

Interview with John

This interview was conducted on March 6, 2022. Names have been changed for privacy. John is a paraplegic from a spinal cord injury and he uses a wheelchair.

What is paraplegia?

Paraplegia is the loss of movement and sensation in both legs and, sometimes, part of the lower abdomen. A paraplegic has paralysis that affects all or part of the trunk, legs and pelvic organs. Paraplegia is almost always the result of damage to the brain, spinal cord, or both.

What is spinal cord injury?

SCI is damage to any part of the spinal cord or nerves at the end of the spinal canal (cauda equina). SCI often causes permanent changes in strength, sensation and other body functions below the site of the injury. Every SCI is different, some people retain sensation in different parts of the body and some people don't. [Learn more at Mayo Clinic](#) or [Living with paraplegia](#).

1. Two questions people google about paralysis are “Can paralyzed people have sex?”, and “Can paralyzed people live a normal life?” With regards to sex and romance, do people tend to make assumptions on what your life is like and what you can and cannot do? How can writers NOT do that? Any thoughts on dialogue to avoid?

John: There seems to be a taboo that disabled people can't have sex or shouldn't have sex or shouldn't want sex. People also assume that a paraplegic is paralyzed from the hips down and that's all there is to it. They assume paralyzed legs = limp noodle dick. The truth is no two paraplegics are the same, everyone is different, just because one paraplegic can do X but not Y doesn't mean the next paraplegic will be the same. If you are writing for a specific person, ask that person if you can. Otherwise, I guess, research research research! Ask questions online.

2. What type of content are you looking for?

John: Listener has paraplegia

3. What would you say to writers who might write scripts that include a person with paralysis? What sort of details should they include to represent an actual person with an SCI? Any specific things to include?

John: Don't be afraid to be specific if the scene calls for it.

Follow-up question: The specifics of what? Sex with a paralyzed man?

John: Anything really, not specifically sex. For example, if they are at a restaurant and there are only booths, maybe he needs to transfer to the booth. Or transfer into and from the car.

4. Any pitfalls to avoid in writing an SCI sex story?

John: There is nothing worse than a script or story where the writer skirts around the disability with kid gloves, almost afraid to mention it.

Follow-up question: Are you saying that the writer should *not* shy away from describing his actions that show us he has a disability? The writer should...embrace it? To make the story realistic for listeners, to think about the little things that he would do (transfers, var, seating) and include lines to acknowledge it? Don't erase him from the story by **not** writing lines about him being disabled?

John: Yes. And there are always lots of transfer videos on YouTube if you don't have anyone to ask. Do a YouTube search for "paraplegic transfer bed" and you will be swamped with videos, like this one: [Youtube video of a paraplegic doing a transfer](#) (from wheelchair to bed, and back).

Follow-up question: You know, now that I know the term "transfer", I have looked for that! Until we met I did not know it had a particular word for it.

5. Would you like to see writers take the initiative and write content for men with paralysis? Or would you prefer that writers wait until the SCI community makes requests?

John: I would love writers to take the initiative. There is room for both of course.

6. Are there any other disability sex aids you recommend?

John: The [Intimate Rider](#) swing chair, here's [a demo video](#) of how it works. I do love to use a vibrating cock ring, but that is not specifically a disability sex aid.

7. Are there any online resources you recommend for learning about SCI or living with it?

John: A not-for-profit support group, "ParaQuad", Paraplegic & Quadriplegic Association of NSW. Other than the general ones you have already mentioned, I think you have it covered. But if they are looking for specific answers to questions? Talking to someone with an SCI is a good thing to do. I think this is where Reddit is ideal, there are many communities that would be

welcoming of honest questions: [/r/Disabledsex](#) and maybe [/r/disablednudes](#). I'm always happy to have members of the GWA Script Guild message me.

Information about sex when you are paralyzed:

- Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, [sex after paralysis \(for men\)](#)
- Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, [sex after paralysis \(for women\)](#)
- Spinalcord.com, [Why you shouldn't discount sex after a spinal cord injury](#)

8. How the story is tagged is how people find the content. It also gives visibility to people in specific communities. What tags would YOU like to see for SCI content?

For example: SCI, paraplegia, wheelchair, disabled listener, interabled relationship?

John: [sci] [paraplegic] [wheelchair] [disabled] [interabled] are the ones I would search for.

9. A lot of the advice about writing for people with disabilities is to ask them what they want. If you have people in your life who are paralyzed, but you write anonymous porn online, you may not be able to ask those people in real life. Is there a good way to approach people online? It seems rude to show up in spaces for people with paralysis...so how can writers "meet" people to ask them what they want?

John: I think some places would be ok to ask in. The first stop might even be to ask in GWA Script Guild, you might be surprised how many people with a disability lurk in these groups.

10. When I am writing, I start thinking about characters. Who are these people and what do they mean to each other? That is how I figure out why they want to have sex. I think of lots of background details that may not make it into the actual story but it helps me see them as real. I think of personality traits, hobbies, jobs, etc. When I write a disabled character, I come up with his character first. He needs to exist in my head as a person before I think about his disability and how it will impact the script.

If you do it backwards, focus on his disability first, and the character second, he doesn't become real to me. If I write him that way he will never become a full character to me and then I cannot write him since I do not understand him. So he always needs to be a character first.

What makes this content difficult is that there are a lot of opinions on what is the best wording.

Many websites and faqs say, "Don't call him disabled, you need to use person-first language. Call him a person with a disability."

And yet, I have read several blogs written by people who are disabled, saying fuck that. I'm disabled. It's not a dirty word. You can say it. So it seems like a small thing, but being uncertain how to even describe a story creates fear it is going to offend people

John: Exactly. It's *not* a dirty word.

Follow-up question: That makes me think, planning and talking about this new story, "I'm writing about a couple who are colleagues. He is disabled," is fine, yet I am aware there is a giant push from places like hospitals and schools to avoid that language. I know not one person can speak for everyone. How you refer to yourself might be very different from the next man I meet with an SCI.

John: That is so very true.

Follow-up: Normalizing it is good, I think? To say, "Hey GWA. I'm writing a story about a hot man. He's disabled." To demonstrate that:

- A) Disabled men exist
- B) They have sex drives like everyone else
- C) Don't desexualize disabled people

John: Those 3 points are the most important. And I think all the PC stuff goes a little too far...wouldn't it be nice if people could just use common sense? I refer to myself as a disabled man or a paraplegic. I would never call myself "a person with a disability," it takes too long to say and it sounds like legal speak.

11. Do you say "para" too or is it always the full word paraplegic?

John: I'm more likely to say para. I guess I can't talk for anyone else but "para" or "quad" is just a common term.