

Towards an Ethics of Sexual Differences

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ABSTRACT. – The author analyzes the origin and meaning of the expression ‘Ethics of Sexual Difference’ (ESD), contextualising it in the paradigm ‘Thought of Sexual Difference’, in which the potentiality and aporias arising from the debate within the feminist movement are highlighted. Possible interpretations of these ethics, developed in the Italian philosophical context, are illustrated and evaluated. The author proposes a critical comparison with other models, for example, the *queer theories*, and attempts to show how the ‘Thought of Sexual Difference’ (TSD) opens itself to destabilization produced by the emergence of new subjects (gay and lesbian, transgender, intersex) and their corresponding scientific knowledge. The author therefore proposes an update to the plural, ‘Ethics of Sexual Difference’ (ESDs), listing the possible methodological and content assumptions (including the development of a relational model in all scientific disciplines) and the disciplinary implications (also in the psychoanalytic field) of an ethics so defined. A reference is made to the discussion of so-called *gender ideology*, in which the protagonists have often showed a certain difficulty in implementing an ethics of differences.

Keywords: Sexual difference, ethics, gender studies, feminism, nature-nurture debate.

Ethics of sexual difference: origin and meaning of the terms

The expression ‘Ethics of Sexual Difference’ (ESD) and the related concept anticipated by Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir is usually associated with Luce Irigaray’s 1985 work with the same title (Italian translation 1987). Irigaray, with Juliet Mitchell (1976), directed radical criticism towards the psychoanalytic thought of Freud and Lacan (cf. Irigaray, 1976; De Carneri, 2019). Her work occupies a place in so-called ‘Thought of Sexual Difference’ (TSD) from which we will now trace a set of parameters. Regarding feminist ethics, where one current is centred on the theme of

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emancipation, and one is based on an appreciation of female specificity (Guaraldo, 2008, p. 87), ESD belongs to the latter, and is associated in turn with Gilligan's *Ethics of Care* (1987), according to which women and men develop moral reasoning differently in relation to the method and content (Guaraldo, 2008, p. 89). The presumed *specificity* of the female is, moreover, one of the salient features of TSD. In fact, in her work, Irigaray (1987) denounces the reduction of the feminine to the masculine, where the feminine is considered relative to the masculine.

In Irigaray's work (1987), ESD mirrors and at the same time delves deeper into the already forming TSD; it assumes a respect for the feminine, and the need to allow women to tell their story, and to build feminine sociality and community where self-love may be learnt (through mother-daughter relationships and relationships among women). TSD's aim is not homologation with the masculine – even if TSD does not reject the social achievements in terms of equal access to resources (Tommasi, 2019; cf. Diotima, 1987) – but “arises from women's need to freely seek expression, political practice, actions faithful to their desires” (Zamboni, 2015) and bodies. It is animated by a *passion for sexual difference: born out of the individual experience of each woman* who expresses her point of view, embodied and sexed, on the world. According to TSD female supporters, women have a specificity regarding the intellectual mechanism - due to the nature of their bodies and in particular to the experience of pregnancy (Zanardo, 2014) – and this implies the development of a knowledge, a language and discourse from *two subjects*, masculine and feminine, without forgoing the latter for the sake of the former. TSD refutes equality between men and women because TSD moves from the premise that irreducible bodies exist on which irreducible identities depend; a primary ontological difference with respect to any abstract elaboration. Thus, ESD implies the respect relating to the specificity and reciprocity of two genders, which means *making room* for the construction of a world belonging to both sexed subjects.

It is useful to remember that TSD has been highly debated, also in light of the evolution of feminist thought, as imposed, among many others, by Teresa De Lauretis, Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler (exponents of post-gender thought, or radical feminism, or *queer*, as appropriate). A *first criticism* concerns the excessive emphasis given to specific female qualities, with little consideration of their historical nature and the cultural and performative influence of the dominant language. The criticism is based on claims that TSD has a naive position with respect to language, and symbolic codes; TSD talks of *nature* without problematizing the concept (Zamboni, 2015); it posits a woman's natural identity – yet continues to deny its universality – which should be consequent upon her body. At the same time, De Lauretis and Butler stress that each body (and its desire, or its gender identity) has its own unobjectifiable specificity, to the point of arguing that

there are no *natural identities*, but rather *naturalized* historical identities; there are, therefore, *majority*, but not universal, female specificities. Even in Butler's analysis, however, the relationship between biological body and gender identity remains unexplained: the former is unavoidable *as well as* it is culturally constructed by *gender* through its performativity.

To sum up, if TSD prefers to counterpose (reciprocally) a male identity with a female one, in *queer* thinking, as it has been variously formulated, the idea that there is a typical female identity applicable to multiple subjects is abolished. Besides, nobody would think that there is one way of being male which applies to everyone: we have all experienced the many antithetical ways a male is a man. Why should a female's body be more limiting than the infinite expressivity of male's body?

TSD, however, comprises various more or less radical positions (it is even difficult to know where to place Irigaray herself). If what matters is the *individual woman's* experience, then TSD is open to *queer* thinking, recognizing the unique character of individual experience. This leads to the *second criticism*, which concerns the starting point: the TSD cannot be configured as one unambiguous formulation, since among its assumptions is "no woman can speak for another", because the risk is that she would create an objective theory about woman that the TSD would prefer to avoid (because objectivity is an imposition of the male *logos*). Thus, the TSD "never dictates stable meanings" (Zanardo, 2015, p. 835), but presents this postulate: the difference between men and women exists, the way this is expressed *historically* depends on female subjectivities. There is an "ineradicable but elusive" difference (Zanardo, 2015, p. 836): female thinkers who identify with TSD believe that "the body is largely unaware, so our experience of the body cannot be objectified".² The experience is elusive even though the difference between man and woman exists and shows itself in a clear, ineradicable way.

However, elusiveness is such a corrosive element that it places TSD in line with the *crisis of reason* and the universal knowledge, which determined the "departure from the models of rationality" of western tradition (Coli, 2002, p. 47). This is due to the fact that, by rejecting the codification of a *universal Woman*, our thinking begins to wander, it becomes asystematic, closer to subjectivity than to universality. Thus, it appears as a practice, without a Feminine Absolute which would fall back "into a new crystallization of thought" (Coli, 2002, p. 48). Characteristic of women's thought, then, "is to be far from the arrogance and the presumption of being able to represent the absolutes of reason [...] because it is aware of the complexity

¹Cf. Cavarero, 2002, pp. 100-105; Lennon, 2014.

²Zamboni, 2015.

and plurality of realities”, accepting destabilization, “which always accompanies complexity and multiplicity” (Coli, 2002, p. 52). Bear in mind that the TSD originates from a more general *thought of difference* which, through different forms of nominalism (cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2019), intends to valorize the infinite differences of singularities against the tendency to reduce to One, to the System, to the Identical. On the side of Differences, can be ascribed thinkers such as Scotus, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Deleuze, Derrida. While on the side of the System we find Plato, Aristotle, Thomas, Hegel (to give some emblematic examples).

In this perspective, TSD naturally opens to destabilization that is the product of the emergence of new subjects: gay and lesbian, transgender, intersex. These are bodies that in their own way redefine and disrupt the perimeter of female gender, completing the work of de-binarization initiated by feminist thought. However, as we know, post-gender feminist thought – which arises from these existences and calls into question the alleged naturalness of sex and desire – has often been rejected by TSD supporters, precisely because of what they see as a threat to the existence of a female specificity.

Coli, on the other hand, sees a form of ESD in the “recognition that the other man or woman, black or white, Catholic or Muslim, is different from me, accepting that their right to exist [...] opens the way to a great possibility of coexistence for *all forms of difference*” (Coli, 2002, p. 48, italics added). The so called *ethics of care* is clearly different: where a definition of the female essence is difficult or undesirable, the ethics of care tends to re-propose stereotypes about abstract entities with fixed characteristics. In order to avoid this risk, far beyond the “respect for diversity” perspective proposed by Coli, has been proposed an *ethics of vulnerability*, based on a nomadic subject, not holder of his own actions (Guaraldo, 2008, pp. 96-100)³. But it is not possible to illustrate this position here.

Other interpretations in the Italian context

Recently, other interpretations of ESD could be found on the Italian scene. According to Vigna, for example, the ESD is a special case of the ethics of intersubjectivity, which includes “the *general* relationship between men and women inasmuch as they are different genders” (Vigna, 2001, p. 231), recognition of the other as sexed subjectivity (Vigna, 2001, p. 233). Vigna, however, advances an essentialist interpretation of these ethics since, in his opinion, males and females have obvious complementary psychological diversity (and *transcendental diversity*), although they are each in themselves a *totality*, *i.e.*,

³Not the only meaning: cf. Bagnoli, 2016.

they can exist without union with the other sex. The encounter between desiring subjectivities, then, can be *conflictual* (relationship of domination where difference is used as a weapon) or of *mutual recognition* (the difference is fulfilled by mutual giving) (Vigna, 2001, pp. 240-241).

Although Vigna rules out the possibility that ESD is an ethics of sexual behavior, there are elements in his text that suggest this is not the case. For example, he interprets homosexuality as a closure to the opposite sex and as an “extreme of predatory transgression”, as opposed to fertility, which is an “extreme of grateful integration” (Vigna, 2001, p. 247). By contrast, therefore, the ESD becomes an ethics of the heterosexual couple, where the partners recognize themselves as equal in their difference, whatever internal order the couple creates (roles are freely attributed) (Vigna, 2001, pp. 249-253). In Vigna, however, it appears clear that subjects have distinct roles assigned by nature. A dubious position, since it has not been proven that particular attitudes correspond to particular bodies (Migliorini, 2017, pp. 57-61).

For Fanciullacci (2010, p. 9), on the other hand, ESD cannot invent “rules and regulations [...] to manage the couple’s relationship in a morally acceptable way [...]”. Rather, this ethics must be built around the recognition of singularities, with the awareness that “the current crisis of a more or less unitary order of possible answers to the question of difference triggers a multiplication of these answers: men and women exercise more freedom, at least in choosing among the many possibilities, if not in the invention of a trajectory of their own” (Fanciullacci, 2010, pp. 53-54).

According to Boella, difference can become exclusion when it is essentialized as a universal: “Yet, difference is liberating when it no longer signifies an excluding deviance, petrification into one nature and fixed characters, but specificity, variation, heterogeneity” (Boella, 2008, p. 5). As we pointed out, Boella also claimed that the object of ethics is the existence of *women* – not of Woman – a place of multiple, complex, even contradictory experiences (Boella, 2008, p. 5). Boella maintains that, since Irigaray, ESD is the “destruction of the patriarchal order and the reconstruction of the symbolic order in the name of a woman’s freedom to be herself” (Boella, 2008, p. 8). This interpretation is well suited to the finality to which an ESD can aspire for all sexual minorities. It is not a feminist ethics nor does it relate to female morality where these expressions indicate an ethics developed from certain female sensitivities (Boella, 2008, p. 10). In general terms, therefore, “difference is a value. Not only as regards content (virtues, female qualities [...]), but as a form of feeling, thinking and acting, valid for the construction of humans”. An ESD which is “philosophically radical calls for a transformation of oneself, one’s gaze and attitude towards the world: new values emerge from the shadows [...] secular invisibilities of the female world are redeemed” (Boella, 2008, p. 17). This ethics is a fundamental attitude towards all invisibilities, all suffocated existences.

From singular to plural

Sometimes a different interpretation of ESD emerges through the texts, *i.e.*, as a safeguard for heterosexuality and dimorphism, as well as a safeguard for a set of ways of being men and women (gender roles).⁴ Ricci Sindoni, for example, gives voice to the fears of many thinkers (although, under the umbrella term *androgynous*, she is confusing between issues that must be considered separately, such as sexual orientation, gender roles, fashions, hermaphroditism⁵) stressing that, in her view, safeguarding humanity consists of safeguarding the existence of dimorphism, heterosexuality, and the gender roles that result from them both (Ricci Sindoni, 2008, pp. 46-47).

If this fear is the *unsaid* of some authors who reflect on these issues, it is better to be explicit about it. The unconscious fears that lead to producing very confused writing should be made conscious. In line with the concerns expressed by Ricci Sindoni, for example, there is also the recent document of the Congregation for Catholic Education (2019), which sums up the mentality of many publications from this same culture. The document states that *gender culture* (unspecified) would “tend to dismiss the differences between man and woman as being simply the effect of historical-cultural conditioning” (n. 1). The Catholic world, therefore, is concerned that the differences between men and women may be erased. Which differences are being referred to is unclear. They can hardly mean corporeal differences, since these are present at birth and there is no denial of dimorphism in *gender culture*. The reference is probably to a series of attitudes, roles, behaviors (*etc.*) that should belong *naturally* to a woman. *Gender culture* does, in fact, relativize these differences, demonstrating that they are often relative to a particular culture and time period. What feminisms want to achieve is freedom for the individual woman to *express herself in the way she considers appropriate for herself*.

We have seen that even TSD, from which the document draws its lexicon (but stereotyping the contents!), does not push for the identification of universal characteristics, but invites women to find their own unique and unrepeatable existential trajectory. The document underestimates the fact that all philosophical positions in the feminist debate, uphold both the existence of a given body, on the one hand, and the cultural influence exercised on the body, on the other. The mystery of this interaction does not allow for the identification of a *natural* for all women, while admitting that the body is an inescapable factor of influence. *Gender cultures* – the plural is essential

⁴Ricci Sindoni (2008, p. 30) speaks of safeguarding heterosexuality (2008, p. 41).

⁵Ricci Sindoni (p. 25) forgets that the Androgyn myth speaks of love between persons of the same sex. Greek myths are «a comment on every important aspect of life» (Casertano, 2009, p. 21) and the myth in question also talks of homosexuality.

if we want to avoid reducing the plurality of voices to a fetish – affirm the need to create a society in which every person determines how to live their own identity.

The document goes on to argue that *gender culture* “denies the natural difference and reciprocity between men and women” (n. 2). About the term *difference* we said enough: in gender theories the difference between individuals, of which the male-female difference is part, is never denied. Certainly, natural reciprocity – understood as heterosexuality – between man and woman is denied. Refusing *heteronormativity* (the man-woman couple destiny), however, does not mean wanting to erase heterosexuality. A symbolic negation is not a material negation and it is pernicious to confuse them (Migliorini, 2018, pp. 189-193). To date, neither heterosexuality nor dimorphism are threatened by anything. At best, greater visibility is given to some sexual identities since they have only now (re)gained a voice, while remaining percentage minorities. Furthermore, feminisms and LGBT* movements do not question the order of generations (no-one calls for incest!), nor the order of generation (bisexual), although some advocate the widening of the possibilities of filiation (which is *also* social, and conventional).

The biological masculine and feminine, from the point of view of the human species, are ontologically necessary, since the *human form* is embodied in them in order to reproduce itself; or, until now at least it has assumed this reproductive strategy. Recognizing that other healthy sexual identities can love (biological or psychological, or both) can love, is not a threat to the existence of the ontological datum. Of course, some philosophical speculations hypothesize future changes in the human reproductive strategy through technology, where one of the two sexes is no longer required. Here, however, we enter in the field of political *critical theories*, but it seems not to be the case that the problem of the ESD, to date, is to guarantee the existence of dimorphism (as a reproductive strategy) and heterosexuality (or, at least, bisexuality) as its affective correlative. That is, there is no immediate risk of one sex deciding to cancel out the other. Some feminist or so-called *post-humanism* thought has gone as far as to imagine this dystopian future – a humanity made of hybrid human beings, hermaphrodite, synthesis of the two sexes and capable of reproduction – but these are *mental experiments*, used critically to demolish false naturalizations.⁶ They are most definitely not the current claims of women or the LGBT* movements.

Purely speculatively, however, we can ask ourselves whether sexual difference is *essential* for human beings (Vigna, 2008, p. 67). Again, as a pure mental experiment, humanity made of hermaphrodites capable of reproducing themselves would still be fully human. These mental experiments make

⁶For further information: Tripodi, 2011.

our being in this world, in male and female forms (mainly), even more mysterious. The existence of a humanity without males and females, however, is not a problem currently. Today, an ESD should be concerned about what nature *has already offered to thought* over thousands of years: the existence of many natural sexual (physical and psychological) identities, loves and methods of filiation.

TSD feminists stress that sexual difference is the original difference, and the sexual body allows for different male and female experiences (Zanardo, 2010, pp. 163-212). The argument may be acceptable, in preserving its undoubted theoretical and historical merits, if it is extended to and realized for each body, as proposed by the theologian Vantini (2019). After recalling that existential evidence of homosexual love unmasks the illusion of the universal-heterosexual paradigm and of the hetero-centric ordered languages, Vantini maintains that contact with *queer* subjects leads us “to speak, think and act in a new way, with [...] a real respect for the differences between us. In this game of relationships, however, no-one should ever speak to the floor in place of another”. Vantini points out that although sexual difference is fundamental, given that each thought is sexed, the problem “concerns what we understand by this difference”; if we squeeze it on essentialism, without “paying attention to the desires and freedom of real women and men”, we forget that

“the sense of difference, according to Genesis, is in God’s safe keeping. It is not available to human beings who would like to make immediate use of it. The [...] issue of sexual difference does not coincide with the issue of heterosexuality. [...] We cannot call into question sexual difference to reconfirm and safeguard a world of exclusionary practices which insists on pretending not to see the complexity of the biographies”.

Here TSD and *queer* thoughts find convergence (cf. Migliorini, 2020). If we accept that women and men experience different forms of love (*inside themselves, outside themselves ...*), this also applies to other bodies (think of passive homosexuals). It is therefore essential to *safeguard* (allow the full experience) the specificity and survival of each bodily experience. This does not consist in exalting one at the expense of others, but in safeguarding all of them while accepting the fact that, to date, some experiences are predominant.

The experience of the world through sexualization is therefore *fundamental*, and in most cases people experience the world initially from a male or female body; but there are several other bodies and sexual identities that do not come under this binarism (*entium varietates non temere esse minuendas*). What does a transgender person experience during the course of his bodily transition? What does a passive homosexual, or a lesbian woman experience? And intersex people? A heterosexual who sometimes cross

dresses or occasionally practices homosexual behavior, what kind of psychic reality do they encounter, what kind of phenomenological curvature do they give to their encounter with reality?

It should be evident that our position here is akin to that of Boella and Coli's, but without forsaking the human capacity to universalise. The latter has turned out to be too profitable in our millennial study of the world to be abandoned hastily. However, we can and must seek a fair balance between the unsustainable epistemic subjectivism of certain feminist speculation and the equally distorted objectivism of male (and scientific) thought. We have to keep in mind that, when we develop models, systems, universals, the result is always an approximation. The reality and those systems fail to match. The human subject constantly defies categorization, notwithstanding that, within limits, it is possible to describe a subject through universal categories. In the history of thought the *elusiveness* or *uniqueness* of a person with respect to universals has been expressed in various ways: the *incommunicability* of the essence in Thomas; *haecceity* in Scotus; *that single individual* in Kierkegaard; *the Face* in Lévinas; *natality* that creates *plurality* (the roots of politics) in Arendt. The ethics of differences could then concern precisely this awareness, which is epistemic and ethical at the same time.

The shift from the singular, 'Ethics of Sexual Difference' to the plural, 'Ethics of Sexual Differences' is therefore also inevitable for the TSD, given the theoretical premises we have seen. Ethics in the plural, to use Coli's words again, eludes "the ever-present temptation to make the other's essence clearer and more evident in order to align it to ourselves". The other person retains "an invisible part of herself [...] not conformable to our self, given the impossibility of knowing the other definitively and any definition would be unable to convey the uniqueness of what it seeks to define" (Coli, 2002, pp. 56-57).

Fundamentals of an ethics of sexual differences: disciplinary implementations

Can the position outlined above really be an Ethics of *Sexual Differences* (ESDs)? The question is legitimate, since, when speaking of a generic acceptance of a person in her uniqueness, this ethics seems a copy of the ethics of responsibility. How is an ESDs distinguishable from a generic invitation to accept the other? We don't find the difference neither in the method, nor in the content (which varies over time), but in its aim: safeguarding the freedom of sexual minorities. Our reasoning now returns to the dispute, mentioned briefly above, concerning the existence of a feminist ethics. I believe that the latter's specificity is its *purpose*, the liberation of women from discrimination. Feminist ethics seeks to guarantee that

women experience freedom just as a man experiences it. Likewise, the ESDs' goal should be the liberation of sexual minorities in all the areas in which it is implemented.

The ESDs could then be implemented into an 'ethics of ethical production', which means listening to the complexity of situations, medical and psychotherapeutic practices, the variety of theoretical positions (anthropological, philosophical), the complexity of life lived in a thousand psychic forms, which frequently require personalized intervention. This attentive listening is propaedeutic to the formulation of ethical positions. As argued elsewhere, Catholic culture has often made the mistake of constructing ethics on partial scientific or medical data, or on anthropology created from an inaccurate phenomenology based on the partial observation of reality (Migliorini, 2018, pp. 232-243). Ethics cannot be separated from anthropology, which consists precisely in describing *who humans are*, what are their characteristics, but also how they come to be formed (within different cultures). To do this, it is necessary to know *which human beings exist*, how universal *humanity* is realized in the material individuals. Then, it is rational investigation (scientific, but not limited to this) which determines which psycho-physical configurations can be considered *healthy*. This determination, through trial and error, through shifting scientific and cultural boundaries, does not relinquish the essential reference to criteria, which are as objective as possible (cf. Migliorini, 2019). Having established these configurations, we need to explain the transition from a *common nature* to the intrinsic variability of *individual nature*, and how it occurs.

An example of the betrayal of this 'ethics of ethical production' is the recent document of the Congregation for Catholic Education mentioned above. Rather confused and imprecise in mixing concepts and issues,⁷ at times even embarrassing, the document suggests that homosexuality that homosexuality is a radically autonomous individual choice (*sic!*). In many parts, at least in the *listening* and *reasoning* section, the writers seem to have not the slightest idea what they are talking about.

In the determination of an *adequate anthropology*, human sciences and metaphysics come to our aid. Today, in almost all disciplines, the *relational* (non-relativistic) model is prevalent. This model implies a structurally relational view of entities in formation, which include the sexual body and the human identity. It is not a *relationalist* vision in which *everything* is reduced to relationships. Rather, co-primacy of the substantial and relational component is established in the event of a phenomenon. It is the *mystery* of the ontological datum which goes through a relational-existential adventure. In relation to human nature, what can we know about this mystery? Probably

⁷Judgment shared by those who study these topics: cf. CTI, 2019; Zorzi, 2019.

very little. Perhaps we can simply see the results, *i.e.*, the psycho-corporeal forms that emerge from the relational dynamic that the various sciences help us to understand, even if only partially.

The body is structured relationally and culturally. Psychological, environmental and biological factors interact in a complex way to determine a person's sexual identity. Starting from the biological body, these factors, intertwining, determine a nuclear gender identity with which it combines to create a series of internalized gender roles and an affective orientation. The individual is the result of an unpredictable relational process that structures different forms of relationships (from the biochemical to the emotional, to the socio-cultural). The body is a set of potentialities and predispositions on which (from the start) the relational process acts.⁸ The fascinating mystery that surrounds sexual identity is associated with its constancy in producing certain configurations (for example heterosexuality) from this potential base and the unpredictability of relationships,⁹ and the equally mysterious constancy in producing minorities, functional and healthy configurations. The natural process of identity building, in a variety of positive outcomes, leads to the formation of the subject's stable structural nuclei, and presents remarkable plasticity with respect to other levels of subject's personal identity. Identity is therefore made up of deeper (in the long run, *innate*) or more superficial elements. Sexual orientation or nuclear gender identity tend to be *nuclear components* of sexual identity, while gender roles are secondary, acquired through *socialization* (primary and secondary).

We are concerned with understanding the *cultural* element as one of the *relational* levels in the unresolved dispute between *nature* and *nurture* (Goldhaber, 2012). Nature (the *given*) and culture (the *given* in relation) are two ways of looking at the same entity, not two interacting entities. They are two differential factors that to us are posited as indivisible. Relationships progressively allow *the penetration* of the *culture-society* into *nature*, also through attachments to significant figures. Nature, therefore, is a broad field of potentialities (and resistances) made an individual nature through relational processes.¹⁰ Preserving the mystery of individual configurations which determine socialization and relationality of the body could be ESDs' task.

The 'ethics of ethical production' also means that, when developing an ethical argument on gender, the gender model that one adopts needs to be made explicit, and the level at which one intends to direct an argument

⁸It is now an acquired knowledge, for example, that homosexuality is determined by a complex multi-genetic predisposition, which can however be actualized only in certain environmental contexts (cf. Ganna, 2019).

⁹In a relational approach the outcomes are probabilistic, there is no rigid determinism.

¹⁰For the last two paragraphs, cf. Migliorini, 2017, pp. 47-61 e 183-191.

needs to be specified (Ferrari, 2018, pp. 121 -146). ‘Gender’, in fact, is a multifactorial instrument: ‘gender’ can denote a general level (including, for example, gender *orders* or *regimes*), or one of the micro areas in which gender identities allow themselves to be analyzed, like the psychological one, where we have nuclear gender identity or internalized gender roles.

To illustrate this point, we can formulate an example of the different levels of application of one’s argumentation: societies tend to be conservative in their socialization processes (at least until today), they perpetrate gender regimes and therefore transmit gender roles – traditionally attributed to the genres they recognize – to the new generations. A modern and liberal society should seek to maintain this feature of societies, to which is added the contribution of educational institutions who supply individual subjects, according to their age, with the tools (Batini & Santoni, 2009; Ghigi, 2019) to develop a critical approach to inherited gender roles,¹¹ in order to build their own approach freely and consciously. This means accepting that in adulthood people can experience gender roles differently to those of the canons of a society. From Butler we learn that these people *destabilize* gender, in the sense that they suggest to the generations possible life experiences, highlighting the false naturalizations, and therefore influencing all levels of socialization by modifying the cultural transmission of *traditional* models. Such *creation* and transmission of new gender models (internalized gender roles) should not, however, be confused with other phenomena, such as transsexuality, which (as far as we know) has to do with nuclear gender identity, not with gender roles.

ESDs are, therefore, not simply an attitude of acceptance (albeit fundamental), but has a practical and a public-institutional side which consists in the training of operators, teachers, medical specialists and general practitioners, and psychologists of all schools of thought, not only those who intervene in cases of transsexuality or intersexuality. Sexual differences are encountered on all social levels; skills and sensitivity are required on the part of the subjects involved to provide effective and appropriate reception. Needless to say: much work remains to be done, given the widespread ignorance about scientific knowledge related to sexual identity issues.

For the therapists, ESDs implies some *imperatives*: continuing education and personal research or study. These ethics provide an indispensable perspective in the field of psychoanalysis. It implies the crafting of a relationship – in clinical practice – marked by respect for the other’s identity. The task of therapists is to remind ourselves that the task of therapists is to lead patients to discover their identity, and propose therapeutic paths that will afford them the best possible psycho-physical well-being, with-

¹¹Education differs from socialization in that it is a consciously undertaken process (Ghigi, 2019, p. 31).

out imposing their own preconceptions (philosophical, religious, cultural). In the following words, expressed with such clarity that no further comment is required, the therapist

“has the task of helping the patient to ‘clarify their gender orientation’ by making it easier for them to listen to their bodies, their experiences [...]. From this listening and the integration of the levels, this person will discover their gender orientation. [...] A therapist is good and is really helpful if he respects the other [...]: any manipulation [...] wanting to impose the therapist’s choices or values on the other is ethical incorrectness and professional incompetence. [...] The ethics of a therapist is profound respect for the person, so they do not impose – either explicitly or implicitly (this is professionalism) – values and ideologies that do not belong to the inner world (body, experiences) of the person. It is clear that therapists have their own anthropology and their own ethics [...] but respect for the patient’s personal path to a discovery of their gender orientation actually belongs to the professional competence and ethics of caring” (Salonia, 2019).¹²

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¹²For similar considerations cf. Brogliato, 2014, pp. 181-187; Graglia, M., & Rigliano, P., 2006; Lingiard, V., & Nardelli, N., 2014; Ferrari, F., et al., 2018, pp. 19-80; Rigliano, P., et al., 2012.

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