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Limiting Selves

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In nursing and pastoral education, notions of the “normal” dominate frameworks for teaching students and practitioners to draw conclusions about the sexual self of persons in their care, in order to plan “appropriate” care. The parameters of the “normal” sexual self may be based in natural law principles of gender and sexuality, or in multifactorial psycho-biological theories of gender and sexual orientation. Regardless of the basis, the category of “normal” delineates a static and immutable view of the sexual self that is problematic in health and pastoral care. This paper will draw on the works of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Judith Halberstam and Marcella Althaus-Reid in contemporary gender theories, queer theories and related theological anthropologies in order to: 1) outline the problems of sexual normativity for nursing and pastoral education and practice; and 2) propose pedagogical commitments and approaches that recognise e-fluidity, multiplicities and potential for evolution in sexual and gender self-understandings. This paper is intended to foster the creation of pedagogical spaces that encourage human flourishing and challenge restrictive and limiting notions of normalcy in relation to sex and gender.

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