



Presentation:

An examination of the issue of gender identity formation in the child and adolescent goes in several different directions in the tenth volume of the series.

In the first chapter we can find an introduction to the issue of sexual life of children from a psychoanalytical point of view. We start from Freud and his first theories on several central issues, like child masturbation, the Oedipal complex and bisexuality. The recognition of the existence of the child's sexual life has changed the way we look at childhood, no longer considered an age of innocence, but identified as an evolutionary phase guided by very powerful urges and affections.

From the beginning, we wonder which original concepts and definitions are still valid, and we examine how these concepts have been modified over time, enriched and deepened by the psychoanalysts of following generations. Finally, we propose a reflection from nowadays on the meaning of the child's sex life for what concerns the development of the individual. The formation of gender identity, that is the psychological feeling of belonging to a sexual gender, is part of the future of a mature individual.

In the second chapter we demonstrate how from the first phases of development, the baby goes through phases of fusion and identification to the point of developing a separate identity, opening up simultaneously to the reflections on the contribution of the father and the mother in this process. A direct experience within the framework of two institutions for assistance to difficult adolescents brings the author to underline that the thrust to return to the fusion relationship never gets entirely left out during one's life span and it is felt with more strength within institutions and big groups of people.

These are institutions that we find out to be very interesting for showing up examples of primitive gender stereotypes that mark the earlier phases of development, and that within these situations, are sometimes completely and rigidly applied. The process of acquiring gender identity happens in a parallel way with the development of the stable sense of Self, which during adolescence, predicts a kind of revision and integration of earlier identity patterns, allowing the introjection of masculine and feminine aspects.

In the third chapter, starting from the concept of gender identity (put more generally, identity as a result of interaction between intra-psychic, inter-subjective, trans-generational, social and cultural elements) the authors show how there is in each human being a profound dimension, not exclusively a biological one, not exclusively a cultural one, that unconsciously guides the relationships with oneself and with the others, and that is mainly identified with as the unconscious phantasy.

Within this framework, in the third chapter we confront the possibility of offering an occasion to children and adolescents of the gender variant category, and to their parents. This is an occasion for improvisation within the relationship with the other, which focuses on the possibility of going beyond reality and beyond the present tense. In this way, we can access, indeed through the exploration of the phantasy, that which is not possible to realize or that which cannot be realized: this has the function of helping the parents to accept the possibility that their child is different from how they imagined him/her, even the possibility that he/she is completely different.

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