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Homophobia and Disability: Literature Review

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Summary
We conducted a literature review of 58 studies on homophobia and LGBT disabled people published between 1994 and 2013 that reported a complex and conflictual relationship among different cultures. These are the expression of three social communities: (i) the LGBT community, (ii) the disabled community, and (iii) the mainstream society (mainly identified as the heterosexual and able-bodied community). The condition of exclusion that both disabled and LGBT people endure is rooted in two socially shared myths: compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality. Both of them are the basis of homophobic prejudice. However, in order to neutralize the socio-cultural barriers, responses produced by the two minority communities, i.e., the LGBT and disabled people, are often in conflict with each other making their spaces inhospitable to LGBT disabled people.

Introduction
People with disabilities belong to a socially stigmatized minority group as well as LGBT people. When people have more than one stigma, due to their belonging to more than one minority group, as in the case of LGBT people with disability, they are part of a minority within a minority (BENNETT and COYLE, 2007). In this particular condition the threats they face substantially increase, compromising their self-esteem and psychological well-being (BENNETT et al., 2007; HIGGINS, 2010; MORGAN et al., 2011; SHAKESPEARE, 1999a). One of the most important barriers that LGBT disabled people have to deal with is the homophobic beliefs of their relatives and caregivers (HINRICHS and VACHA-HAASE, 2010; LEBLANC and TULLY, 2001). We have conducted a literature review to investigate homophobia and disability in scientific research. The study moves from an analysis of national (Italian) and international scientific production on the phenomenon of homophobia related to LGBT disabled people.

Methods
Electronic databases (Medline, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES and Google Scholar) were searched on December 2013 for relevant books, chapters, and articles using the terms “homophob*” AND “disab*” in the “all text” field query. Titles and abstracts (where available) were screened to determine eligibility. If there was doubt as to the article’s eligibility, or the abstract was not available, the full-text was retrieved. Products were excluded if: “homophobia” was only incidentally used and they did not refer to the living conditions of LGBT disabled people.

Results
It was found that the term “homophobia” was used in 58 products belonging to the field of disability study. Among them, 5 are books and book chapters (HALDEMAN, 2001; MAIL and LEAR, 2006; MCRUER, 2006a, b; TREMAIN, 1996), 52 are journal papers (ABBOTT and HOWARTH, 2007; BAROUNIS, 2009; BLYTH and CARSON, 2009; BURNS and DAVIES, 2011; CAMBRIDGE, 1999; CORKER, 2001; DUKE, 2011; ELMAN, 2012; ERICKSON, 2007; FRALEY, MONA, and THEODORE, 2007; GRIEVE et al., 2009; GROSSMAN, D’AUGELLI, and DRAGOWSKI, 2007; HAMILTON, 2009; HANJORGIRIS, RATH, and O’NEILL, 2004; HASH and NETTING, 2009; HELLMAN and KLEIN, 2004; HENRY, FUERTH, and FIGLIOZZI, 2010; HELLMAN and KLEIN, 2004; HENRY, FUERTH, and FIGLIOZZI, 2010; HILLINGSBURGER and TOUGH, 2002; HINRICHS et al., 2010; HUNT et al., 2006; JOHNSON et al., 2005; KAVER, 2003; LANGLEY, 2001; LEBLANC et al., 2001; LIPTON, 2004; LUCKSTED, 2004; MCCLELLAND et al., 2012; MORGAN et al., 2011; O’TOOLE, Corbett J. and BROWN, 2002; O’TOOLE, Corbett Joan and DOE, 2002; PARKES, 2006; PEATE, 2008; PERLIN, Michael L, 2013;
The adherance of each of them to the respectively compatible social value: the LGBT community stressing the able (TREMAIN, 1996, 2000). The two communities try to overcome the social prejudices through the hypersexual identities and the disabled person is asexual, then the LGBT disabled person is conceptually impossible sex. In this way, the disabled LGBT has to face the fact of being a living oxymoron: If LGBT identities are caregivers towards LGBT people with disability (ABBOTT et al., 2007; GRIEVE et al., 2009; HINRICHs et al., 2010; PARKES, 2006). The most critical issues concern the lack of adequate training about love and sexuality and a widespread moral condemnation of homosexuality. Because these attitudes are not always present at a conscious level, caregivers often do not explicitly hamper sexual behavior, rather they do not provide proactive support for sexual and emotional needs of LGBT disabled clients. As explored by Stefano Federici (2002) in research on the sexual lives of disabled people in Italian residential centers, those that suffer most are homosexual people with a disability living in institutions. Because of the need to implement training initiatives to mitigate the effects of caregivers’ attitudes, Fabio Meloni and Federici (FEDERICI et al., 2012) developed AmAAbili (Love-Able), the first Italian project of education and training on the issue of disability and sexuality. AmAAbili was a research-intervention project divided into three parts: a data collection phase, an experiential workshop phase and a 20-hour training course. Since 2011, based on the experience of AmAAbili, an annual 24 hours experiential training marathon for caregivers is organized on sexuality and disability.
Conclusions

The scientific literature on homophobic prejudice towards disability is still very limited and mainly of a theoretical nature. There is a lack of experimental investigations on the spread of homophobic prejudice among disable people and anti-disabled prejudice among LGBT people. At the same time, it is urgent that positive action for education and training of social workers and caregivers is implemented so that they can provide support to the sexual and emotional needs of their LGBT disabled clients.

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