



Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies (Studies in Feminist Philosophy)

Cressida J. Heyes

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Heyes monograph in feminist philosophy is on the connection between the idea of normalization--which per Foucault is a mode or force of control that homogenizes a population--and the gendered body. Drawing on Foucault and Wittgenstein, she argues that the predominant picture of the self--a picture that presupposes an inner core of the self that is expressed, accurately or not, by the outer body--obscures the connection between contemporary discourses and practices of self-transformation and the forces of normalization. In other words, pictures of the self can hold us captive when they are being read from the outer self--the body--rather than the inner self, and we can express our inner self by working on our outer body to conform. Articulating this idea with a mix of the theoretical and the practical, she looks at case studies involving transgender people, weight-loss dieting, and cosmetic surgery. Her concluding chapters look at the difficult issue of how to distinguish non-normalizing practices of the self from normalizing ones, and makes suggestions about how feminists might conceive of subjects as embodied and enmeshed in power relations yet also capable of self-transformation. The subject of normalization and its relationship to sex/gender is a major one in feminist theory; Heyes book is unique in her masterful use of Foucault; its clarity, and its sophisticated mix of the theoretical and the anecdotal. It will appeal to feminist philosophers and theorists.

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