

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND THE EXERCISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE EXERCISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Series “Personal Development and the Exercise of Human Rights” welcomes interdisciplinary works that investigate any aspect of the relationship between personal development and the exercise of human rights, and which may employ a variety of methodological and analytical tools. This Series is inspired by research in the field of neuropsychology, in which men and women are conceived as active agents of themselves and their surrounding environments. Human actions can thus be understood in relation to the degree of coercion or valorisation of individual capabilities; they are produced by the interaction between these capabilities and the system of social action that opposes or favours their deployment, in the elaboration and realisation of each individual life project.

The political climate, the global economic and financial context and the network of international relations together create the life conditions that can favour or limit personal development. This development can be represented as a series of experiences across a number of events that take place in space and time and that can “control” the relationship between the individual and the multiple normative systems which are mediated by the actions of other people and that concern every aspect of human life. Encouraging people to exercise their human rights is fundamental for individual understanding and practice. It protects human dignity, which is affirmed through the possibilities offered to each of us to live our own lives and to work towards the common good.

Gender and Sexuality

Rights, Language and Performativity

edited by
Silvia Antosa

Contributions by
Silvia Antosa
Michela Balocchi
Todd Brower
Maria Chiara Di Gangi
Irene Dioli
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00173 Roma
(06) 93781065

ISBN 978-88-548-4978-5

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1st edition: July 2012

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Silvia Antosa

Introduction

Gender and Sexuality: Rights, Language and Performativity comes out of the fruitful experience of a two-day international, trans-disciplinary conference I organised, together with Elisabetta Di Giovanni, at the University of Palermo in June 2011. Given that discourses of gender and sexuality are intrinsically interdisciplinary and cannot be easily assimilated into a single epistemic and discursive categorisation, the conference aimed at creating an open space of reflection and debate across disciplines for the discussion and development of these theories in the Italian context. It was a prolific moment in which all participants engaged in lively, productive and often inspiring discussions. The selection of papers that I have collected in this volume have been written by established and emerging researchers based both within and outside Italy, and engage critically with two main aspects of the construction of gender and sexuality. The first one is socio-political; it includes both the problem of the recognition of rights for all individuals, especially LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer and intersexual) subjects, and the struggle to combat discrimination, that entails an analysis of and an opposition to homophobic discourses and actions. The second aspect is the cultural dimension, which involves a theoretical and methodological elaboration of discursive strategies and analytical tools that relate or can be applied to gendered and sexed identities. These two spheres of investigation have been addressed by the contributors to this volume using a variety of analytical approaches that are informed by and engage with recent developments in the field of gender and sexuality studies. The

articles gesture towards a number of ongoing questions and tensions, and for this reason, throughout this book each contributor positions him/herself in critical relation to the notions of gender and sexuality by assessing the existing literature in the field and problematising a number of issues regarding the specific topic examined.

The first section of the volume, *Sexual Rights*, draws on theories of gender and sexuality to de-construct (straight, gay, inter and trans) sexual identities as they are articulated in legal and socio-cultural discourses. The articles included in this section take into consideration the ways in which legal, medical and political languages can shape and even modify LGBTIQ modalities of self-expression and representation from a legal as well as a socio-cultural perspective in different national contexts. In his essay (*At the Intersection of Identity and Expression*) Todd Brower explores how two doctrines and judicial decisions transfer power to control LGBT identity and expression from the individual to third parties. The first doctrine he analyses entails that legal standards like “offensiveness” can change lesbian or gay self-expression into different forms of self-representation, and disregard the speaker’s meaning in favor of that of the hearer. In the second set of cases examined by Brower, free speech and expressive association jurisprudence in US constitutional law has been employed to bar queer people from private organizations and societal institutions because their identities have been transformed into speech – speech that the private organization may use as a sword to exclude the individual. In her article, entitled *Sexual and Human Rights of Intersex People: the Sociological Aspects of Medicalization of Intersexuality in Italy*, Michela Balocchi investigates the medical practices applied to intersex children in the Italian context in order to highlight their sociological significance. She carries out an analysis of in-depth interviews she conducted with intersex people, doctors, psychologists and LGBT activists. Her research is one of the first contributions to this under-investigated field, because intersex issues are still commonly understood as pathologies