

Forum on psychoanalytical ethics.

Illusions and disillusion about gender during adolescence

Abstract

Mette Hvalstad & Siri Erika Gullestad

The panel, presenting four different cases illustrating diverse gender-developmental trajectories, highlights the need for multifactorial models considering biology, culture, societal norms as well as unconscious psychological dynamics. While emphasizing that gender identities not only arise in puberty but may be experienced as “given” from childhood, the panel discusses challenges faced by psychoanalysts confronted by transgender people seeking help in a quickly changing and highly polarized cultural environment. Today, psychoanalysis struggles to integrate rapidly developing ideas of gender identity, sex, and sexuality without falling back on normative models. Psychoanalysts need to be reminded of Freud’s words: “In every female all the secondary male characters, and in every male all the secondary female characters, apparently exist in a latent state, ready to evolve”. The panel discusses the risk of holding on to a biological binary model of sex and a dogmatic understanding of the oedipal complex as well as the danger of pathologizing transgender patients. Our presentations underscore that confronting the clinical and theoretical challenge of gender diversity and – fluidity has the potential to be creative for our field and for those we try to help.