

## The shaping of masculinity:

### Revisioning boys turning away from their mothers to construct male gender identity

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(Final version accepted 9 June 2003)

*This paper offers an understanding of the nature of the internalization processes involved in the shaping of male gender identity founded on the boy's unique struggles in separating from his mother. The underpinning for the initial development of a sense of masculinity is reconsidered as the author questions the widely held idea of Greenson and Stoller that a boy normatively has to 'dis-identify' from his mother to create his gender identity. Import rather is placed on the conscious and unconscious aspects of the mother's (and father's) pre-oedipal and oedipal relationship with their little boy in order better to understand the nature of the boy's unique identifications and subsequent sense of masculinity. Both the security of the boy's attachment to his mother, in providing the foundation for a transitional turning to an 'other', and the mother's capacity to reflect upon and recognize her own, as well as the father's and her son's, subjectivity and maleness, are crucial in comprehending boys' 'attachment-individuation' process. Likewise, the unconscious paternal and maternal imagos and identifications of both the boy's mother and father, as well as the father's pre-oedipal relationship with his little boy and the boy's mother, are extremely significant in shaping a son's gender identity. The author argues that these early maternal (and paternal) identifications live on in every male and continue to impact the sense of maleness in a dialectical interplay throughout the life span. A maturing gender identity develops from integrating these early, pre-oedipal maternal identifications that no longer need be repudiated nor defensively organized as polarized gender splitting.*

**Keywords:** masculinity, boy–mother relationship, male gender identity, pre-oedipal gender identifications, internalization, identification, disidentification, attachment-individuation, separation-individuation, reflective functioning, phallic and genital ego ideals, phallic narcissism

This paper reconceptualizes the nature of the internalization processes involved in the shaping of a boy's gender identity as it is founded on his unique struggles in separating from his mother. As Fast (1999) notes, current psychoanalytic conceptions of men's gender development rely on a normative model initially espoused by Greenson (1968) and Stoller (1964, 1965, 1968). This model argues that, in infancy, boys develop in a feminine direction as a result of their 'primitive, symbiotic identification with a mothering person' (Greenson, 1968, p. 372) and thus, by age 2, boys have established a *primary femininity*. In order to achieve a masculine gender identity, boys must subsequently *disidentify* with their mothers and *counteridentify* with their fathers. Moreover, this

premise rests on the notion that such disidentification, or repudiation of feminine identifications, *must* occur if the boy is to achieve a secure sense of his masculinity. In fact, Greenson propounds that the success of the boy's ensuing identification with his father is determined by his 'ability to disidentify' (1968, p. 370).

Many contemporary analysts consider theoretically and clinically problematic the forceful splitting propounded by Greenson (1968) termed 'disidentification from the mother' and 'counter-identification with the father' (for example, Fast, 1984, 1990, 1995, 1999, 2001; Benjamin, 1988, 1991, 1996; Pollack, 1995, 1998; Christiansen, 1996; Axelrod, 1997; Diamond, 1998, 2001, 2004; Wilkinson, 2001). Building on Fast's seminal work (1984, 1990, 1999), I wish to add to this dialogue by highlighting the complex pre-oedipal and oedipal internalizations that help each boy create his unique sense of maleness while considering two key issues that those employing Greenson's pre-oedipal theory failed to take adequately into account: first, the desirability and unavoidability of the boy's earliest, pre-oedipal identifications with *both* parents; and second, the *unconscious, intrapsychic* foundation for such internalization, especially as the boy's identification with his mother reflects the recovery of lost or disrupted aspects of a gratifying object relationship.

### **A reconsideration of male gender identity development**

Gender identity development is no longer thought to be a linear, continuous trajectory. As Gabbard and Wilkinson (1996) have discussed, a boy's (and, later, a man's) experience of the ambiguities of his gender are continually being reworked across differing developmental junctions. Consequently, by questioning the notion that boys normatively 'dis-identify' from the mother in order to establish a secure sense of gender identity and expounding upon the formation of the gendered masculine ego ideal, I will examine the underpinnings of male gender identity as boys turn away from their mothers.

#### **Does a boy's moving away from his mother constitute disidentification?**

I have summarized elsewhere the many observational studies and clinical findings (see Diamond, 1998) that have indicated that little boys do tend physically to move away from their mothers and toward their fathers (or surrogates) at a young age (e.g. Abelin, 1975; Mahler et al., 1975; Stoller, 1964, 1968; Gilmore, 1990; see also Freud, 1921). In general, these authors maintain that, unless a boy pulls away in order to differentiate himself from his mother, he will be feminized, and that the father's *active* presence is necessary to bring about the needed maternal disentanglement. It must be asked, however, whether this 'moving away' is a prerequisite for a male's psychological development and, if so, is it necessary, as the term 'disidentification' implies, for a boy to create a mental barrier against his desire to maintain his dependent relationship with his primary source of satisfaction, namely his mother? While agreeing that young boys do turn toward their fathers (and away from their mothers) to establish themselves as 'boys' among males, I offer an alternative explanation. In doing so, I explore both the conceptual and empirical limitations of the disidentification hypothesis, while offering a reconstruction of the early formation of masculine gender identity.

Greenson (1968) employed the term ‘disidentification’ that was introduced by Stoller (1964, 1965, 1968) and later used by both Stoller (1985) and Chodorow (1978) to elaborate on the pre-oedipal determinants of cohesive gender identity that were tied to issues of separation from the mother. Greenson’s brief paper is quoted often and, in fact, his trenchant formulation has been taken as a developmental norm. Nonetheless, except for Fast’s (1984, 1990, 1999) incisive commentaries, Greenson’s and Stoller’s claims have received little critical commentary in the mainstream psychoanalytic literature.

### **Disidentification as a pathological process: Masculinity and the early son–mother–father triad**

It is significant that Greenson’s (1968; see also 1966) formulation emerged from his work with Stoller in studying transsexuals (Stoller, 1964, 1965, 1968). To support his thesis, Greenson used a case example of Lance, a ‘transsexual-transvestite five-and-a-half-year-old boy’ (1968, p. 371). Lance’s mother ‘hated and disrespected her husband and men in general’ (p. 371), while his father ‘was absent ... and had little if any pleasurable contact with the boy’ (p. 372). Employing this clinical material, which is clearly reflective of a quite disturbed family system, Greenson generalized that Lance’s ‘problems in disidentifying’ were both developmentally normative and extremely meaningful in understanding ‘realistic gender identity’ formation. This Greenson–Stoller disidentification hypothesis has become the most important clinical application of pre-oedipal theorizing in the treatment of men (Kaftal, 1991; see also Fast, 1999). Subsequently, other analysts have used similar clinical examples entailing pathological triangulation to demonstrate that male gender identity formation is contingent on the boy’s aggressively detaching from his mother to successfully renounce his ‘protogyninity’ (for example, see Johns, 2002, for a typical illustration of an unquestioning acceptance of this assumption).

Axelrod (1997), in concert with Fast’s (1984, 1990, 1995) ideas, maintained that this notion of disidentification from the mother fit only the more problematical cases of early development. In essence, he argued that an arrested or fixated sense of masculinity tends to be grounded in a *pathological* form of early triangulation. Specifically, a dynamic of dis-identification and counteridentification is set in motion by: (a) *mothers* who are severely misattuned to the individuation needs of their young sons; (b) *fathers* who are either weak and unavailable or misogynist themselves; and, (c) by the *child’s* own temperament and drive endowment with respect to ‘merger proneness’.

My hypothesis is that such pathological systems are characteristic of more ‘narcissistic families’ wherein it is problematic for *more than one subjectivity to exist* since either one member’s subjectivity dominates or subjectivity itself is generally poorly recognized (Diamond, 2001). Under these circumstances, a boy’s early gender identity development does take on the quality of a *conflict* or *struggle*, as Greenson suggests, wherein identification with the father becomes more problematic in its essential *opposition to*, or *identification against*, the mother. These little boys tend to extend their father’s contemptuous, devaluing attitudes toward women and frequently evidence a heightened phallic narcissism. Moreover, such defensive masculinity is commonly rooted in a painful loss of dependency and love, and in an intense envy of

his mother that is founded on a painful narcissistic mortification (Chodorow, 1978; Butler, 1995; Lax, 1997; Hansell, 1998).

When this defensively based dis-identification (and counteridentification) occurs, pathological rigidity commonly results. It is evident in the severity of the superego and in the lessened cohesiveness and fluidity of the boy's sense of maleness. Thus, a kind of 'zero sum game' operates where masculinity requires that femininity be relinquished (see also Diamond, 2004). Accordingly, Fast declared for boys it may well be that: "dis-identification" or "repudiation" signals failure in optimum development of masculinity, an organization too exclusively phallic, denying the actual procreative capacity and nurturing possibilities of the man' (1984, p. 73).

In contrast, I propose that in the less pathological, more normative forms of early gender identity development, *progressive differentiation* rather than *opposition* predominates enabling masculine gender identity to be founded upon a reciprocal identification with both an available father or surrogate (Diamond, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2004) and a mother who is able to recognize and affirm her son's maleness (Atkins, 1984; McDougall, 1989; Fast, 1990, 2001; Benjamin, 1996; Beebe et al., 1997; Diamond, 2001, 2004). A '*watchful, protective*' father, typically in conjunction with a *sufficiently 'attuned' mother able to recognize her son's masculinity*, helps to mitigate the severity of what might be potentially traumatizing for the boy who is engaged in the separation-individuation process (Diamond, 1995, 1997, 2004).

As Freud (1921) first observed, and Abelin (1975), Gaddini (1976) and Blos (1984) later elaborated, the father plays an important role in the establishment of his son's core gender identity within the early, *triadic father-mother-child relationship*. Such a father tends to be aligned with a mother who maintains a 'consistent affective relational presence' and who therefore needs neither be repudiated nor renounced (Fast, 1984, 1999, 2001; Bassin, 1996; Elise, 1998). In addition then to providing a conventional focus for masculine identification, an available, pre-oedipal father tempers his little boy's more defensive tendencies to disengage forcefully from a mother who is unable to affirm her son's maleness, in order to organize his gender identity. Instead of an oppositional, 'contra-' or *counteridentification* with the more symbolic father *against the mother*, as Greenson (1968) maintained, the boy who is able to achieve a *reciprocal identification* with an available father (Benjamin, 1988, 1991) is provided with the foundation for a more secure and often more varied gendered expression of the self (see Benjamin, 1988, 1991; Diamond, 1998, 2001).

This affirming, mutual bond with another who is like the self but who remains independent and outside one's control was aptly termed *mutual recognition* by Benjamin (1988). Such mutual recognition is pivotal in a father's facilitation of his son's development beyond the phallic-narcissistic position (Kaftal, 1991; Diamond, 1998, 2004). These active and receptive 'genital' qualities of fathering reflect a more flexible sense of masculinity and function to facilitate the integration of the boy's maternal-feminine identifications (Diamond, 2004). Through internalizing a relationship with an admired man interacting in ways beyond a 'phallic' manner, a 'genital' paternal imago is established which can become a foundation for healthy yet fluid masculine gender identity.

### **Beyond the disidentification hypothesis: Conceptual and empirical challenges**

The widely accepted notion of disidentification has played an important role in clinical psychoanalysis for over three decades. Greenson's elegant contribution (1966, 1968), in collaboration with Stoller's research (1964, 1965, 1968, 1985), has substantially encouraged analysts to go beyond (and before) the ubiquitous Freudian oedipal complex (Freud, 1925) to address the boy's earliest, pre-oedipal determinants of his gender identity.

A careful reading of Greenson's (1968) landmark article indicates that he recognized the crucial import of the boy's original identification with his mother—at the very least in setting the stage for the boy's subsequent identification with his father. In fact, Greenson closes his paper by musing as to what might become of this 'original identification with the mother' (p. 374). Unfortunately, however, Greenson neglected to consider that the boy's turning away from his mother and toward the father was *transitional*, and, in consequence, he did *not* discuss the integrative-synthetic achievement that is required of the developing male in order to employ his early, pre-oedipal identifications. This issue is often obvious in the clinical setting when a boy (or, later, an adolescent or adult male) cuts himself off from such core identifications through disavowal and repudiation. In such cases, we frequently observe symptoms founded on repressive or dissociative mechanisms as well as an overall restriction in masculine development (e.g. Pollack, 1998).

The conceptual foundation for the disidentification hypothesis rests on several questionable formulations. For example, Fast (1999, 2001) has adeptly criticized both the supposition that all boys experience a 'blissful symbiosis' with their mother and the reliance on Mahler et al.'s (1975) concept to argue that the boy's separation from his mother encourages his individuation and achievement of masculinity. I contend further that the undefined concept of identification further confuses the situation and I will comment on the problematic use of this construct.

#### **The foundation for the initial sense of masculinity:**

##### **A review and extension of Fast's challenge to disidentification theory**

Fast (1990, 1995, 1999, 2001) summarized the empirical evidence that directly contradicts the conceptual basis of the 'dis-identification hypothesis' with respect to 'primary femininity', 'blissful mother–infant symbiosis', and the presumed linear relationship between a boy's separation from his mother and the strength of his sense of masculinity. For example, Stern (1985) demonstrated that such 'blissful symbiosis' does *not* occur in normal development nor does it produce anything resembling a 'primary femininity' in 2-year-old boys (Gergely, 1992, 2000). As Kaftal (1991) advanced and Fast (1999) elaborated, the essential problem with the Greenson–Stoller theory is its implication that 'protofemininity' is an innate, inevitable and definitive structure of manhood.

Fast emphasizes real-life interactions between little boys and their mothers and fathers, while pointing toward the *internalizations* that ensue from these interactions, as well as the impact that these interactions have on internal schematas. Fast (1999;

see also 1984, 1990, 2001) proposed that the boy's turning away from his mother toward the so-called 'male world' of his father is a *transitional step* in the context of secure attachment to his mother and father. She argues that a sufficiently secure attachment with the boy's mother must occur for the necessary *transitional* movement *away from* her to ensue, and, furthermore, that such a 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988) enables the little boy to *return to* his mother and, thereby, to re-engage in a cross-sex relationship. In Fast's words, 'when he feels securely a member of the male community, he re-engages his mother, now with a focus on sex-difference issues, himself as boy with his gender-different mother' (1999, p. 657).

I too have observed that the boy's turning away from his mother is *transitional* and that the (*pre-oedipal*) *father's role* in this process is crucial (Diamond, 1995, 1997, 1998). This *transitional* turning or stepping away from the mother helps the boy to *differentiate and separate* from his primary, external object. *However, this is not the same as 'dis-identifying' from his internal, maternal object.* In fact, the early process of separation and the particular experience of loss actually facilitate the boy's internalization of key aspects of his relationship with his mother. The maternal identifications that do occur are founded upon neither symbiosis nor primary femininity. In contrast, these crucial and lasting early identifications evolve from the separation-differentiation process.

It is, therefore, *not* the boy's disavowal of his maternal identifications that is crucial to establishing his masculinity. In fact, I contend that 'dis-identification' is a misnomer and, instead, denial and disavowal of an existing maternal identification are the prevailing defensive operations that attempt to repudiate from consciousness or dismiss early identifications that are typically grounded in more pathological, triangular relations. The underpinning for a boy's achievement of 'healthy' masculinity, instead, is founded upon a secure and involved attachment to both mother and father (or surrogate).

Lyons-Ruth (1991) and other attachment researchers (see Fonagy, 2001) have indeed demonstrated that a boy's individuation is facilitated by the *security* of his attachment to his mother, rather than by his *separation* from her. Drawing upon and extending these and other findings, Fast (1999, 2001) concludes that a boy's secure sense of masculine identity primarily develops from the quality of the boy-to-mother *attachment* (*not* separation). Attachment theorists now refer to this developmental phase as *attachment-individuation* rather than *separation-individuation*.

Without doubt though, as many observations demonstrate, little boys do tend to move away from their mothers and toward their fathers (or surrogates) at a young age (Stoller, 1968; Abelin, 1975; Fast, 1984). Using clinical vignettes, Fast (1995, 1999, 2001) regularly tries to reconstruct the basis for this 'moving away from his mother and strongly toward his father'. To make sense of these findings, Fast (1999, 2001) calls upon a 'relational perspective' that is based in 'attachment theory'. In contrast to Greenson's and Stoller's assumptions, Fast posits that the baby boy's 'internal working models' are gendered from the beginning of life, albeit *not* as a function of some form of symbiotic identification with his mother's 'femaleness and femininity', but, rather, as a result of the *particular interactions* that go on between him and his mother, as well as with his father. The little boy's 'models' are

constructed in interactions with parents who treat him as ‘male’ in relation to their own gendered selves (as ‘female’ or ‘male’). The boy’s task then, in establishing his sense of maleness, is *not* about overcoming profemininity but, rather, *building on the gendered schemes he has been establishing since birth*. In Fast’s words, a little boy must ‘newly articulate (and consolidate) his sense of himself as “boy” in same-gender relationships with his father (and males in general)’ (2001, p. 3), and in other-gender relations with his mother. In essence, Fast persuasively challenges the notion that boys establish their masculine identities only with their fathers, and that the mother’s place in their masculine development is simply to get out of the way.

### **The complexity of the internalization processes in forming the sense of maleness**

In this section, I will briefly consider issues pertaining to internalization left unaddressed in previous commentaries for which our understanding of the early shaping of a boy’s sense of maleness depends. The use of the concept of *identification* per se has been defined vaguely and has to be integrated with recent research on the infant–caregiver relationship which studies the recursive sequences between neurobiological, intrapsychic, and relational processes (Stern, 1985; Schore, 1994; Beebe et al., 1997; Siegel, 1999). Moreover, the mother’s unconscious relationship with her little boy, and, in particular, her capacity to recognize and respond to her small son’s maleness, has been largely overlooked.

*Disidentification* is a perplexing term basically because early identifications are *never* simply removed nor repudiated. Rather, these early ‘maternal’ identifications remain significant in a boy’s psychic structure and, typically, come to play a more active, even conscious, role as he matures (see Diamond, 2004, for an elaboration of this process among adult men at mid-life).

### **The nature of identification and disidentification**

Analysts generally understand *identification* as primarily depicting a process of *internalizing relationships* in order to build psychic structure (see Loewald, 1970; Behrends and Blatt, 1985; Stern, 2002). Identification refers to the most mature level of internalization that is central to the child’s basic identity or ego core (Loewald, 1962), and, as Stern suggests, one’s sense of self evolves mainly from an ‘identification with the other’s response to the self’ (2002, p. 723). Thus, in identifying with his mother, a little boy also ‘identifies with’ and internalizes a core, enduring sense of his mother’s *relating to him as a male person* of the opposite sex (Diamond, 2001, 2004).

In contrast to Greenspan’s vague notion, Laplace and Pontalis define identification as a

... psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified (1973, p. 205).

Identification occurs, moreover, as a consequence of various environmental disruptions and crises of integration. This level of internalization requires the establishment of a sufficiently gratifying, pre-oedipal emotional tie, termed 'primary identification', with another human being.<sup>1</sup> For identification to occur, this gratifying involvement must in some way be disrupted or lost, most typically in the experienced incompatibilities in the mother–infant relationship. The infant or child who experiences such an 'incompatibility' seeks to recover significant aspects of the relationship by means of identificatory processes. Thus, particular functions and experiences of the relationship are internalized and, by becoming a part of one's self, facilitate progressive development. In this way, the internalization of relationship builds psychic structure as '... the child reaches out to take back ... what has been removed from him' (Loewald, 1962, p. 496).

Greenson used the term *disidentification* in order to pinpoint the processes occurring 'in the boy's struggle to free himself from the early symbiotic fusion with mother' (1968, p. 370). His notion of 'identification' thus reflects a primary, stable and enduring form of internalization, which implicitly serves to prevent the small child's experience of separation from mother. It is, however, the very recognition of such separateness that is the crucial issue in differentiating the 'not me' or 'other' from the self. A more precise use of the concept of identification, therefore, would indicate that a boy's experience of separating from his mother, even when the boy consciously turns away from and renounces the world of his mother, actually instigates an *increased need to internalize aspects of this sufficiently gratifying relationship*.

Objects which are relinquished as external, even fantasy objects, are 'set up in the ego' (Loewald, 1962, p. 483). Through the internalization process, renounced external objects (i.e. mothers who the boy may turn away from) become internal objects and, in fact, an internal relationship is substituted for an external one. Attachment research indicates that a child, at any stage of development, can *separate* from familial objects in order to seek new relationship and redefine old ones, *only because* significant aspects of these early familial relationships (i.e. objects) have been internalized (e.g. Behrends and Blatt, 1985; Fonagy, 2001). The internalization processes at work in gender formation are complex, to be sure, but far more is known today than in Greenson's and Stoller's era. In particular, the small boy identifies with, and makes a part of his internal world, many aspects of his relationship to his mother (and father). I propose that, in terms of his masculine gender identity, a boy identifies especially with the sense of his mother relating to him as a male person (of the opposite sex). These identifications remain core aspects of his internal world and significantly affect the formation of his male gender identity.

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<sup>1</sup>Freud (1921) viewed this primal form of emotional tie with the object as stable and enduring. Most analysts agree, however, that the differential uses of the term *internalization* cause considerable confusion. Though beyond the scope of this paper to consider further, the three traditional categories of internalization, namely, *incorporation*, *introjection* and *identification* (both primary and secondary), are insufficient for differentiating the vast gradations in complexity that comprise the processes of internalization at varying levels of development (e.g. Schafer, 1968; Meissner, 1981; Behrends and Blatt, 1985).



So how are we to understand the identifications that are presumably reacted against?

#### **What the little boy identifies with in relation to his mother**

A mother may fail as a developmentally facilitating object of identification due either to her inability to establish a sufficiently gratifying involvement with her son or by being overly gratifying. It may also be that the mother's unconscious limitations in recognizing and sanctioning her boy's maleness as well as her husband's fatherliness, as evident in Greenson's (1968) case of Lance, establish a more pathological maternal identification. Similarly, an absent or unavailable father, or a father who is unable to reciprocally identify with his little boy's foray into the 'male world', will contribute to his boy's more pathological internal organization. It is as a result of these factors that certain boys establish a highly conflictual and poorly cohesive internalization of their mothers and, thus, their nascent sense of maleness is prematurely and excessively disorganized or arrested. Phallic narcissism becomes urgent and frequently 'fixated' for these boys who rely on the phallus then as a defense against the dangers of a still needed (maternal) object who has been internalized in a highly problematic manner (Diamond, 2004).

To restate then, 'dis-identification' is a misnomer and, instead, denial and disavowal are the prevailing defensive operations that attempt to repudiate or dismiss early identifications that typically are grounded in more pathological, triangular relations. The extent to which this process dominates is based substantially on whether a boy's identification with his mother is founded on her ability to recognize and support her son's maleness. Similarly, the mother's unconscious attitudes toward the child's father are crucial in determining the boy's ability to internalize the necessary triangular structure (Atkins, 1984; Herzog, 2001; Target and Fonagy, 2002). Both Wilkinson (2001) and Target and Fonagy (2002) elaborated this by employing the concept of *reflective functioning* which gives prominence to a parent's *specific* mental processes vis á vis his/her child (see Fonagy and Target, 1996). Thus, a small boy's internalization of a secure masculine gender identity is strongly impacted by his mother's ability to perceive and endorse him as a male person, both objectively and subjectively (Ogden, 1989; Wilkinson, 2001). Ogden elaborated the paradox of 'masculinity-in-femininity' in what he called 'the transitional oedipal relationship'. Thus, he noted that it is 'in a relationship with a woman that the boy's male identification and paternal idealization originate' (1989, p. 152). In essence, a boy's elaboration of his masculinity (and triadic object relations) is deficient without a firmly established internal object father in the mother's unconscious. Little boys lacking in this unconscious, intersubjective recognition of their maleness thus compensate by relying on a more defensive, rather than adaptive, phallicity (Diamond, 2001, 2004).

*A securely rooted male identity is largely built upon a boy's identification with his mother's unconscious attitudes toward his maleness* (Fast, 1999, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001; Target and Fonagy, 2002; Diamond, 2004). A growing boy with this foundation need neither rigidly repress nor disavow feminine identifications in order to differentiate himself (and his still nascent male gender identity) from his mother (Dinnerstein, 1976; Chodorow, 1978). Thus, as many writers argue (Loewald, 1962;

Behrends and Blatt, 1985; Fast, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001), what little boys ‘identify with’ in their relationship to their mothers is the sense of the mother’s *relating to him* as a (male) person of the opposite sex. A boy’s sense of his maleness very much includes the internalization of his mommy’s way of relating to him. Moreover, in giving prominence to the importance of a parent’s *specific mental processes* in the son’s internalization of his masculine gender identity, Wilkinson (2001) stresses the significance of the mother’s appreciation of her boy ‘as a mentalizing, desiring, and subjective individual’. It is a mother’s (and father’s) *mental processes* pertaining to both his objectivity and his subjectivity that a boy identifies with (Fonagy and Target, 1996; Wilkinson, 2001; Target and Fonagy, 2002). So-called separation-individuation occurs then, *not because* a child disengages from his internalized family objects, but, rather, such separation (from family objects) can ensue *only because* significant aspects of the boy’s relationship to his ‘maternal object’ have been internalized sufficiently (see Behrends and Blatt, 1985).

When a mother is lacking in *reflective functioning*, the version of himself that the little boy discovers through his mother is tied to more concrete (physical reality) operations which entail defensive strategies that reassure or placate her. In these more pathogenic circumstances, the mother–son attachment is unstable, insecure and thereby compromised. Instead of internalizing a sense of oneself as a sexually mentalizing subject (which Wilkinson terms as *sexual agency*), such a boy’s gender identity is defensively based upon his behavioral activity and physical appearance and, thus, is formulated in accordance with being more of a ‘*sex object*’.

Little boys who are lacking in their mothers’ (and fathers’) inter-subjective recognition tend to defensively rely on more rigid, *sex object identifications* rather than the healthier and more developed *sexual agency identifications* that involve appreciating mental processes (Wilkinson, 2001). Using classical terms, I would add that, for a boy missing his parents’ reflective functioning, *defensive phallicity* or *phallic narcissism* becomes psychically urgent. A *phallic ego ideal* and more severe forms of *gender splitting* are relied upon to manage the uncontained anxieties arising in such a relational matrix. This ‘phallic’ form of repudiating early maternal identifications creates an *unconscious gender ossification* which often becomes manifest later as gender confusion or rigid, defensive certainty. The *phallogentric male* defensively operates as if his *phallus* is all that he has to make him masculine, and, under these conditions, development of the *genital ego ideal*, whereby antithetical intrapsychic elements can be reunited, as for example between *autonomy* and *connection*, is thwarted (Diamond, 2004).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>In studying the subject of evil, Stein (2002, 2003) offered a fascinating and somewhat corresponding construction as to the psychodynamics underlying suicide-killing terrorists’ ecstatic willingness to follow ‘God’s will’. Stein proposes that these ‘errant sons’ regress to fuse with an archaic, cruel and depraved father imago as an ego ideal. This love of a ‘corrupt father’ functions to repudiate ‘femininity’ and to ‘get rid of the impure, “infidel”, soft, feminine “godless” part of themselves’ (2002, p. 415). In this ‘regression to the Father’, God becomes ‘the phallus’ and in this fundamentalist religious submissiveness, the repudiation of any emotional need for women offers a manic sense of liberation from becoming softened and emasculated (Stein, 2003). Thus, the radical fundamentalist group’s fostering of such homoerotic merger and abjection provides the means to manage the more culturally uncontained anxieties otherwise manifest as painful confusion, uncertainty and guilt.

### The formation of male gender identity

In offering a revised understanding of how boys use their initial sense of gender difference from their mothers to construct their sense of masculinity, I pose the question of how are we to understand the shaping and development of the male's sense of gender identity if the individuating boy need *not* fiercely 'dis-identify' from his mother? In other words, how do we understand the formation of male gender identity as young boys *transitionally* separate from the world of their mothers, without simply relying on the umbrella construct of disidentification? Furthermore, since boys indeed do identify with their mothers, how might we understand how identification with mother *contributes* to a boy's sense of masculinity? I have previously advanced an alternative view that provides an inroad into understanding the unique features of masculine development without relying on the questionable construct of disidentification (e.g. Diamond, 2004; see also 1997, 1998). I shall briefly elucidate this conception while underscoring the significance of the specific nature of the boy's identification with his mother's recognition of her son's maleness.

#### The mother–son dyad: Early loss and the striving for narcissistic completion

I contend that the most fertile psychoanalytic conceptualizations of masculinity that address both the conflictual, so-called 'dis-identificatory' aspects, as well as the less oppositional (albeit non-pathological) forms of mother–son internal relationship, stem from an appreciation of the male's *striving for narcissistic completion*. Consequently, the *pre-oedipal* identifications and attachments in the mother–infant dyad as well as in the early, father–child dyad are crucial and often eclipse the *oedipal*, triangular dynamics that Freud (1925) posited and have traditionally been used to account for the male's sense of masculinity. From this *pre-oedipal* perspective, the boy's *ego ideal* helps him to heal what he arguably must experience as an *abrupt, traumatic loss of omnipotence* that results from his initial sense of gender differentiation and separateness from his mother.

The boy's primary schema of connection is developed within attuned mother–son mutuality and provides him with a core sense of narcissistic cohesion. This core will have been internalized in the form of his earliest identification with his mother and, thus, continues to play an active intrapsychic role throughout life. I maintain, nonetheless, that the boy *inevitably* experiences a 'traumatic' sense of loss during this early differentiation phase of separation-individuation, regardless of the intensity and severity of his struggle to separate from his mother (Diamond, 1997, 2004; see also Fast, 1984, 1990; Benjamin, 1988, 1991; Ogden, 1989; Butler, 1995; Pollack, 1995, 1998; Lax, 1997; Hansell, 1998). As Butler (1995) persuasively argued, the basis for the inevitability of this traumatic loss lies in the fact that many of the traits and activities that culturally comprise gender identity can be traced to a process of unresolved mourning for early homoerotic attachments and gender-inconsistent traits. This is frequently manifest as a deep but ungrievable loss with profound consequences.

In comparison with girls, boys are relatively more cognitively and emotionally immature at the time of their initial gender crisis. Thus, there is typically a developmental asymmetry in that the pressure to renounce gender-inconsistent traits is greater for boys

(Chodorow, 1978; Fast, 1984; Hansell, 1998). Boys experience greater prohibitions against early homoerotic attachments and homosexuality than do girls (Hansell, 1998) and, as they mature, considerable inhibition against reexperiencing the early maternal erotic attachment (Wrye and Welles, 1994). In addition, due to heightened shame associated with homoeroticism and 'father hunger' (Herzog, 2001), boys become increasingly inhibited as well around paternal erotic desires. Unlike the girl, a boy is inescapably called upon to safely negotiate a passage through the dangers of this 'traumatic discovery of otherness' (Ogden, 1989) in order to organize his internal and external relations, and thus, to integrate and synthesize his earliest identifications.

There is consensus among psychoanalytic gender theorists that the *gendered nature of the masculine ego ideal* is consequently founded on the boy's distinctive struggles during these initial stages of gender differentiation (Chodorow, 1978; Fast, 1984; Butler, 1995; Hansell, 1998). This struggle requires that the little boy adapt to a significant disruption and loss in relation to his mother. This pre-oedipal disruption has been traditionally cast along more *metapsychological* lines emphasizing *the loss of an ideal state of primary narcissism and unity with the maternal object*. More recently, it has been taken up in *relational* terms (see, for example, Benjamin, 1988, 1991; Pollack, 1995, 1998), stressing a relational rupture that results from *the premature loss and/or repudiation of the small boy's sense of connection with his mother* (in what are termed 'desiring and identificatory attachments'). In either case, the issue essentially concerns the important 'wound' to which the *boy* child must adapt.

The loss of the 'ideal state' of attunement or unity with the maternal object, developed within the mutuality of the early mother-son attachment, becomes particularly disorienting because the boy frequently not only loses a large part of his primary dyadic connection, but also simultaneously is forced to repudiate, renounce or deny what he has lost. The extent to which this disruption is 'premature' for the small boy (with his limited cognitive and affective capacities) depends on the presence of a 'holding', background object, specifically the 'watchful, protective father' (Diamond, 1995, 1997), in addition to the security of the boy's attachment to his mother and the quality of her recognition of his masculinity (Diamond, 2001, 2004; Fast, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001; see also Ogden, 1989). In other words, the young boy feels pressured *to deny* his need for his mother in order to maintain narcissistic cohesion, whereupon shame unconsciously ensues from his unmet, yet intense need for and identification with his maternal object. In general, a boy may feel emotionally abandoned without being aware of it (see Pollack, 1998), while, simultaneously, he is culturally prohibited from knowing or valuing this loss.

This inevitable 'separation' is compounded for the *boy* child because he must recognize that he is *sexually different from* his mother just when he is 'losing' her (Fast, 1984, 1990; Lax, 1997). The boy's concurrent recognition of gender differences (from his mother) compounds the situation. This pre-oedipal loss occurs as the boy realizes that he can neither be the mother nor be of her female gender. Lax (1997) describes this as the boy's 'bedrock trauma'—a narcissistic wound which he experiences when he realizes he is *not* the same as his mother.

In short, the boy's early separation from his mother is frequently 'shattering' and often traumatic because it results both in *an abrupt loss of his omnipotence* (to

be and have all) and in a *prematurely attenuated dyadic connection with his mother*. This painful process, particularly within western cultures, is marked by the fact that very young boys are typically shamed into withdrawing from their mothers more than they naturally desire (Pollack, 1998). Thus, the boy not only loses a large part of his primary dyadic connection and 'ideal' state with his mother, but also simultaneously is forced to repudiate, renounce or deny what he has lost.

In view of the societally enforced separation from the mother-orbit, males seek to repair this narcissistic wounding by seeking to recapture the *lost 'holding' connection and/or ideal state of being* in relation to mother that was both disrupted and subsequently disavowed. Manninen (1992) used the term 'ubiquitous masculine striving' to reflect a man's *unconscious drive to discover and reconnect to what has been disavowed and experienced as internally lost in relation to his mother*. Males typically attempt to replace what was lost with something different to hold on to. I maintain, furthermore, that it is the *nature and quality of the boy's earliest maternal and paternal identifications* that play the most vital role in the developing male's capacity to synthesize these earliest internalizations and, consequently, to achieve a healthy, sufficiently fluid and integrated male gender identity (see Diamond, 2004).

### **The gendered, male ego ideal: The phallus and the recognition of maleness**

One prevailing theoretical perspective maintains that the boy's traumatic loss of the 'paradise' of the earliest, highly gratifying relationship with his mother disposes him to create a phallic image of himself in relation to the world in order to regain control of the object now experienced as quite separate from his ego (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1984, 1985; Manninen, 1992, 1993). The phallus partially represents the lost breast as something different to hold on to. The little boy omnipotently forms the adaptive *and* defensive illusion of 'the supremacy of his own masculine equipment' (Manninen, 1992, p. 25) in order to overcome the painful, 'gaping wound' created by the separation between his ego (i.e. self) and ego ideal (i.e. the internalized, ideal mother). For the small boy then, the penis thus represents the source of both *gratification* and *narcissistic completeness*. The phallus therefore comes to represent reunion while 'phallic power' promises to transform the boy's traumatic separateness from his mother into an increasing influence over her through penetration (see Elise, 2001).

In my exegesis of the male phallic position (Diamond, 2004), I stress the symbolic use of the phallus as a defense against the dangers of an all-too-separate but still needed (maternal) object. The extent to which this process becomes 'shattering' (i.e. the size of the boy's 'narcissistic wound') is based significantly on two main factors: first, whether his identification with his mother is founded on her ability to recognize and support both her son's maleness and his father's presence (Fast, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001); and, second, whether there is an available pre-oedipal father (or surrogate) providing a reciprocal identification while also supporting his son's connection to his mother (Diamond, 1997, 1998, 2004). The growing boy with this foundation of attachment and intersubjective recognition of his maleness and need for connection need neither rigidly repress nor disavow feminine identifications while instead relying on defensive phallicity. An age-specific and rather gradual, transitional moving away

from his mother thereby ensues in contrast to a more shattering repudiation involving the denial and disavowal of early maternal identifications.

### **Phallic masculinity: The dominance of the phallic ego ideal and phallic urgency**

For the most part, without an opportunity for a maturing ego ideal that *integrates* the phallic ego ideal with the genital ego ideal (and is represented as the internalized 'genital' father), phallicism becomes psychically *urgent* for the adult male's achievement of the missing psychic cohesion. This reliance on a more exclusively phallic ego ideal underlies the stereotypical 'male obsession', whereby only by conquering the world can one conquer the mother' (Manninen, 1992, p. 7). This hypermasculine, phallic image of manhood, additionally, frequently conceals the unavailability of the pre-oedipal, 'genital' father (Ross, 1986). With respect to the 'little man' of childhood, the extent of the boy's phallicism in search of narcissistic completeness greatly influences his ability to accept oedipal reality. In the end, oedipal mastery requires a boy's realization of his own limitations and becoming content with something less than an idealized, narcissistic wholeness.

Paradoxically, the masculine, phallic ego ideal *unconsciously* denies gender (and other forms of) differentiation in the service of the wish for the unlimited possibility inherent in the omnipotent, idealized union with the maternal object. True differentiation is denied while at the manifest level, the phallogocentric male defensively operates as if his phallus is *all that he has* to make him masculine. Such a phallogocentric man is one for whom phallicism has psychic urgency and contributes to particular conflicts and inhibitions in the phallic realm. Phallicism, based on a promised transcendence of limitations, becomes desperately needed in order to manage narcissistic anxieties arising in the context of the less well-defined, complex reality of gender differentiation and multiplicity. This *phallic narcissism* or *defensive phallicity* (in contrast to the more *adaptive phallicity* that fuels activity in childhood and young adulthood) ultimately becomes a persistent obstacle to mid-life growth and development (see Diamond, 2004).<sup>3</sup>

### **Healthy adult masculine gender identity and the integration of early, pre-oedipal identifications: A dream vignette**

Phallogocentric gender ossification results from the dominance of the phallic ego ideal when there is a failure to integrate *both* the earlier *maternal (feminine)* and the pre-oedipal, *paternal (masculine)* identifications. This 'phallic' form of repudiating early maternal identifications creates an *unconscious gender ossification* which often

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<sup>3</sup>In reconstructing phallicism, I emphasize its *pre-oedipal, narcissistic* foundations from both a *dyadic* and *triadic* perspective (see Diamond, 2004). Such an early substructure for phallicism is evident throughout the life cycle in both the fragmentation anxieties and the sense of shame that are evoked whenever a stable masculine identity *cannot* be maintained. My emphasis thus contrasts with the traditional Freudian view of phallicism with its primary focus on the exclusively triangular, *oedipal* dynamics based largely on the interplay between the sexual and aggressive *drives* in a competitive context generating castration anxieties. Although both the pre-oedipal and oedipal basis of the sense of masculinity will remain important throughout a man's life, I stress that a mature masculinity (i.e. true genitality) requires that the *pre-oedipal, narcissistic facets of phallicism*, be reworked and integrated.

becomes manifest later as gender confusion or rigid, defensive certainty. The resulting male gender identifications are thus more *fragile* than *flexible*, partly because they are formed out of the conflicted, unconscious wishes to embrace and embody one's repudiated feminine identifications in the 'wish to be complete' (Schou, 1995; see also Elise, 2001).

This is illustrated by a dream presented by a young man in his early twenties who was struggling with his sense of masculinity. In particular, this patient, Seth, had difficulty integrating his early maternal identifications with an ongoing sense of his maleness. Though he was a rock guitarist operating with much bravado, he carried a deep sense of shame while considering himself a 'sissy' since age 5. As a result, he persisted in a defensive phallicism that involved repudiating his emotional self through an exaggerated yet aloof, 'cool' masculine demeanor.

Seth was an only child whose parents divorced when he was 7. His mother was experienced as 'very doting' and had not dated since the divorce. His highly narcissistic father was contemptuous of women while prone to tantrums and impulsive action.

During the third year of treatment, Seth presented this dream: 'I dreamed that I saw a piano in a friend's house. I began playing it and felt exceptionally sad while crying uncontrollably. I was embarrassed and tried to leave the room without anyone seeing me cry. However, I could neither hide my feelings nor leave the room'.

In his associations, Seth remembered that, as a small child, he loved hearing his mother play the piano. He related his sadness to missing something that once had been very comforting and important to him. While opening himself to sadness and longing, he declared that this emotional memory attached to his mother was something deeply 'inside' him and, as he put it, 'most definitely a part of me somehow lost along the way'.

Following this dream, we were able to explore Seth's 'repulsion' to touching his mother as well as his longstanding attraction to, and terror of, 'feminine' women. He began to share his longing to be seen as a 'real man' by other guys and presented a series of dreams wherein his aggression was no longer so inhibited. He subsequently became more open with his male friends and commenced a relationship with a young woman with whom he very comfortably revealed his 'most personal feelings'.

While a dream vignette can neither convey the spirit of the treatment process nor the complexity of a patient's dynamics, it can illustrate the kinds of identifications that our male patients struggle with in terms of their sense of masculinity. As this vignette implies, Seth's earliest identifications caused him difficulty *not* so much because he failed to 'disidentify' from his mother, but rather because of the *nature of the particular identifications unconsciously carried forward*. Seth's mother's unconscious limitations in recognizing and sanctioning her son's maleness, combined with his father's inability to offer a male object for identification that locates maleness within the matrix of relationship, modulated affect and emotional connection to women, endowed Seth with a problematic internalization in the realm of gender identity as well as triadic reality.

Seth was eventually helped to avow the multiplicity of his early maternal and paternal identifications and thereby begin an integrating process wherein his maleness

is recognized in its *essential* emotional and non-gendered diversity. In short, Seth was increasingly able to 'play' his mother's piano, experience his emotional self and still express his manliness and aggression in the world around him. This vignette adds credence to Wisdom's suggestion that 'a man's neurosis may be rooted in being unable to adapt to his femininity' (1983, p. 166).

### **Maturing masculine gender identity: An integrative psychic achievement**

A maturing gender identity develops from integrating early, pre-oedipal identifications with each parent and inevitably demands a psychic achievement in the integrative-synthetic sphere. The establishment of gender identity begins then with the child's 'capacity to identify with both mother and father at the same time' (Christiansen, 1996, p. 113) while its eventual transformation requires what Ogden referred to as 'the creation of a dialectical interplay between masculine and feminine identities' (1989, p. 138). A healthy, cohesive sense of manhood develops when *core gender identity* is not split off from a flexibly masculine *gender role identity*.

In attaining this more differentiated, 'genital' ego ideal, issues pertaining both to the acceptance of the *limitations* of one's gender and to its *contrasting* elements no longer have to be denied in the service of primary narcissism. Such a man does not have to have or be 'all' in order to experience his manhood with all its 'limitations' (see Fast, 1984). Similarly, the previously renounced, early overinclusive, opposite-sex identifications that were deemed gender inappropriate are reclaimable, and antagonistic, contrasexual elements can be reunited (Bassin, 1996; Young-Eisendrath, 1997; Elise, 1998, 2001). This maturational accomplishment is founded on developing the capacity for 'postconventional thought' whereby gendered opposites, rather than remaining bifurcated, are instead 'held' and symbolically bridged (Benjamin, 1996).

Benjamin contends that notions of what is masculine or feminine can thereby more comfortably destabilize as finite categorization of gender identity is superseded by the complexity of one's multiple, differently gendered identifications. Thus, the meanings of the terms *masculine* and *feminine* may be used free of intrinsic gender linkages while understood to derive from a socio-cultural process of *gender splitting* in which aspects of human personality are distributed unequally between the sexes. Culturally shaped gender polarities (of gender-linked distinctions) that direct each individual to develop qualities attributed to his or her own sex and, in some measure, to suppress qualities of the other sex, are internalized. It becomes each individual's burden to keep the other gender's characteristics undeveloped (Benjamin, 1996), and, I maintain, particularly for many men, to become engaged in a maturational task to better integrate contrasexual qualities (see Diamond, 2004).

The old notion that femaleness must be overcome in order to create male development simply does not fit with the diverse gender identity narratives that our male patients present to us. I concur with Balsam (2001) that an individual's fixed gender portrait, such as masculine/active/dominant or feminine/passive/submissive, essentially represents a defensive solution to the struggle involved in establishing gender identity. Thus, as Benjamin insists, the 'lived ambiguities of gender' (1996,



p. 36) are made tolerable only when this higher level of (post-oedipal) differentiation is achieved by means of sustaining the tension between contrasting elements that remain *available* rather than *forbidden*.

### Conclusion

In concluding, I have elucidated the shifts in psychoanalytic theorizing which have led to an increasing recognition that the development of the sense of masculinity is a relational process that involves integrating identifications with both the mother and father. I provide a perspective to understand the shaping of male gender identity without needing to rely on the dubious and clinically problematic idea that a boy normatively has to fiercely ‘dis-identify’ from his mother to overcome his femaleness. I focus on the mother’s (and father’s) *actual as well as unconscious relationship* with their little boy, and one another, in order to better examine the nature of the boy’s unique identifications and subsequent sense of masculinity. Both the security of the boy’s attachment to his mother, in providing the foundation for his transitional turning to an ‘other’, as well as the mother’s capacity to reflect upon and recognize both her own and her son’s subjectivity, are of crucial importance in understanding boys’ ‘attachment-individuation’ process. Moreover, the unconscious paternal and maternal imagos and identifications of both the mother and father, as well as the father’s pre-oedipal relationship with his little boy and the boy’s mother, are extremely significant in shaping a son’s gender identity. Indeed, these early identifications live on in every male and continue to impact his sense of maleness in a dialectical interplay throughout the life span. Finally, I point out the importance of appreciating how *culturally embedded* these largely unconscious constructions of masculinity are, particularly in ‘the mind of the mother’. A suitable farewell to Greenson’s and Stoller’s important and heuristic hypothesis requires that contemporary analysts impart an expanded recognition of these unique familial, cultural and, especially, unconscious intrapsychic dynamics in each specific child–mother–father (or surrogate) triad in order to grasp the complex, specific internalizations that shape any male’s unique sense of maleness.

**Acknowledgements:** The author wishes to express his gratitude to Steven Axelrod, Dianne Elise, Irene Fast and Sallye Wilkinson for their contributions to an early draft of this paper, and to Alan P. Spivak for his thoughtful reading of a later version.

### Translations of summary

**Die Entwicklung der Maskulinität: Der Aufbau der männlichen Geschlechtsidentität durch die Abkehr des Jungen von der Mutter im kritischen Rückblick.** Der Beitrag versucht, die Internalisierungsprozesse zu verstehen, die an der Ausprägung der männlichen Geschlechtsidentität durch die charakteristischen Bemühungen des Jungen um Trennung von der Mutter beteiligt sind. Die Grundlage für die erste Entwicklung eines Männlichkeitsgefühls wird neuerlich überprüft, indem der Autor die weithin vertretene Überlegung von Greenson und Stoller in Frage stellt, dass sich der Junge von seiner Mutter „des-identifizieren“ muß, um seine Geschlechtsidentität aufbauen zu können. Besondere Bedeutung wird statt dessen den bewussten und unbewussten Aspekten der prä-ödpalen und ödpalen Beziehung der Mutter (und des Vaters) zu ihrem kleinen Sohn beigemessen, um die typischen Identifizierungen und das schließlich auftauchende Maskulinitätsgefühl besser zu verstehen. Sowohl die Sicherheit der *Bindung* des Jungen an die Mutter, die die Basis für eine Hinwendung zum „Anderen“ schafft, als auch die Fähigkeit der Mutter, über ihre

eigene Subjektivität und Männlichkeit sowie die des Vaters und ihres gemeinsamen Sohnes zu *reflektieren und sie anzuerkennen*, sind entscheidende Faktoren im „Bindungs-Individuations“-Prozess des Jungen. In ähnlicher Weise sind die unbewussten väterlichen und mütterlichen Imagines und Identifizierungen sowohl der Mutter als auch des Vaters sowie die prä-ödpale Beziehung des Vaters zu seinem kleinen Jungen und zu dessen Mutter für die Ausprägung der Geschlechtsidentität des Sohnes außerordentlich wichtig. Der Autor vertritt die These, dass diese frühen mütterlichen (und väterlichen) Identifizierungen in jedem Mann überdauern und sein Männlichkeitsgefühl in einem dialektischen Zusammenspiel lebenslang beeinflussen. Eine reife Geschlechtsidentität entwickelt sich aus der Integration dieser frühen, prä-ödpalen mütterlichen Identifizierungen, die dann nicht länger abgelehnt oder defensiv als polarisierte Geschlechterspaltung organisiert werden müssen.

**Configuración de la masculinidad: reconsideración del alejamiento del niño de la madre para construir la identidad de género masculino.** Este trabajo ofrece una comprensión de la naturaleza de los procesos de internalización implicados en la formación de la identidad de género masculina en base a los esfuerzos extraordinarios del niño por separarse de su madre. El autor reconsidera el fundamento del desarrollo inicial del sentido de masculinidad al cuestionar la ampliamente aceptada idea de Greenson y Stoller de que normalmente el niño tiene que “desidentificarse” de su madre para crear su identidad de género. A fin de comprender mejor la naturaleza de las singulares identificaciones del niño y su consiguiente sentido de masculinidad, el autor más bien da importancia a los aspectos conscientes e inconscientes de las relaciones preedípicas y edípicas de la madre (y del padre) con su niño pequeño. Para comprender el proceso de “apego-individuación” del niño resultan cruciales tanto la seguridad del *apego* del niño a su madre, en la medida que aporta la base para una fase transicional en la que el niño se dirige a “otro”, como la capacidad de la madre de *reflexionar y reconocer* sobre su propia subjetividad y masculinidad, además de la del padre y la del hijo. De igual manera, las imagos materna y paterna inconscientes y las identificaciones tanto del padre como de la madre del niño, como también las relaciones preedípicas del padre con su niño pequeño y con la madre del niño, son extremadamente significativas en la formación de la identidad de género de un niño. El autor sostiene que estas tempranas identificaciones maternas (y paternas) perviven en todo varón y continúan confrontándose con su sentido de masculinidad en una interacción dialéctica durante toda su vida. La identidad de género en proceso de maduración se desarrolla a partir de la integración de estas tempranas identificaciones preedípicas maternas que ya no precisan ser repudiadas ni organizadas defensivamente como una escisión de género polarizada.

**La formation de la masculinité : En révisant l’hypothèse des garçons qui se détournent de leur mère pour construire leur identité de genre masculine.** Cet article propose une approche de la nature des processus d’internalisation impliqués dans la formation de l’identité de genre masculine à partir de la lutte singulière du garçon pour se séparer de sa mère. L’auteur reconsidère les fondements du développement initial du sentiment de masculinité en interrogeant les idées largement répandues de Greenson et Stoller, selon lesquelles le garçon doit normalement se « désidentifier » de sa mère pour créer son identité de genre. L’accent est plutôt mis sur les aspects conscients et inconscients des relations pré-œdipiennes et œdipiennes de la mère (et du père) avec leur petit garçon, de façon à mieux appréhender la nature des identifications singulières du garçon et son sentiment consécutif de masculinité. Tant la sécurité de l’*attachement* du garçon à sa mère (en ce sens que celle-ci procure la base du mouvement transitionnel vers un « autre »), que la capacité de la mère à *refléter et reconnaître* sa propre subjectivité et masculinité (et celles du père et de son fils) sont cruciaux pour la compréhension du processus d’« attachement-individuation » chez le garçon. De même, les imagos et identifications paternelles et maternelles inconscientes aussi bien de la mère que du père du garçon, ainsi que la relation pré-œdipienne du père avec son petit garçon et avec la mère du garçon, jouent un rôle majeur dans la formation de l’identité de genre d’un fils. L’auteur soutient que ces identifications maternelles (et paternelles) précoces se poursuivent chez tous les hommes et continuent à influencer le sentiment de masculinité dans une interaction dialectique tout au long de la vie. Une identité de genre qui devient mature se développe à partir de l’intégration de ces identifications maternelles précoces pré-œdipiennes, qui par la suite ne nécessiteront ni d’être répudiées, ni d’être organisées de façon défensive comme clivage entre les deux pôles du genre.

**Il modellamento della mascolinità: un riesame dell’allontanamento del bambino dalla madre per la costruzione dell’identità di genere maschile.** Questo lavoro dà una visione della natura dei processi d’interiorizzazione operanti nel modellamento dell’identità maschile di genere, fondati sulle straordinarie lotte che il bambino sostiene per separarsi dalla madre. L’autore riprende in esame le basi dello sviluppo iniziale del senso della mascolinità contestando l’idea, largamente accettata di Greenson e Stoller, secondo

la quale il bambino debba normativamente “disidentificarsi” dalla madre per creare la propria identità di genere. Egli dà invece importanza agli aspetti consci e inconsci del rapporto pre-edipico ed edipico della madre (e del padre) con il figlio piccolo per meglio capire la natura delle identificazioni specifiche e del senso di mascolinità del bambino che ne deriva. Sia la sicurezza fornita dall’*attaccamento* del bambino alla madre (che fornisce la base per il movimento transizionale con cui il bambino si rivolge a un “altro”), sia la capacità della madre di *riflettere sulla* propria soggettività e maschilità, oltre che su quella del padre e del figlio, e di *ricoscerle*, sono fondamentali per comprendere il processo di “attaccamento-individuazione” del bambino. Allo stesso modo le *imago* materna e paterna e le identificazioni inconscie sia della madre sia del padre del bambino, oltre che il rapporto pre-edipico del padre con il figlio piccolo e con la madre del figlio, sono estremamente significativi nel modellare l’identità di genere del bambino. L’autore sostiene che queste precoci identificazioni materna (e paterna) continuano a vivere in ogni maschio e a scontrarsi con il senso di maschilità in un gioco dialettico che dura tutta la vita. L’identità di genere che matura si sviluppa dall’integrazione di queste precoci identificazioni materne preedipiche che non hanno più bisogno di essere ripudiate né organizzate difensivamente come scissione di genere polarizzata.

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