

## **MASCULINITY UNRAVELED: THE ROOTS OF MALE GENDER IDENTITY AND THE SHIFTING OF MALE EGO IDEALS THROUGHOUT LIFE**

A model of masculine gender identity development is presented that demonstrates how a male's sense of his masculinity and the ambiguities of his gender are being reworked throughout his life. Of factors shaping the boy's sense of masculinity early on, particular emphasis is placed on the role of the involved father, the nature of the parental relationship, and the mother's recognition and affirmation of her son's maleness. While healthy masculine gender identity is founded predominantly on the boy's unique struggles in separating from his mother, it does *not* result from what has been traditionally viewed as the boy's *disidentification* from her (and from the feminine more generally). Indeed, boys who need to violently repudiate their identifications with their mother are more susceptible to a fragile, rigid masculine identity and narcissistic psychopathology. A case example of a young adult man illustrates the impact of identifications with both parents. The interplay of early masculine identity development and later life challenges confronting the adult male is briefly noted. "Masculine" ego ideals shift across developmental junctions until, ultimately, a more mature sense of masculinity emerges: the phallic wish to deny differentiation and maintain unlimited possibility is renounced and mourned and certain real limits concerning sex, gender, and generational differences are accepted. This reshaping of the "masculine" ego ideal consequently involves the transformation of a man's previously adaptive "phallicism" into more realistic, "genital" ego ideals—an achievement involving interplay between masculine and feminine identifications and the integration of antithetical elements no longer so unconsciously gendered.

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Training and Supervising Analyst, Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies; Teaching and Supervising Faculty, Wright Institute, Los Angeles; Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of California at Los Angeles. Submitted for publication November 29, 2005.

Until three decades ago, the psychoanalytic study of male development was essentially organized around Freud's oedipal theory and the crucial idea that the boy wants to "have" his mother (Freud 1923b, 1924, 1925). To overcome the castration anxieties aroused in competing with his father, the boy identifies with him and, in turn, constructs the sense of his own masculine identity.

Since then, attention has been redirected to the fact that before the boy wants to *have* his mother, he wants to *be* her, or at least *be with* what she provides, her maternal nurturance. Hence, the boy's pre-oedipal relationship with his mother and the actual involvement of the father in the early triadic environment are now seen as crucial to understanding male gender identity.

Analysts influenced by Margaret Mahler (Mahler, Bergman, and Pine 1975) began to formulate a new way of understanding male psychology. Most significant were Ralph Greenson and Robert Stoller, two Los Angeles-based psychoanalysts who formulated what has become known as the *disidentification hypothesis*. This theory argues that in order to establish a normal, healthy sense of masculinity, the small boy must disidentify from his mother and counteridentify with his father. This supposition has been taken as the benchmark to explain the male's struggle to experience his gendered identity as "masculine." The theory happens to be congruent with a dubious, unconsciously held view, widespread in patriarchal cultures, that masculinity is defined by its *not* being feminine. In other words, the most significant thing about being a man is *not being a woman*. This view has been unfortunate for both sexes but perhaps especially so for men, since gender identity, so long as it is based on the disavowal of whatever is construed as feminine, remains an unstable psychological achievement.

More recent work by researchers and psychoanalytic gender theorists has furthered our understanding of boys' earliest and subsequent sense of masculinity (e.g., Fast 1984, 1990, 1999; Benjamin 1988, 1991; Pollack 1995, 1998; Axelrod 1997; Lax 1997; Hansell 1998). In revising the disidentification model, I have tried to provide a set of theoretical lenses to help us achieve a deeper, more complete understanding of our male patients (Diamond 2004a,b). I emphasize how masculinity is forged from the boy's earliest wishes to be both his mother and his father, and how these early identifications require adaptations and accommodations throughout the life span. I argue that a male's gen-

dered ego ideals and the sense of his masculinity, as well as the ambiguities of his gender, are continually being reworked throughout his life. Moreover, the *phallic* and *genital* features of a man's internal experience are best understood as coexisting positions in varying, discontinuous balances that shift as a man matures, rather than as a linear developmental progression in which the genital phase supersedes the phallic.

A brief word on terminology. In using the terms *phallic* and *genital*, I am referring to a specific orientation, typically manifest in a cluster of traits, which psychoanalysis views as originating from early psychosexual, libidinal development. From the classical psychosexual standpoint, the phallic phase is a pregenital period beginning at about two years of age and extending into the oedipal phase, during which the phallus is the primary erogenous zone. Freud (1923b) describes this "infantile genital organization" as reflecting "a primacy of the *phallus*" rather than of the genitals (p. 142). The phase comprises two subphases: *phallic narcissism* (or *phallic exhibitionism*), characterized by a self-satisfaction based on overestimation of the penis, exhibitionistic desires to gain attention, and dyadic relations, and the later *phallic-oedipal phase proper*, with its triangular configuration, idealization of oedipal objects promoting phallic omnipotence, and heightened castration anxieties (see Jones 1933; Edgumbe and Burgner 1975; Greenspan 1982; Schalin 1989). Throughout the entire phallic phase, the high valuation of the penis is manifest in phallic pride with its associated desires and anxieties. Figuratively speaking, extending, thrusting, and penetrating become paramount, along with the associated personality traits of assertiveness, aggression, strength, and potency.

I hold that phallic ambitions, propensities, and energies are utilized, integrated, and transformed throughout a male's development and that these phallic features of internal life will play an important role in his *adaptively* expressing and experiencing his masculinity. A male's *defensive phallicity*, however, frequently reflects regressive tendencies in an otherwise healthy personality; alternatively, it may indicate more rigid characterological distortions based on primitive defensive operations employed to protect his fragile, inflexible masculine gender identity. In the latter case, the so-called phallic character is characterized by exhibitionistic self-display, haughty reserve, a regarding of the penis as an instrument of aggression (rather than love), recklessness, misogyny, and an excessive need to display one's potency. Such pathology can

manifest at various developmental junctures, though it is traditionally understood as regressively based on oedipal-phase anxieties (see Jones 1933). This is evident in adult men who persist in defining themselves by conquest, sexual potency, and aggression when relational needs, a greater appreciation of otherness, and reflectivity might otherwise come to the fore.

The *genital phase* is considered the final stage in instinctual libidinal development, representing what has been called “genital primacy” (see Freud 1905). Genital primacy does not equate, however, with the mere capacity for orgasmic functioning; “genital,” taken beyond psychosexual theory, is used broadly to reflect the male’s capacity to attach equal importance to his own and his partner’s satisfaction. Moreover, there is an interiorized, culturally minimized dimension of genital masculinity pertaining to the inner body and testicles, the *inner genital space*, that reflects the more open, spatial, and receptive aspects of male psychic experience (see, e.g., Friedman 1996; Fogel 1998). Maturing, healthy genitality is characterized by the attenuation of the anxieties pertaining to masculine inner space and the associated psychological sensibilities. Penetration and receptivity, as well as intrusion and inclusion, are its hallmarks. Genital aims for connection and the recognition of others in their uniqueness and subjectivity (i.e., “otherness”) are a manifestation of this postambivalent integration of phallic propensities in the service of reality.

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The term *genitality*, as I use it, involves adaptive assertion, aggression, and modulated phallicism, in which penetration in the service of mastery, potency, and authority are integrated with the needs for connection and attachment. Phallic urges are present and remain significant, but in their genital countenance are transformed into more aim-inhibited and object-recognizing forms. In this respect, there is a strong resemblance between the analytic ideal of the genital character and both the Anglo-Saxon prototype of a gentleman and the Judeo-Hebraic exemplar of a “*mensch*.” Speaking psychosexually, the maturing man’s genital features help him become oriented more toward making love than simply fucking—though of course the impulse to fuck remains an important dimension of his masculinity and lovemaking.

To paraphrase Freud, to truly understand “what men really want,” we need to appreciate the challenges inherent in the varying developmental junctions over the course of a man’s life. In this paper I will focus on how boys establish their earliest sense of masculinity; I will then reflect

upon the interplay between this initial sense of masculinity and the central developmental challenges that ensue. I will begin, however, by briefly considering the important roles played by both biology and culture.

### ANATOMY, DESTINY, AND GENDER

Freud's famous dictum that "anatomy is destiny" is no longer the linchpin of psychoanalytic gender theorizing. Research on the masculinization of the brain or lack thereof demonstrates that several biological variables are related to specific gender-related traits, maturational challenges, and intrapsychic conflicts commonly experienced by males (Panksepp 1998; see also Baron-Cohen 2003). Nonetheless, on the basis of clinical evidence, the biological givens in gender identity formation are significantly counterbalanced by what psychoanalysis emphasizes: the early imprinting of the boy's actual interactions with his primary attachment figures; his internalized object relations; the prevailing sociocultural determinants; and, most important, his unique, psychodynamically determined reactions to each of these influences, particularly as they interact with his basic biological development (Stoller 1976; Blos 1985). We might say therefore that with respect to biology, the destiny of a boy's masculinity is based on what he makes of his anatomy.

Contemporary thinking about gender, emerging over the last thirty years, has resulted in an influential critique, in large measure empirically based, of Freud's phallicentric theories of male and female development (see Dimen and Goldner 2002). Freud, in collapsing the distinctions between biological sex, sexuality, and gender, "made gender crudely derivative of the anatomical differences between the sexes" (Goldner 2002, p. 63). Today's more complex gender-identity paradigm untangles gender per se from sex and sexuality. Consequently, *masculine* gender identity must be distinguished from *core* gender identity and from sexual (gender) object choice. *Core gender identity* refers to the sense of belonging to a biological sex and is established in the first year and a half of life (Stoller 1968). It is the felt conviction of being biologically male (or female) and is what I refer to when discussing the boy's *maleness*. This stands in contrast to what this article largely addresses, namely, the boy's "gender identity," which Stoller termed "non-core gender identity" and Person and Ovesey (1983) and research psychologists call "gender role identity." This sense of

masculinity, or the male's self-image as a gendered being, is far more complicated and ambiguous than maleness. It is fundamentally constructed out of the boy's early identifications with each of his parents and, as I suggest, is reworked throughout a man's life.

### **GENDER, MASCULINITY, AND CULTURE**

The issue of gender is aptly regarded as an "essential contradiction" (Harris 1991). Rather than simply deconstructing gender dichotomies, I believe that sophisticated psychoanalytic theory must be able to sustain the necessary dialectical tension between traditional essentialist (either/or) thinking and a postmodern, constructivist (both/and) perspective. This is a tension between biological givens, such as hormonally influenced brain and bodily masculinization, and the psychosocially created.

Still, as cultural beings, we cannot so easily contain this tension. Anthropologists write about a ubiquitous sociocultural process that renders a splitting of gender traits so that aspects of human personality are distributed unequally between the sexes (see Young-Eisendrath 1997; Labouvie-Vief 1994). In every culture, the individual internalizes a culturally shaped gender polarity that directs him or her to develop qualities attributed to his or her own sex and, in some measure, to suppress qualities of the other sex.<sup>1</sup> In Western societies, despite efforts to reduce this gender splitting, the underlying cultural images for masculinity generally continue to mean being rational, protective, aggressive, and dominating, while those for femininity mean being emotional, nurturing, receptive, and submissive (Benjamin 1988). It becomes each individual's burden to keep the other gender's characteristics less developed within.

Culture plays a pivotal role in interfacing with the psychodynamics of gender identity. As analysts we focus largely on the parents in relation to their son and to one another. But sibling and peer relations, the

<sup>1</sup>This occurs even though hormonal influences on the fetal brain and genitalia demonstrate differences between the two genders. Regardless of how we define the concepts of masculine and feminine from a constitutional perspective, what is most serviceable in psychoanalysis stems from clinical observation that demonstrates that "in human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found in either a psychological or a biological sense. Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex; and he shows a combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones" (Freud 1905, p. 220n).

“boy culture” with its enforced male code that every boy encounters growing up, must be kept in mind as we try to understand each unique male patient.

### **SETH: THE INITIAL SHAPING OF A BOY’S SENSE OF MASCULINITY**

The case of Seth shows how a boy’s masculinity is constructed in relation to both mother and father. To facilitate discussion of my thesis, I place emphasis on this patient’s early identification with the attitude of each of his parents toward his maleness.<sup>2</sup>

Seth, an intelligent twenty-two-year-old professional rock musician, was troubled by somatic problems, including headaches and chronic back pain. In addition, he hadn’t been able to urinate in the presence of other men at public urinals since he was fourteen. When he strapped on his guitar, Seth was the model of a “cool” male icon, but beneath the bravado he struggled with feeling sufficiently “masculine.”

Seth had been sexually active since his early teens. When he began twice-weekly face-to-face treatment, he had been in a relationship of several years with a slightly older female musician whom he described as “like a guy, a tough, unemotional chick needing neither foreplay nor tenderness.” He also told me that without a girlfriend he felt overwhelmed by shame and worried that he was weak and inferior, using alcohol and drugs to manage these painful feelings.

Seth was an only child. His highly narcissistic father had divorced his mother when Seth was seven, after which Seth maintained an extremely ambivalent relationship with him. The father, who subsequently remarried twice, had always carried on extramarital affairs. Seth experienced his father as highly dependent on him, often describing Seth as his “best and closest friend.” Disparaging Seth’s mother, his father would caution Seth to be careful because “all women are out to use men.”

Seth’s mother, whom he viewed as “very doting,” had never remarried or apparently even dated since the divorce. She opposed his having girlfriends and discouraged him from learning to drive—a decidedly limiting predicament for a young man living in Los Angeles.

<sup>2</sup>In referring to Seth in a previous article (Diamond 2004b), I concisely discussed one of his dreams in order to indicate the nature of his unconscious identification with his mother.

Seth had recently found out that she had breast-fed him well past his third birthday, conceivably indicative of her difficulty separating from him. Much like Seth's father, though in a more restrained manner, she was highly critical of her former spouse. Her dislike extended to men in general.

During our early sessions, Seth felt "lost" and his obsessive philosophizing was often difficult to bear. Nonetheless, I felt something was keeping me from drifting too far away from him and I soon recognized that his early transference hinted that he was "falling in love" with me. In return, I experienced this sweet though troubled young man with affection. I began to look forward to seeing him, despite the tedious and distancing nature of our early sessions, and gradually he became able to allow me closer.

Sometimes a little boy lost, other times a confused teenager, Seth initially seemed to be coming to me for a feeding that required little of me but to be present and attentive to him, holding him in my gaze. With another patient I may have experienced myself as being more like a mother holding her baby in a maternal gaze, but with Seth something else was happening. Though quite ineffable, an indisputably masculine ambience was alive, as he relentlessly spoke of his efforts to define himself in his world. At the same time, he would watch me carefully while tentatively stating, "You do know what I mean."

Seth next talked about the physical closeness he once had shared with his father; in my experience of his gaze, I imagined that his desire to engage me was very much related to the way a son beckons his father to wrestle or roughhouse in order to experience their bodily presences joined together in their full and aggressively masculine forms. I sensed he was looking at me as a young boy resolutely looks to his father for affirmation by discerning his own maleness reflected back. This "iso-gender attachment" (Blos 1985), or what Benjamin (1991) calls a "homosexual identificatory love," seemed necessary in order for Seth to establish his masculine identity. It is noteworthy that this counter-transference, and others in which I endeavored to appreciate how I was being acted on by my patient, were useful in helping me to understand what was occurring, and to fashion my interventions.

Seth's words were like gestures inviting my nonverbal engagement with him, and I understood these longings to be a manifestation of his "father hunger" (Herzog 2001) for a particular kind of paternal figure. I realized in time that this desperately sought-after strong man,



neither so dependent on him nor demeaning of femininity, was sought to help Seth recognize his masculinity in relation to himself, to other men, and to women without having to disavow his interior world and its powerful maternal internalizations. Seth desired to find in me the man who would help him feel, as he put it, “okay to be who I really am”; in paying close attention to my own experience, using it as a guide both to recognizing and interpreting Seth’s transference needs, I found myself drawn toward being a kind and accepting, fatherlike mentor who could help him better understand himself and the world around him.<sup>3</sup>

During a session well into our second year, Seth reported a dream in which he, as a child, was very jealous of another boy’s bow and arrow set. As the dream continued, Seth found me holding his “tiny penis” and felt surprisingly “comfortable.” The oedipal implications of his manifest dream are apparent in his phallic envy of the other boy’s bow and arrow set and, presumably, his envy of mine. In associating to the dream, however, he was greatly surprised to find himself feeling so content in response to my holding his “tiny penis.” I reflected on what this contentment might point to. Did it indicate Seth’s longing for his mother to satisfy his preoedipal needs? Might it reveal his renunciation of his own phallic-aggressive strivings (by rendering his penis as “tiny” in order to stave off his dangerous and powerful father/analyst rival)? Or could it relate to his more dyadic paternal needs?

I waited for Seth to continue, and soon he spoke of being “traumatized” as a three- to five-year-old boy when his father first separated from his mother. He told me how he would frequently stay at his father’s apartment when his father’s girlfriend spent the night. He could hear them in the adjoining bedroom “having sex, banging the walls, and making all kinds of strange and scary noises,” adding that he felt very frightened while wondering how his father could be so “insensitive.” I wondered too as I listened further.

Seth next recalled how when he was twelve his father made him suddenly stop seeing a male child psychologist he liked very much and

<sup>3</sup>At other times, in attending to the role-relationship that Seth was unconsciously trying to establish (see Sandler 1976), I found myself to be more of a mother figure who could support Seth’s masculine tendencies by recognizing his phallic-aggressive strivings and male-related activities. Most often, however, in the paternal transference, I was experienced (and experienced myself) as a father presence *not* needing to prove that only I was allowed to be a big, phallic man. In these circumstances, I often intuitively felt it best to allow Seth to formulate his own interpretation when it was already experience-near for him, rather than my putting it into words for him.

had been seeing for several years. "I think he couldn't stand how much I liked going to Dr. B.," Seth said before returning to the comfortable image of my holding his tiny penis. Seth's thoughts turned yet again to Dr. B., and he became angry thinking about how his jealous father had kept him from this revered father figure. Seth then abruptly became preoccupied with his finances and insurance coverage for treatment, and soon we began discussing his anxiety about our work together coming to a sudden end. Seth was moved, as well as relieved, when I subsequently interpreted his wish that I become his "new" Dr. B., a father figure who could remain available while recognizing what he needed in order to develop. It was becoming more apparent that my holding of his penis, though overdetermined to be sure, indicated his longing for a stable, primarily preoedipal and dyadic paternal attachment. In addition, it proved beneficial at this juncture in our work together to address this need predominantly rather than focusing on the dream's conflictual, oedipal facets (and thus take up the penis-holding as a regressive defense).

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When Seth and I discussed the dream in the next session, he cried, apparently for the first time since he was a child; this is important since many men, even after years of analysis, frequently experience an internal prohibition against crying due to its association with women (see Reichbart's paper in this issue of *JAPA*). I interpreted his crying as an indication of his premature "loss" of his needed "holding" father (in the context of experiencing a newfound security with me), and this seemed to usher in a new phase in the treatment in which he felt very "safe" and "held" by me. In other words, he was conveying that he needed an analyst-father, much as he needed his actual father, to introduce him gradually to triadic reality in appropriate doses that would protect him from both the "too-muchness" of sudden overstimulation (manifest in his associations to hearing his father in sexual intercourse) and the precipitous loss evident in his recall of the abrupt departure of Dr. B. I thus underscored Seth's need to experience me as the carrier of an early, dyadic paternal transference where he could feel small and yet safe in a bodily, sensual connection to a bigger male's maleness.

Seth began to speak often and freely of his shame and of his feelings of inferiority, most notably in having to "prop up" his father by being "a happy, brainy, and nondemanding son who took care to not upset others." He had to make his penis small, so to speak, in front of other men (as at the urinal and sometimes with me) in order to create a sense of safety for himself. This compromise solution would become

more evident later in our work, as his phallic-aggressive wishes and positive oedipal anxieties became more amenable to interpretation. At this time, however, as his dream associations suggest, Seth greatly desired a father figure who could feel his tiny penis and recognize the little boy within who was so in need of a larger male's reciprocity. His newfound security in freely associating indicated that he was experiencing me as "propping" him up rather than needing him to be the way his father (and analyst) wanted him to be.<sup>4</sup>

This period of our work highlights the significance of the preconflictual, dyadic father-son bond, especially in its bodily sensual form, as a significant facilitator of a boy's healthy sense of masculinity. In this respect, bows and arrows do not simply express phallic desire and potency; additionally, as in Cupid's pursuit of Psyche, they reflect eros in the search for a loving connection. I took this up interpretively with Seth by commenting on his efforts to find "a father in me who, by connecting with you in our shared maleness, can help you feel more capable of dealing with the world of men and thus more comfortable in competing and freely asserting yourself."

Seth's shame around feeling insufficiently masculine quickly became our central focus. He told me that he'd regarded himself as a "sissy" since he was very young, acknowledging his forceful need to "hide" what he called his "emotional self" in a dark cave lest he experience himself as "weak and feminine." The "cave," which he associated with the vagina, alluded to the place where he'd hidden his emotional self, and the "dark" spoke to both the depth and the terror of his early bodily identification with his mother. This material illustrates the shame-ridden danger that a boy's initial maternal identification, the

<sup>4</sup>As I've noted, Seth's struggles with his phallic and aggressive strivings, his conflicted wishes to display his phallic equipment, and his defenses against exhibiting his own intact, potent phallus are clearly implied in the clinical material. These issues would come to the forefront of the interpretive work as the treatment progressed. By following Seth's associations, tracking my countertransference attitudes as a guide to his transference desires, and keeping our work experience-near, I deduced that it was best to take up this material in terms of his efforts to discover his dyadic father within pre-oedipal reality. By doing so, I discovered that the oedipal could eventually be navigated. In fact, only later in our work was Seth able to make contact with and constructively use my interpretations of the danger of his aggressive impulses, his rivalrous feelings toward me, and his defenses against them. In short, his envy of the bow and arrow reflected his coveting of a penis as a substitute for lacking real contact with a loving, protective father. Thus, I believe that he needed to feel my bigger penis supporting his smaller one before he could fully experience and bear his envy and aggression within triadic reality.

“primary sensual-erotic contact between infant and mother” (Wrye and Welles 1994, p. 35), represents for males.

As Seth recalled his father’s verbally abusive berating of his mother, he began to understand his own uncompromising, sadomasochistic attacks on his emotional and needy self. He had long idealized the character of Hannibal Lechter for his “brilliant invulnerability”; only now could he recognize the internal split he had created in order to rid himself of what he regarded as soft, impure, and feminine. It wasn’t just that Seth feared being castrated by his father for wanting to *have* his mother; on a deeper level, he was terrified that he would be annihilated for experiencing himself in certain ways as *being like* his mother. Indeed, for many men, losing one’s penis is preferable to not existing.

Hannibal Lechter, the perfect psychopath, embodies the quintessence of phallic masculinity. But Seth was no psychopath, and he was beginning to realize that the ongoing war within himself reflected his early parental identifications, both his father’s unconscious misogynist attitudes and his mother’s corresponding misandry, indicated by her fear of, and contempt for, maleness. Seth had incorporated these attitudes when he was far too young to question them and hadn’t been able to come to terms with these internalizations without repudiating his emotional self, in both its aggressive and its loving aspects. In fact, some time later, after becoming openly angry with me, Seth was surprised to discover that “nothing had fallen apart between us.”

During the third year of treatment, Seth dreamt that he was playing a piano in a friend’s house, only to become overwhelmed with sadness and cry uncontrollably. Embarrassed, he tried to leave the room without being seen but was able neither to get up nor to stop crying. In associating, Seth remembered how, as a small child, he loved hearing his mother play the piano. His uncontrollable crying reminded him of being overcome with feelings of loss as he recalled his maternal grandfather’s death, his parents’ separation, and his mother’s subsequent depression. The sad longing in the dream seemed familiar, and he realized that the piano-playing represented something that once had been very comforting to him. His mother, he told me, was very much “inside” him, “a part of me that I somehow lost along the way,” and that he had since sought to disavow.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>This sort of disavowal of a male’s maternal identifications is quite common, particularly when the identifications are grounded in more pathological trian-

Subsequent to this dream work, we were able to explore Seth's attraction to, and terror of, "feminine" women, as well as his "repulsion" to touching his mother. I helped him recognize his positive oedipal yearnings in the context of his father's distant but powerful presence, as well as his defenses against his desires and rivalrous impulses. Seth's capacity to experience competition without requiring defensive submission was increasing, and in sharing his longing to be seen as a "real man" by other guys throughout the next year, he presented numerous dreams in which he displayed his phallic equipment. Though still rather cautious, he was beginning to more easily express his aggression in his everyday life.

The material was becoming more conflict-laden, and my interpretations were focused on his wishes for, and defenses against, his assertiveness and aggression. He dreamt he was playing tennis with his father, unable to return the older man's powerful volleys. He then compared their rackets and discovered that his father's was cracked at the top. In discussing his associations to this dream, Seth recognized his competitive feelings and aggressive wishes to "crack" his father (though less consciously to "crack" his analyst). His aggression was palpable as he spoke of feeling he had been a "mechanical man" for so long, surviving by "swallowing his emotions."

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We soon could discuss his fascination with Hannibal Lechter as a compromise function reflecting both his terror of being cannibalized in his maleness and his desire to be the devouring male figure himself. A major change in the nature of our work was under way. Seth began to challenge and even chastise me, often rather playfully, about my fees, my schedule, and ultimately my limitations and "cracks." For instance, on several occasions he would say something like, "So when already are you going to offer something brilliant and incisive, a Hannibal Lechter-like statement that ties everything together?"

Toward the end of our work together, Seth brought in a series of dreams involving urinals. In one dream, despite feeling uncomfortably exposed, he was using an unusually shaped public urinal, an expression of his long-standing desire to freely urinate in public. At an adjacent urinal, a very masculine man who had been squatting like a woman, aggressively stood up and shouted, "I am a man!" Seth then assertively and freely pissed into a urinal that no longer seemed so oddly shaped.

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gular relations. It involves a complex process that I will discuss in depth beginning in the next section.

In analyzing the dream, Seth reflected on his growing comfort with his maleness, including his aggressive feelings. He understood that his pissing in the urinal had felt like an attack on other men, and in recognizing the extent of his inhibited aggression, he wondered aloud, “What the hell is so bad anyway about *wanting* to win the pissing contests!” Seth was integrating what had been split apart—in other words, the “woman” inside him could begin to coexist alongside the emerging “man.” Seth was increasingly able to “play” his mother’s piano, feel his sadness, and still display his “piss and vinegar” (i.e., express his manliness and aggression in the world around him).

In summation, this material illustrates how a young man often requires extensive support in integrating his earliest identifications with each parent (though of course, a parent’s impact on the child goes well beyond the issue of identification). For Seth, these identifications caused him difficulty not so much because he failed to *disidentify* from his mother or *counteridentify* with his father, but rather because of the nature of the particular identifications that he unconsciously carried forward—identifications that reflected problematic gendered attitudes and beliefs.

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His father did not offer his son an object to identify with, who as a “genital” father could locate maleness within the matrix of relationship, modulated aggressive and loving affect, and a stable emotional connection to women. Seth’s inhibited aggression toward his desperately needed father rendered him submissive, since he so lacked his father’s mentorship in the realm of instinct and emotion. Without an available and mature father, Seth grew up feeling as if he were left stranded. He couldn’t identify with a healthy adult (i.e., mature) man, and was at a loss to understand how he could find his maleness in relation to his mother. Moreover, his mother’s unconscious limitations in recognizing and sanctioning her boy’s maleness complicated the loss. As a result, Seth predictably created a rigid, either/or version of masculinity whereby he had to repudiate ferociously every emotional “feminine” quality, including his feelings for his mother, in order to feel “masculine.” No wonder he idealized Hannibal Lechter—the impenetrable man.

Seth would need considerable analytic help in establishing an internal cease-fire and an ongoing dialogue between his gendered internal objects. As his inner battle lessened, Seth found that both his masculine and his feminine sides were available rather than forbidden; thus, he could appreciate his maleness in its essential emotional and nongendered diversity.

## MALE GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The case of Seth helps clarify the internalization processes involved in each boy's unique struggle to differentiate from his mother. The boy's separation from the world of his mother is a complex process involving the interaction of biological and psychosocial factors. This is evident, for instance when, at around the age of three, boys experience a momentous psychophysiological alteration caused by their body's maturation that drives newly intense genital sensations. This arrival of sexuality is quite disruptive, in part because it also represents the loss of innocence in the boy's relationship with his mother. Bollas (2000) calls this "the death of infancy" (p. 15) wherein the little boy experiences his own sexuality as destroying both his own and his mother's innocence. The "mother-as-comforter" becomes the "mother-as-sex-object," and this loss results in considerable intrapsychic conflict, elaboration, and defense.

Regarding the formation of male gender identity, my ideas depart from Greenson's prevailing normative model (1968), in which infant boys develop in a feminine direction. To achieve a secure masculine gender identity, according to this model, boys must disidentify with their mothers, repudiate their feminine identifications, and counter-identify with their fathers. Against this model, however, and drawing on Fast's seminal work (1984, 1990, 1999), I suggest that this forceful splitting is both theoretically and clinically problematic, as well as ultimately indicative of substantial psychopathology.

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### *The Problem with Disidentification*

There is abundant evidence that little boys do tend to move away physically from their mothers and toward their fathers (or surrogates) to establish themselves as "boys" among males (Stoller 1964, 1976; Abelin 1975; Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975; Gilmore 1990; see also Freud 1921). How do we understand this psychoanalytically? Is this "moving away" a prerequisite for a male's psychological development? (Some cross-cultural data suggest otherwise.) More to the point, is it necessary for a boy to create a mental barrier against his desire to maintain closeness with his mother?

To answer these questions, let's consider masculinity in the clinical sphere, where we frequently encounter patients with conflicted, fragile, and damaged masculine self-images. Traditionally, these internal

conditions are understood as expressions of “too little” or “too much” masculinity. Boys or men with too little masculinity are looked upon as passive, nonphallic characters largely under the sway of the negative oedipus complex. In contrast, those with too much masculinity tend to be defensively counteridentified from their mothers, often evidencing a heightened phallic narcissism. However, when we look more closely at a young man like Seth, we see evidence of both too little masculinity in his overt passivity and inhibited aggression, and too much masculinity in his phallic insistence on staving off emotional experience and his terror of being penetrated (as by other men’s eyes in public urinals). In short, the clinical picture is far more muddled than prevailing clinical notions of masculinity might suggest.

It is noteworthy that Greenson’s formulation of disidentification (1968; see also 1966) emerged from his work with Stoller in studying transsexuals (Stoller 1964, 1965, 1968). To support his thesis, Greenson (1968) presented the case of Lance, a “transsexual-transvestite five-and-a-half-year-old boy” whose mother “hated and disrespected her husband and men in general,” while his father “was absent . . . and had little if any pleasurable contact with the boy” (pp. 371–372). Employing this clinical material, 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 (p. 372). Soon thereafter, analysts eager to better understand men adopted the Greenson-Stoller hypothesis and made it the most important clinical application of preoedipal theory in the treatment of men.

#### ***What Disidentification Actually Reflects***

The pathological systems in which Lance and Seth were enmeshed are characteristic of families unable to triangulate successfully. Drawing on Abelin’s observations (1971, 1975, 1980) and expanding on the ideas of Fast (1984, 1990) and Axelrod (1997), I would argue that early triangulation is set in motion by (1) mothers who are severely misattuned to the individuation needs of their young sons; (2) fathers who are either weak and unavailable or misogynist themselves; (3) a parental couple prone to splitting; or (4) the child’s own biological constitution, temperament, and drive endowment, particularly with respect to what neuroscientists refer to as “brain and bodily masculinization” (Panksepp 1998) and what psychoanalysts broadly term “merger proneness.”



Under any or all of these circumstances, early gender identity development takes on the quality of a conflict or struggle, as Greenson suggests, and the little boy will tend to internalize the father's (and the mother's) contemptuous, devaluing attitude toward women. When this defensively based disidentification (and counteridentification) occurs, a pathologically phallic rigidity commonly results. Thus, a kind of zero sum game operates in which masculinity requires that femininity be relinquished. Engaging in the defenses of denial and disavowal of maternal identifications, the young boy attempts to expel from consciousness early identifications typically grounded in more pathological triangular relations.

What has recently been termed *femiphobia*—an unconscious hatred and dread of the part of the self that is experienced as feminine—often ensues (see Ducat 2004). In other words, the male's repudiation of his "feminine" self signals a failure in optimal development and is evident in a defensively phallic organization that denies a man's "procreative capacity and nurturing possibilities" (Fast 1984, p. 73).

### **Revising Boys Turning Away from Their Mothers**

In contrast, under "good enough" conditions, the boy's turning away from his mother is transitional (Diamond 1998; Fast 1999). This transitional turning away from the mother helps the boy to differentiate and separate from his primary external object. However, this is not the same as "disidentifying" from his *internal* maternal object. In fact, the boy's particular experience of loss actually facilitates his internalization of key aspects of his relationship with his mother.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, these crucial and lasting early maternal identifications evolve directly from the separation-differentiation process; as Fonagy (2001) argues in bringing attachment research into psychoanalytic focus, a boy's secure sense of masculine identity develops from the quality of the boy-to-mother attachment (not their separation). Attachment theorists refer to this as *attachment-individuation* rather than *separation-individuation* (see Lyons-Ruth 1991).

<sup>6</sup>Identification, the most mature level of internalization central to the child's basic sense of self, occurs when there is a disruption of sufficiently gratifying emotional ties to a primary other (Loewald 1962). Such internalization builds psychic structure as "the child reaches out to take back . . . what has been removed from him" (Loewald 1962, p. 496). Through the internalization process, renounced external objects, such as the mother the boy turns away from, become internal objects as the internal relationship becomes substituted for an external one.

*Disidentification* is a perplexing term, actually a misnomer, because early identifications are never simply removed or repudiated in the unconscious, once and for all (if they were, there would surely be less need for psychoanalysis). Rather, the boy's early identifications with his mother and father remain significant in his psychic structure; typically they become more accessible as he matures (see Diamond 2004a) and come to play a more active and conscious role.

In healthier, more normative forms of early gender identity development, progressive differentiation rather than opposition predominates, enabling masculinity to be founded on a reciprocal identification with an available father (or surrogate), a mother who is able to recognize and affirm her son's maleness, and a parental couple who together are able to acknowledge and love their son.

### ***The Involved Father***

Freud (1921) first observed that the father plays an important role in the establishment of his son's gender identity within the early triadic relationship. In the little boy's turning away from his mother and experiencing loss, an available preoedipal father tempers his son's defensive tendency to disengage forcefully from her, while also providing a conventional focus for masculine identification (Diamond 1998, 2004b). The boy who is able to achieve a reciprocal identification with an available, loving father who possesses a body and genitalia like his own is provided a foundation for a more secure (and often more varied) gendered expression of the self. This affirming, mutual bond with the father—who is like the boy but who remains independent and outside the boy's control—facilitates his son's integration of maternal-feminine identifications.

At around age three, even as they turn toward the world of their father, boys face another loss in relation to their mother. As I have noted, they begin to experience her in a new way, in a sexual manner, in addition to her accustomed role as maternal nurturer. Preoedipal splitting occurs and the boy feels he has two mothers (and two selves)—one that is pregenital and one that is genital. Conflict then emerges as to which mother he desires, the evocative sexual one or the comforting nurturer, and temporary refuge from this conflict is sought. A way to achieve this is by putting the conflict outside the mother-child relation, setting up the father as "the second other" (Greenspan 1982) and thus the one to blame. By standing for sexuality in the boy's unconscious,

the father is blamed for breaking the bliss of ignorance and turning it into the sin of sexual knowledge. The father is consequently called on to accept this potentially adaptive projection and to bear his child's hatred toward the outside-the-mother world that fathers represent (see Bollas 2000). When a father fails to metabolize this projection and provide a healthy preoedipal "genital" object for identification, the little boy, in an "hysteric" effort to resolve his conflict, seeks a return to the mother through desexualizing both the self and the mother. As Bollas observes, by idealizing her nonsexual characteristics, he turns her into a Madonna mother, and the self into a sexual innocent ("a perfect little boy"). Without the father's containing presence to keep him linked in the boy's mind to his mother, an opposition can form between love and sexuality that encourages the boy's viewing sexuality as a form of separation from maternal-like love.

Through the boy's relationship with a father (or father surrogate) whom he admires, and who interacts with and mentors him in a caring way, in part through bearing such projections, the boy is able to internalize a paternal imago in which the active and penetrating aspects and the receptive and caretaking qualities of the father's parenting become a foundation for healthy and fluid masculine gender identity. In other words, a father who represents genital masculinity, whose adaptive phallic strivings are integrated with his more relationally oriented, connected, and nurturing masculine qualities, helps set the stage for his son's healthy sense of maleness.<sup>7</sup>

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### ***The Parental Couple***

The boy's internalization of this healthy genital father imago also depends on the nature of the father's relationship with the mother, and hers with the father. As her son initially engages in differentiating from her, the "good enough" mother often continues to experience dramatic

<sup>7</sup>A problematic legacy of classical Freudian oedipal theory is a tendency by some analysts to discuss the son's desire for his father primarily in "negative" oedipal terms—specifically as the "negative" or "inverted" oedipal constellation. This is a regrettable interpretation of Freud, who wrote of the boy's early love for his father and the ubiquity of psychic bisexuality, as instanced by Seth's homoerotic identificatory love for me as his analyst-father (see Freud 1925). In furthering Freud's insights, several post-Freudian analysts have incisively conceptualized the dyadic, early father-son relationship and the triangular dynamics of the rapprochement phase wherein both parents need to contain and manage their own separation issues and competitive, envious feelings (see, e.g., Abelin 1971, 1975, 1980; Blos 1985; Benjamin 1988, 1991).

shifts in her libidinal life. These libidinal changes typically begin during pregnancy and persist early on, when her primary maternal preoccupation and attunement to her baby are dominant (Winnicott 1956). For that reason, a father is frequently called upon to invite his wife to return to their conjugal relationship so that she learns to divide her focus between the maternal and spousal parts of herself. Herzog (2005b) contends that the mother may need her husband to maintain the sexual component of “spousing and caregiving,” particularly in the face of her wishes that her husband remain “the nonsexual man who can entertain the child” (p. 66).

By drawing his wife back to him in the context of his engaged fathering, the father protects the marriage’s adult sexuality and intimacy while facilitating his son’s efforts to differentiate from his primary object. Through firm yet sensitive efforts to restore the couple’s suspended sexuality, the father uses his manliness to strengthen his connection with his wife and to provide his son an object of identification able to locate maleness within the matrix of intimate relationship. Winnicott (1964) asserted that this sexual bond between parents provides the child “a rock to which he can cling and against which he can kick” (p. 115).

In this fashion, a father helps his son to recognize the link joining his parents together and thereby establishes “triangular space” (Britton 1989). By being both a caring father to his son and an exciting lover to his wife, he offers each a dyadic relationship with him that is parallel to and competing with the mother-son dyad (Campbell 1995; Diamond 1998). In reclaiming his wife and son, the relating man supplies a vital anchor for both his child and his partner. Accordingly, the boy is better able to represent himself with his mother, his father, and with mother and father together. In being jointly regarded by his parents rather than individually appropriated by either for their unconscious need fulfillment, preoedipal triadic reality becomes a prerequisite for the favorable regulation of the oedipal phase (Herzog 2005a).

In contrast, when the father is unable to join with his wife to facilitate his son’s internalization of triadic reality, the boy’s identification with his mother becomes problematic and negatively affects his masculine gender identity. This is evident in some boys’ more hysterical and perverse reactions to the prospect of separating from their mother; disavowing their own and their mother’s sexuality, they unconsciously remain in the position of the little boy with his presexual mother. These

boys manifest profoundly shame-based defensive configurations reflecting a tenuous sense of masculinity.

***The Attuned Mother***

The significance of the boy's relationship with his mother needs to be underscored. A mother's recognition and affirmation of her son's maleness helps him to progressively differentiate from her rather than establish his sense of masculinity in violent opposition to her femaleness.

By recognition and affirmation of his maleness, I am referring to the mother's capacity to support her son's journey toward the world of his father—the world of males. A mother who is able to contain her own separation anxieties and fears of loss, as well as her envy of the budding son-to-father connection, is better able to support her dyadic relationship with her child. Needless to say, the mother's oedipal dynamics are crucial, for she must to be able to modulate her own competitive impulses as they emerge during this early period of triangulation. A son who is not supported by his mother when he is turning outward from her tends to internalize a particular identification with her—one that in effect opposes his "phallic" forays toward his father and the external world. This problematic identification then operates to impede a boy's healthy aggression, competition, mastery, and authority—as if these qualities would themselves represent an attack on the mother. We see the outcome of a boy's unconscious identification with a competitive, envious, and possibly misandryous mother in our male patients who become attacking and even envious toward their own healthy, assertive, more phallic-like qualities.

So, to be more precise, a little boy especially identifies with the sense of his mother relating to him as a male person, and the ensuing internalizations continuously affect his felt masculinity. The mother's unconscious limitation in recognizing and sanctioning her boy's maleness, as well as her husband's fatherliness—a limitation evident in the case of Seth and in Greenson's case of Lance—establishes a more pathological maternal identification for her son.

***The Little Boy's Maternal Identifications: The Father in the Mother***

The mother's endorsing her son as a male person tends to operate more unconsciously, and her boy identifies with these unconscious attitudes—what Ogden (1989) calls the paradox of "masculinity-in-femininity." In other words, 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. Because of her identification with her own securely established internal oedipal father, the mother is able to bring the phallic/genital father to the emerging triadic relationship with her son. The unconscious father, or male, in the mother (or in the female analyst) is very much a part of her son's (or patient's) maternal identification. Mothers deficient in this internal object father place their sons in a precarious position from which to psychologically elaborate both their masculinity and their oedipus complex.

The boy's sense of masculinity is strongly affected by his mother's feelings about his physicality, sensuality, and temperament, as well as by her endorsement of the father's paternal authority. Little boys lacking in this largely unconscious, intersubjective recognition of their maleness establish a highly conflictual internalization of their mothers. For these boys, particularly when their fathers are emotionally or physically absent, defensive phallicity or phallic narcissism becomes psychically urgent. In "narcissistically valorizing the penis" (Braunschweig and Fain 1993), they tend to employ the phallus as a defense and compensate by relying on narcissistic pathology, often featuring perverse sexuality (see Herzog 2004).

When these problematic early identifications occur, a phallic ego ideal and more severe forms of gender splitting are relied on to manage the uncontained anxieties arising in such a relational matrix. Such arrested phallicism, marked by a partition in the bodily experience of the sensual from the sexual, operates to stave off intimacy (Bollas 2000; Elise 2001). One such patient of mine, a thirty-something man whose father abandoned the family and whose mother was "burdened" by her son's maleness, spent month after month in therapy recounting his daily sexual conquests while attributing his "successes" to the enormous size of his penis and his gigantic, Mensa-worthy mind. Interestingly, analytic work could truly deepen only when, to his great shock, he found himself romantically involved with a transsexual partner; at that point he was forced to examine his defensively constructed, highly fragile sense of masculinity. Indeed, it is characteristic of the phallicentric male to operate defensively, as if his phallus is all he has to make him masculine.

## **THE GENDERED NATURE OF THE MALE'S EGO IDEAL**

How can we understand the shaping of the boy's ego ideal along gendered lines? To put it more colloquially, why is the "male ego" so important for men? The gendered nature of the masculine ego ideal is founded on the boy's distinctive struggles during the initial stages of gender differentiation—a struggle requiring the little boy to adapt to a significant disruption in relation to his mother. It is the boy's gendered ego ideal that helps him heal what he experiences as an abrupt, rather traumatic sense of loss during his struggle to separate from her.

### ***How Do Boys Compare with Girls?***

To better grasp this idea, I will briefly contrast boys with girls at the time of their initial gender differentiation during the second or third year. Young boys tend to be less mature cognitively and emotionally than little girls. There is typically another developmental asymmetry, in that little boys are pressured to renounce gender-inconsistent traits far more than young girls are. In fact, by age six, boys experience considerably less gender constancy (i.e., the feeling that one remains the same gender regardless of changes in appearance, affect, or behavior) than do little girls (see Fast 1984; Hansell 1998).

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Taboos against cross-gender behavior tend to be enforced much more brutally by parents, peers, and society generally when it is exhibited by boys (see Maccoby 1998). There are also greater prohibitions against early homoerotic attachments and homosexuality for boys; as they mature, boys show considerable inhibition against reexperiencing their early maternal erotic attachment (we saw this with Seth). Moreover, due to heightened shame associated with homoeroticism and father hunger, boys also have difficulty with their father-directed erotic desires. Unlike girls, boys are inescapably called upon to safely negotiate a passage through the dangers of this "traumatic discovery of otherness" (Ogden 1989). Boys do not grow up experiencing themselves as masculine by dint of being male; masculinity has to be won and, typically, proven repeatedly.

### ***The Boy's Separation "Trauma" and the Male's Sense of Shame***

Psychoanalysts have cast the boy's experience of separating from his mother's world as his initial preoedipal crisis, or "trauma," conceptualizing it along more traditional, metapsychological lines, emphasizing

the loss of an ideal state of primary narcissism and unity with his primary object, or in relational terms that emphasize an interpersonal rupture resulting from the boy's premature loss or repudiation of his sense of connection to his mother. However it is conceptualized, the boy must adapt to the loss just as he is realizing that he is sexually different from his mother. Thus, this loss occurs as he realizes that he can neither be the mother nor be of her female gender; Lax (1997) regards this as the bedrock trauma for males, "a painful narcissistic mortification . . . that may have lifelong consequences" (p. 118).

The boy not only loses a large part of his primary dyadic connection, but he is also pressured to repudiate what he has lost. Normative socialization for males relies heavily on the aversive power of shame to shape acceptable male behavior. The gender-related issue of being independent from his mother—rather than a "momma's boy," "tied to her apron strings," or a "pussy, sissy, or faggot"—reinforces his need to conform. Owing to this societally enforced separation from the mother-orbit, the young boy is culturally prohibited from knowing or valuing his loss and coerced to deny his need for his mother. He may feel emotionally abandoned without being aware of it (see Pollack, 1998), while experiencing his identification with his mother as shameful. This is most often manifest in defensive efforts against neediness. As Elise (2001) contends, males can embody impenetrable citadels in an effort to stave off shame states that are not so easily metabolized.

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### ***Phallic Narcissism and Maturing Masculinity***

As Freud indicated, phallic narcissism begins as a natural, adaptive process to mitigate the small boy's experience of loss and envy. 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 1976, 1984, 1985; Manninen 1992, 1993).

The phallus partially represents the lost breast as the boy's penis replaces the breast as the superior organ. In turn, the boy's breast envy is relegated to the deeper unconscious (Lax 1997). The little boy omnipotently forms the adaptive and defensive illusion of "the supremacy of his own masculine equipment" (Manninen 1992, p. 25), and the phallus, initially employed to assuage the boy's differentiation anxieties, becomes the symbol of invulnerability—a permanently erect monolith of mascu-



line omnipotence (Ducat 2004)—manically defending against the depressive dangers of an all-too-separate but still needed maternal object. In short, phallic monism—the belief that the penis is *the* sexual organ—comes to guard against any recognition of lack or deficiency.

The masculine, phallic ego ideal is thus based on the boy's unconscious denial of differentiation in the service of his grandiose wish to maintain the unlimited possibility inherent in the omnipotent, idealized union with his maternal object. The seminal issue for most men is how this early, preoedipal phallic narcissism and phallic omnipotence is integrated into an ongoing and evolving sense of masculinity (Diamond 2004a). However, for some men without an opportunity for a maturing ego ideal that integrates the phallic ego ideal with the genital ego ideal (represented by the internalized "genital" father), phallicism in the form of a hypermasculine, phallic image of manhood becomes psychically urgent in order to achieve the missing psychic cohesion. Phallic behavior becomes largely compensatory and constitutes a narcissistic end in itself, as in the constant urge to assert oneself impressively, rather than serve more creative purposes (Schalin 1989). In short, when things do go awry, the phallic ego ideal becomes needed in order to manage narcissistic anxieties arising in the complex reality of gender differentiation. True differentiation is denied, while penetration offers the promise of transcendence of vulnerability, limitation, and dependence. Under these circumstances, phallic masculinity is arrested, the phallic ego ideal dominates, and the sense of phallic urgency is paramount.

This arrested phallic narcissism or defensive phallicity (in contrast to a more adaptive phallicity with its suitable penile pride that fuels creative, purposeful activity in childhood and young adulthood) ultimately becomes a persistent obstacle to young adult and midlife growth and development and is evident in the fragmentation anxieties and sense of shame that are evoked whenever a stable masculine identity cannot be maintained.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>In rethinking masculinity, I stress the importance of healthy, adaptive phallicism in contrast to arrested phallicism in the male's expression of self (see Diamond 1997, 1998, 2004a). Healthy phallicism is based primarily on what classical psychoanalysis refers to as neutralization, sublimation, and integration of the grandiose strivings of phallic-narcissism or exhibitionism, as well as phallic omnipotence during the oedipal phase (Edgcombe and Burgner 1975; Schalin 1983). This phallic development occurs mainly because of involved, good enough fathering (or surrogate fathering) during a boy's oedipal and latency years. Other analysts have also distinguished the healthy, adaptive form of phallic narcissism

## **TRANSFORMING MASCULINITY IN THE COURSE OF MALE DEVELOPMENT**

The relationship between the phallic and the genital features of a man's masculinity is continually being reworked, evoking distinct challenges at key developmental junctures. These challenges emerge particularly during the oedipal and latency phases, in adolescence and young adulthood, and again in mid- and later life. Though it is beyond my scope here to examine each of these critical junctures, it is pertinent nonetheless to note the main gender identity-related factors operating throughout these other phases (see Freud 1924; Erikson 1963; Blos 1978; Levinson et al. 1978; Schalin 1983; Colarusso 1995; Diamond 1998, 2004a).

For example, during his oedipal phase and latency years, a boy's sense of masculinity is especially impacted by his father's beneficial use of his paternal authority, emotional regulatory capacity (particularly in modulating aggression), and admirable skill in doing things. The boy's sense of his maleness, then, is directly related to his budding ability to express and modulate aggressive and competitive urges, acquire a sense of industry, and attenuate his adaptively needed, but illusory phallic omnipotence. In adolescence, as the boy differentiates from his family in seeking to develop his own identity, his masculinity is considerably influenced by his father's capacity to bear his son's moving away from him (as the boy did earlier with his mother), as well as by the teenage peer group's sanctioning of his masculine identity. Accordingly, by late adolescence and early adulthood, a young man's sense of manhood is directly tied to adult identity formation, especially influenced by his sexual prowess and ability to endure pain. In young adulthood, mentors are crucial as the young man embarks on his "heroic" journey to become his "own man," with lasting intimate relationships in the world outside his family. Thus, during his adult years, he is more likely to appraise his manhood in terms of his career success and ability to provide for his family. Finally, in mid- and later life, undoubtedly related to the diminishment of testosterone, his manliness becomes more flexible, particularly in the course of evaluating the success of his generativity and, most likely, fatherliness.

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from the pathologically defensive type, especially by emphasizing the importance of the bodily component in the desire to penetrate (see Schalin 1989; Corbett 2003).

### ***The Maturing Male Ego Ideal***

The man who is able to develop a maturing ego ideal that integrates the phallic ego ideal with the genital ego ideal (represented by the internalized, involved, and loving “genital” father) is freed from reliance on the bifurcated, “phallicized” manhood that plays such an important and beneficial role in his childhood, adolescent, and young adult adaptations. Thus, the achievement of a mature sense of masculine identity is dependent on the adequate negotiation of a shifting balance between the phallic ego ideal and the genital ego ideal throughout the life cycle.

In early adulthood, men attempt to live up to idealized notions of what it is to be a man. Thus, young adult men are typically dominated by the phallic ego ideal characterized by the “heroic illusion” (see Levinson et al. 1978), though increasingly they need to invoke a more genital ego ideal in striving to establish lasting, intimate relationships. If all goes well enough, there is an increased reality orientation—grandiosity lessens, a sense of otherness and empathy increases, and maturing adulthood is on course.

Developmental achievements in the area of work, intimacy, and fathering or mentoring typically precede the impact of aging in stimulating the reshaping of the masculine ego ideal. The maturing man’s task then is to integrate the various phallic and genital aspects of his inner world in order to achieve what might be termed the “mature” or “true” genital position, or genital masculinity, where phallic propensities are used in the service of reality. The maturing man is forced to deal with “the necessity of growing small” (Manninen 1992, p. 23) in order to become whole—less grandiose, omnipotent, phallic. As a result, the ego ideal can become less sharply gendered, a more balanced yet fluid masculinity is attained, and the ideals previously associated with becoming a man give way to those associated with becoming a person.

By midlife, a man’s changing masculinity optimally weighs the perpetual male struggle along “genital” lines as, depending on the context, his divergent identifications can be adaptively and more flexibly activated (see Meissner 2005). In brief, the pleasures of receptivity, being, experiencing, and understanding frequently come to take precedence over the excitement of striving and reaching, and priority is given to insight, connection, and nurturance. Unless a pathological upsurge of defensive phallicity occurs whereby the aging man persists in defining himself by conquest and aggression, this is a time when

affiliation, a deepening of eros, and a greater appreciation of the preciousness of life can take center stage.

**A New Experience of Masculinity**

By reworking the relationship between the phallic and the genital features of masculinity through life experience or through the psychoanalytic treatment process, many men are able to achieve a new experience of their masculinity. The need for a clearly defined, well-bounded masculinity lessens, and the mature man is freed from reliance on the bifurcated, “phallicized” manhood that was so adaptive earlier in life. This transformed male ego ideal can be heard in Walt Whitman’s timeless ode to the fluid interiority of a more fully realized manhood:

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,  
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,  
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man.

[*Leaves of Grass*, 16:326–328]

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