

Accompany, educate, liberate. A pedagogical study on sexual assistance for people with disabilities



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**Questioning contemporary societies
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Introduction



People with disability and Sexuality: open question





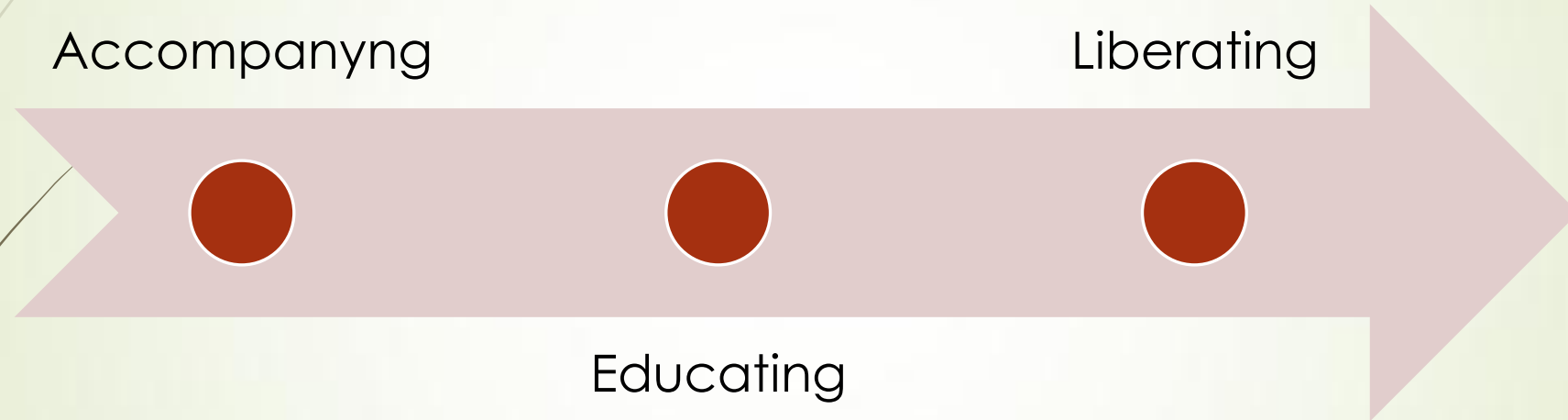
Cultural and personal barriers that have prevented people with disabilities from fully exercising their sexuality:

- ▶ 1. Delay or lack of socialisation of their emotional and sexual experiences;
- ▶ 2. Segregation in special areas for persons with disabilities, in out-of-the-way routes and locations;
- ▶ 3. Lack of sex education;
- ▶ 4. Physical barriers to spaces and information;
- ▶ 5. Difficulty in expressing their sexuality due to excessive protection from associations, centres and families;
- ▶ 6. A lack of information about sexual assistance (Shakespeare, 1996)

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- **In search... of cultural and operational strategies able to respond to the sexual need of people living in conditions of disability (scientific studies from the late Seventies)**



One of possible strategies: Inclusive educational project





Aim, methods and sources of the research:

- Rethinking physical and sexual education for people with disability

Our discussion will therefore seek to develop an idea of sex education for people with disabilities as the final outcome of theoretical pedagogical approach that has attempted to reflect on three levels (closely intertwined):

1. Socio-cultural perspective;
2. Political perspective;
3. Pedagogical perspective

focusing

on the debate in recent years in Italy (as in other European countries)
regarding the role of sexual assistants for the disabled

- ▶ The sexual assistants for the disabled seems to us to be a topic that cuts across the three levels:
 - possible challenge of social and cultural prejudices;
 - political legitimisation of a role and a right;
 - educator, companion or sex worker?






This role will be analysed (sources) by examining:

- ▶ the training programme devised by the Lovegiver Association (a committee for the promotion of sexual assistance, founded in 01/28/2013 and chaired by Maximiliano Ulivieri),
- ▶ the selection criteria for aspiring sexual assistants, the courses (unfortunately not yet started, which has made direct analysis of the profiles of the candidates impossible),
- ▶ the bill presented to the Italian Senate in April 2014, entitled Provisions on Assisted Sexuality for People with Disabilities.

Focussing on this role allows us to envisage a broad concept of sex education, from which it cannot be excluded, according to the features it is assuming in Italy, with strongly educational characteristics and implications.



Socio-cultural perspective

- ▶ From Medical model of disabilities: sexuality is non-issue (a non-existent fact, as the focus should be on care of the deficit and adaptation of the person to the social context)
- ▶ To Social Model: sexuality becomes something to be “listened to” and “exercised”  Sexuality should be viewed as the prerogative of each individual, of each particular man or woman, and as the expression of how they experience their bodies, emotions and pleasures, without referring to an abstract reality, but blending it with a series of relational, affective and empathic situations.
- ▶ This sexuality is expressed in two directions, one regarding relationships, the desire to meet and exchange (components of eroticism, corporeality and pleasure), and the other regarding the free expression of ourselves, our own uniqueness and identity. These dimensions are built up through experience and education... if they are permitted, that is!



Political perspective

- ▶ Sexual rights are now considered as human rights, and their violation is a violation of the rights to equality, non-discrimination, dignity and health:

Italian Constitution recognizes and guarantees the inviolable human rights (Article 2)

Decision no. 561 of 1987, the Constitutional Court stated that “as sexuality is one of the essential forms of expression of the human person”


UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006): sexual health

Bill no. 1442 (April, 2014) “Provisions on Assisted Sexuality for People with Disabilities” → “sexual assistance”

Sexual Assistant: an Italian model (between health and education)



- ▶ The movement started, in an organized manner (before individual initiatives), as we mentioned above, by Maximiliano Ulivieri, who in 2013 formed a Committee to promote this legislative initiative which highlights a particular aspect of the issue: the necessary support for the sexual dimension of people with disabilities through a service that provides emotional, affective, bodily and sexual assistance.
- ▶ Definition: sexual assistants as wellness operators that are to facilitate the healthy sexuality and psycho-physical well-being of people with disabilities. These operators, after completing a psychological, sexological and medical training course, should be able to help people with physical-motor and/or psychic/cognitive disabilities to enjoy an erotic, sensual or sexual experience and more effectively channel their internal energies, which are often discharged dysfunctionally in feelings of anger and aggression.



The bill «Provisions on Assisted Sexuality for People with Disabilities” (2014)

- ▶ is composed of a single provision
- ▶ places this role under the aegis of the Ministry of Health
- ▶ Establishes that each region will have to compile a list of professionals trained specifically to carry out this work, which can be a self-employed activity or can be exercised in a cooperative form, but may not form the basis of an employment contract or be put out to tender.
- ▶ To become a sexual assistant, a person must be of legal age, have completed compulsory education, be psychologically and physically qualified (certified by the Local Health Department), subscribe to a code of ethics and have completed the required procedures.
- ▶ Each region can provide training courses and monitor the work progress of the sexual assistants.
 - ▶ The sexual assistant, finally, must help people with disabilities to have a sexual experience but who are also able to perform a role of **sexual and affective education** (he/she assist and support people with disabilities to recognise, experience and exercise eroticism and sexuality).

- The meetings between the person with disability and the professional assistant (lovegiver) can vary from 5 to 10 sessions and include educational and rehabilitative training in a continuum that ranges from informative, theoretical and practical aspects of affectivity to bodiliness, sexuality experienced through contact and the use of massage techniques, the suggestion and experience of the sensory excitement of masturbation, and the promotion of education in orgasmic pleasure. Unlike in the countries of northern Europe, and particularly to distinguish sexual assistants from prostitutes, coital sexual experiences, such as penetration, and oral-type experiences are not envisaged (Quattrini, 2014).





Accompany not Isolate

- ▶ Sexual assistance is seen as an experience of evolutionary growth necessary for the person with disability who requests it. It is organised as an educational process in which the assistant is entrusted with a role of accompaniment to the disabled person towards the discovery of their own bodies, affectivity and an intimacy they are so often denied. In this process, the sexual assistant does not seek to create moments of segregation or isolation, but to be, we could say, a coach that trains the person for future meetings or relationships and helps them choose to embrace the precious and vital need of their sexuality.
- ▶ This educational connotation of the sexual assistant is the result of inclusive culture Italian who chose the way of communion in education



Training Course (Quattrini, Olivieri, 2014)

- ▶ 200 hours of training
- ▶ The theoretical aspects will focus on the study of disability from a medical, functional, psychological and relational perspective; assertive communication, active listening, emotions, empathy, and affective, bodily and sexual education
- ▶ The experiential part will allow the applicants to question their own convictions. Two sexual assistants from northern Europe will present their own experience and also allow techniques and theories to be tried out
- ▶ 50 and 100 hours of internship will be carried out in associations and cooperatives participating in the project
- ▶ monitoring activities will be conducted during the first year of the work



Prospective lovegiver and Selection Criteria

- ▶ CVs
- ▶ Motivational letter
- ▶ Clinical interview : - Sexual Disability Questionnaire (Quattrini, Dell'Oste) and assessed with the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (Mehrabian, 1996), the Emotional Fragility Scale (Caprara et al, 1991) and the Aggressive Behaviour Indicators (Caprara et al, 1991).
- ▶ They were also assessed with an Emotive-corporeal perception tool (Quattrini), helpful for examining personal arousal dynamics and the exclusion of any erotic attraction towards disability (devotism).



No prostitution: the importance of training

- ▶ The sexual assistant accompanies the disabled person in an **educational process** that allows intimate bodily knowledge, helping to promote a co-constructive process of pleasure and sexual well-being in three phases: acceptance (interaction and confidence), listening and contact. The individuals are taught how to do it for themselves, where possible.

The aim of each process of accompaniment is precisely to let go and liberate.

- ▶ It's important to train:
- ▶ Health workers and educators
- ▶ Sexual assistant
- ▶ Sex workers
- ▶ Families (in direction of information and culture, with Conference open to all)

Pedagogical perspective



- Sexual education: as a process of support and liberation
- Liberation of sexual urges and Liberation from barriers and prejudices
- Accompaniment process in the etymological and pedagogical sense of *eo* ("go") *cum* ("with"), to go with, referring to the closeness between two people in a shared journey towards a common goal. To accompany in an asymmetrical relationship, which tends to reduce the distance, never substituting the other person, never acting in their place, but pointing out the tools for proceeding unaided.
- The goal is independence and autonomy as far as possible



Inclusive educational project

- Each educative figure is involved in this process, in differently way, in different fields and times of life, for the same goal.



- All are partakers of an inclusive educational project, open to all, not just for people with disability, because sexuality is relation, mutual change.
- Guiding principle: I know my body, I listen to it and I satisfy it... while respecting myself and others. I am ready for sex...





Sexual Education means:

- ▶ understand the messages of your body and that of others (from an early age, at school and in the family)
- ▶ living one's body, with the help (if necessary) as free choice:

Need for sexual education which moves in its dimensions:

trasmission and **trasformation**

The transmission of content, information and strategies to help people with disabilities acquire a whole series of concepts inherent to the subject of sexuality (from an affective, sentimental and relational perspective as well as a biological one).

The transformation of this content should enable greater self-expression and the search for personal solutions, rather than being passive recipients or victims of other people's choices.



- ▶ At the initial stage, it will be the task of parents, teachers and educators to introduce people to these topics, including them, even in relation to other matters, in their own messages, teaching and educational activity, both in terms of information and of tools, exercises and contact, knowledge of self and one's body. The discovery of sexuality should also be encouraged in a personal way, without constraints and fears, which only suppress the capacity of being able to relate with others. This activity should not be restricted to disabled people, but carried out with everyone, because sexuality, as an encounter, requires the presence of everyone, regardless of their health conditions.

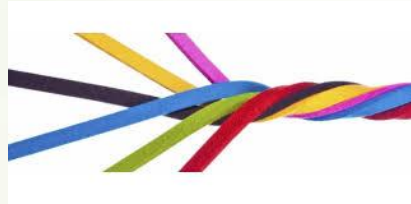
- ▶ A later stage, it will be the task of individuals specifically trained as sexual educators or assistants to continue to accompany people with difficulties in this process of growth and emotional, affective and bodily experience.



Brief conclusion



- An inclusive educational project thus brings to light a broad scheme involving families, schools, centres and sexual assistants, who work together, each respecting the others' roles, towards the full development and full participation of the disabled person in everyday life with others: listening, welcoming, informing, accompanying and liberating!
- It is an educational activity intentionally aimed at making each person and their life journey unique.



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