-bodied, so his friends, and even his parents, are wondering if he’s hit his head on a traffic pole or something. First mom and dad, then all his aunts and cousins start explaining to him how he “deserves better”. Then his crew starts to make fun of him by saying that he “likes ‘em plus-size”. Then there’s his sister Jenny who tries to hook him up with this friend or that. What should the boy do?

Option A: Forget about his crush, listen to society, and start courting the next slim girl he sees.

Option B: Explain to his friends and family that beauty and love goes beyond the body, and ask his crush to dinner, sacrificing social position for affection.

If I were him, I would pick the second option. And not because I support some charity organization that helps overweight people to find dates, or because I like to do favors to people who are discriminated by society. Nope. It’s because life has taught me that beauty standards are subjective. If this imaginary boy’s friends and family were so worried about him starting a relationship with someone who is obese, they wouldn’t know a very important detail: in Ancient Greece and other cultures, a full, well nurtured body was the greatest symbol of beauty. Ancient Greek paintings and murals depict women with large bellies and puffed up cheeks. Having huge hips and thick legs, these women would have been labeled “overweight” in modern society, while back then, they were the supermodels of the age. And of their reply to that information would be something like “Well, that was like five thousand years ago! People like other stuff now!”, it would once more demonstrate how much they rely on what society tells them. I brought the example of the overweight lady not because I consider obesity to be a disability, but because, while society may label disabled and overweight people as “repulsive” or “abnormal”, we all need to be able to think as individuals.

Coming back to Ms. Jenkins, she confesses to have received even more bizarre responses from potential dates. She recalls one of them telling her that "I've always fancied some kinky sex." She was immediately annoyed and disappointed, as this one phrase meant that "He considered me slightly freaky,". When she was a teenager, she claims that boys she met would buy her a refreshment, and then, all of a sudden, asked the completely raw question of "Can you still have sex?’” After 20 years of living with a disability, Lisa Jenkins has realized that a lot of people have sex as the main goal in their mind when looking for a date, and to this day, she is sometimes extremely surprised by the questions people ask her on dating sites. However, it is worth mentioning that a 2008 Observer poll discovered that 70% of its participants would not have sexual intercourse with a disabled person.

If you are a person with special needs reading this, do not be desperate. Even though I have never dated someone, I have realized that I am not hopeless. And neither are you, my friend. Many dating websites, such as eHarmony and Match.com are now offering dating advice for the disabled, and many tips can also be found on the web, or by seeking help from family. Don’t ever be afraid to ask, and, for the sweet love of God, don’t isolate yourself. There used to be a time when I would try to impress, imagining myself with a crowd of women after becoming rich and famous. But after a few years I realized this: If a partner likes you for your money, they are a waste of time and emotions. If a partner pressures you to change and be “worthy” of them, letting you cry while they hang out with the “hot ones”, *they* are not worthy of *you*. If they cannot accept you as you are, they don’t deserve you. Because every individual has gifts. Gifts that make them amazing as they are. So be happy, and know that *you* choose who you want to be with. Not the other way around. And until you’ve found someone who cares about you almost as much as your mama does…Well, let me tell you something: It probably ain’t love, honey!

Works Cited:

Begum, Parin. "'Dating is More Difficult when You Have a Disability' Says Ex-Paralympian Myles Pearson." Lancashire Evening Post, 14 Feb. 2020, [www.lep.co.uk/health/dating-more-difficult-when-you-have-disability-says-ex-paralympian-myles-pearson-1567354](http://www.lep.co.uk/health/dating-more-difficult-when-you-have-disability-says-ex-paralympian-myles-pearson-1567354).

"Desexualising Disability." This Ain't Livin', 4 Feb. 2014, meloukhia.net/2014/05/desexualising\_disability/.

Claire, Marie. "8 Things You Only Know About Dating if You Have a Disability." Marie Claire, 17 Dec. 2018, [www.marieclaire.co.uk/life/sex-and-relationships/dating-with-disability-486397](http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/life/sex-and-relationships/dating-with-disability-486397).

Damon Rose and Kathleen Hawkins. "The Awkwardness of Dating when Disabled." BBC News, 13 Feb. 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/blogs-ouch-31421248](http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-ouch-31421248).

"Dating With a Disability." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia, 8 Dec. 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/12/08/well/family/dating-with-a-disability.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/08/well/family/dating-with-a-disability.html).

"The Dating World of Disabled People." BBC News, 3 Apr. 2012, [www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17584953](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17584953).