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# Bodies, relations and desires. Conceptualisations about intimacy from a disabled perspective

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## Résumé

The neoliberal system has the tendency to integrate the difference through a strategy of control (Ahmed, 2012), based on the process of invisibilisation and normalisation of all those considered deviant from the "normalcy". Situated on a specific position in the hierarchy of bodies which rules our society (Young, 1996; Butler, 1993), people with disability are still discriminated and stigmatized. They are generally identified with their impairment and considered only as vulnerable, dependent and passive.

Nevertheless, in our ableist, heteronormative and patriarchal societies the stereotypes and the prejudices related to sexuality and disability are still rooted (Shakespeare et al., 1996). The disabled bodies are generally infantilized, considered neutral gendered and described alternately as asexual or characterized by a dangerous sexual charge. The processes of desexualisation compromise the possibility of access to equal sexual health and reproductive rights, and act on disabled bodies in a plurality of ways involved with the normativity attending the construction of masculinity and femininity. In the case of women with disability, the discrimination and the processes of desexualisation are related to the fact that they live at the intersection of a double experience of oppression: as women they suffer the violence of symbolic and social sexism; as disabled they are excluded by the privilege related to the able-bodiedness (Santos and Santos, 2018). Their intimate life is affected in a peculiar way, depending on the expectation, the stereotypes and the standards the society correlates to their bodies and their gender roles (Garland-Thompson, 2002; Shildrick, 2013).

The contribute is based on my PhD research work, focused on the investigation of the mechanisms of socialization and embodiment of the sexual, gendered and ableist norms. At the same time, the aim is to analyse the social and institutional expectations through the investigation of the practices of access/management/care of the sexual and reproductive health of women with disabilities.

Grounded on the theoretical contribution of feminist disability studies in dialogue with critical disability studies and crip studies, the topic is explored by an intersectional and gendered approach based on an empirical qualitative work I am conducting in Italy with women with physical and/or sensorial disability, both congenital and acquired. Through in-deep interviews, I am collecting self-narratives about the experiences, the meanings, the practices and the beliefs that women with disabilities refer to the dimensions of body, sexual health, affectivity, desire, relationships and sexuality.

The topic, not much explored in Italy, is examined with the purpose to contribute to the

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existing investigations on disability and sexuality, focusing on the specific aspects of the experience narrated by women with disabilities. Indeed, as feminist researchers with disabilities have suggested, the personal experience of disability is far to be a gender-neutral fact.

In my proposal I will examine the effects that the processes of desexualization have in the construction of the individuality from the perspective of the subjects involved in the research, aiming to find, possibly, strategies of negotiations and re-conceptualization of the notions of intimacy, sexuality and dis/ability.