

Disclosure of Queerness and Disability Identities: A Systematic Literature Review

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Objective:

The objective of the current study is to review recently published literature with a focus on the coming out experience of individuals with disabilities, and identify key factors impacting their decision to engage in or avoid disclosure of either their sexual orientation, gender identity, or both.

Methods:

A systematic literature review was conducted across the PsychINFO database using terms related to sexual and gender minorities, self-disclosure, and disabilities. Potential articles were limited to peer-reviewed articles, written in English, and published between 2000 and 2021. Articles with a focus on self-disclosure within the workplace were excluded.

Results:

The articles that met inclusion criteria highlighted four different factors related to disclosure of gender identity or sexual orientation while having a disability: 1) self-disclosure to protect, 2) self-disclosure to educate and support, 3) self-disclosure to foster community belonging, and 4) navigating privilege with different spaces.

Conclusions:

Factors that contributed to disclosing one's identities were related to themes of educating heteronormative or non-disabled people, offering support to those with similar identities, gaining information about biases held by others, fostering a sense of community belonging, and openly exploring salient identities. Factors related to non-disclosure were related to protecting oneself and others from unsafe situations, protecting the feelings of others, and momentarily gaining power and privilege. Future directions would use highlighted factors to construct a semi-structured interview to better understand experiences with disclosure decisions, and representing individuals from more cultural diverse backgrounds and communication disorders.