

Gender, Sexuality and Power in Groups

Erica Burman

In this paper I draw on issues posed by an experiential women's group, first, to explore relations between women in groups and, second, to highlight how gendered institutional dynamics enter into relations of desire and authority between women. Reviewing current literature on women, gender and groups, I discuss the absence of discussion of the erotic (including the homoerotic) within groups – including women's groups and how this connects with questions of agency, power and knowledge. The gendering of power and authority and its reflections within group processes is also considered. Two contrasting representations emerging from the group material, the 'experienced lesbian' and the 'murderous doctor', are then analysed as indicative of the range of available transference positions in which the (woman) group conductor can be located. It is argued, first, that such broader consideration of women's positions within group processes promotes exploration of the multiple and diverse forms of sexed/gendered relations within groups. Second, that these relations may transcend actual sex/gendered positions, whereby, third, attending to such institutionally gendered power dynamics accords with group analysis as an arena connecting individual, familial and broader cultural relations, and in which transformative relations can be prefigured.

Key words: gendered and sexualized transferences, countertransference, groups, conductor's positions

Introduction

This paper arises from a small group I convened as an optional module as part of a postgraduate university Women's Studies

programme.¹ This was an ‘experiential’ group conducted within an educational setting, with a broadly educational or training, rather than therapeutic, aim. Hence its process inevitably both shared with and departed from therapeutic group analysis (Foulkes, 1986: 8; Hughes, 1983; Hutten, 1996),² most notably in terms of ambiguity around level of explicitly therapeutic work, and boundary blurrings – including (as is usual in educational settings) dual relationships inside and outside the group (Merta et al, 1993). In addition the explicit feminist commitment shared by both staff and students generated particular alliances and struggles within the group in relation to the broader academic institution (Rich, 1980). This dimension perhaps renders some of its dynamics similar to those of therapeutic communities, in attempting to model democratic processes within broader (non-democratic) contexts.

I will use examples arising from this group to explore how the ambivalent relations between gender, sexuality and authority enter into group relations. Beyond this, as an undertheorized area in group analysis, I will be suggesting group analysis needs to espouse socially-situated theories of gender and sexuality in two ways: first, by locating discussions of gender and sexuality in relation to the (changing) social structures that give rise to them, and, second, by seeing them as inevitably entering into transference relations. As also indicated by Dalal (1998), facing this challenge is crucial for a group analysis which can prompt political agency and empowerment. Ettin’s (2001) discussion of the relations between political and therapeutic participation has drawn attention to group analysis’ capacities not only to resocialize, but also to highlight and critically redress, cultural norms that reflect broader (including gendered) patterns of social relations. For as Foulkes puts it:

What is inside is outside, the ‘social’ is not external but very much internal too and penetrates the innermost being of the individual personality. (Foulkes, 1990: 227)

Similarly, exploring the relevance of psychoanalysis for a feminist politics, Rose suggests:

To understand subjectivity, sexual difference and fantasy in a way which neither entrenches the terms nor denies them still seems to be a crucial task for today. Not a luxury, but rather the key processes through which – as women and as men – we experience, and then question, our fully political fates. (Rose, 1986: 23)

This paper is correspondingly structured around discussion of, first,

the case for attending to the role of the erotic in groups. Second, I consider implicit as well as explicit features of the gendering of power and authority in groups. Third, drawing also on counter-transferential material, I discuss two widely divergent representations of relationships between women emerging from group material, including between the conductor and group members. Finally, I develop some implications of this approach for group analysis.

At the outset, however, I should clarify that in discussing categories of non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation (such as 'gay'/'lesbian'), I am not (only) addressing minority or marginal positions. In terms of sexuality, Foucault's (1981) genealogical explorations highlight how norms rely for their construction on their differentiation from the very pathologies they name. Hence, rather than functioning as outside prevailing norms of sexuality, the elaboration of the category of the 'homosexual' is better seen as the device by which *all* sexual and social behaviour is regulated. Moreover, issues of gender and homoeroticism are surely elements within individual and group relations whose disavowal can only block and prevent development (see also Mann, 1999: 13).

These questions are of importance to group analysis in two ways. Firstly, as a multi-body (rather than individual, analytic/maternal dyad or oedipal triadic) psychology, group analysis' extension, distribution and modulation of dynamics beyond dyadic/triadic relations must include the sexual/erotic. Following from this, secondly, by virtue of the interplay between intra- and whole group dynamics, we should be attentive to how the projective space of the group facilitates more mobile and diverse transpositions of sexual and gendered identifications, paralleling the group-specific processes discussed by Proegers (1990) (on the group as uroboric vessel), de Maré et al. (1991) (on *Koinonia*), and Hopper (1997, on the fourth basic assumption). If as Maguire (1995: 152) notes:

The psychotherapist's ability to draw freely on cross-gender identifications will profoundly influence his or her ability to help patients integrate the maternal and paternal strengths of each parent within the transference.

As also indicated in Elliot (1994), group analysts surely need to be open to how diverse and multiple forms of cross-gender and sexual dynamics occur within groups.

Group Psychology and Women's (Sexual?) Authority

I begin by situating the project of groupwork with broader cultural themes of gender and power.

At the end of a session, one group member found a sheet of paper on one of the desks, a handout from a lecture previously held in the classroom, and read out "Women, power and authority" – does this belong to anyone? She looked again and saw it said 'Weber', not 'women'. That night I dreamt that someone introduced me to Weber and I woke up thinking of Rosemary Pringle's work on secretaries.

Freud's (1921) writings on group psychology focus on two key modern large groups: the Church and the army. These, combined with the state bureaucracy, are typically regarded as the bastions of patriarchal authority, and indeed have largely been men-only institutions. Not only are they central to the production of the modern rational self-regulating individual of western societies,³ but they are also formative in the construction of contemporary forms of masculinity (e.g. Roper and Tosh, 1991) – such that the very notion of the individual is shot through with gendered assumptions. Perhaps it is because of their anomalous status that women's positions within these institutions has always excited interest, in particular in relation to their sexuality (c.f. the humour that surrounds women nurses and secretaries).

Yet Pringle's (1989) study of women secretaries highlights how the public and private sectors are far from separate and mutually maintaining. Developing from but critiquing Weber's analysis of bureaucracies, she demonstrates how the extension of women's traditional caring and servicing roles into the public sphere – far from functioning to feminize this – in fact *reproduces* the gendered authority relations of the home. Hence the women secretaries become surrogate wives to their male bosses. Indeed, as she documents, institutional authority may well override actual gender and sexual identifications, such that the same gendered dynamics are often also played out in relation to their female managers. The cultural divide between bureaucracy, rationality and masculinity in the public sphere, and emotionality, support, passion and intimacy in the private sphere turns out to be a false opposition⁴ – since the emotional and erotic pervades *and in some key but unacknowledged sense is also required* by the public sector to sustain just this fiction.⁵

Recent analysis of women's traditional work has demonstrated that it requires as much of the 'rational' planning and organization

typically associated with masculinity as it involves 'intuition'. Indeed it is relevant to note how the rise of the service sector economy is one of the key characteristics of late capitalist/post-industrial societies, with women's servicing and supportive (i.e. indirect and non-confrontative) relational styles now valued in management, and female intuition reframed as 'parallel multi-tasking'. Alongside this (and equally pertinent to the status of the psychotherapy profession), discussions of the feminization of labour have emerged – in terms of low pay, home working and casualization; conditions that women have long endured and continue to endure across the world, and that now men suffer too. Hence it seems that 'female' oppression now includes men such that, far from being relegated to inside the dolls' house, feminine imagery is now detaching itself from female bodies to characterize the flexible, fluid and intimate hold of (military-invented) cyberspace and multinational corporations on our bodies and minds (Gordo Lopez and Parker, 1999; Haraway, 1985, 1991).

In this context of rapidly changing and de-naturalized meanings of gender, several key questions arise that are of equal relevance inside and outside the consulting room (Hare Mustin and Marecek, 1986). First, how and where is women's authority? Are powerful women really (institutional) men (as the descriptor 'phallic woman' suggests)? Secondly, are there other ways of relating outside or beyond current hegemonic heteropatriarchal relations?⁶ How should forms and relations of power be conceptualized? Current theories of power portray this in terms of relationships to be negotiated, rather than as a possession to be owned, shed or envied (Foucault, 1980). As articulated most clearly in post-structuralist and post-colonial theory (e.g. Spivak, 1993), there are key political questions concerning how the historically subordinate can access and intervene within current discourses or meaning systems. Are they by definition excluded from discourses of power, or alternatively do they become colonized by them if they use them? Is the woman conductor as such an honorary man, or can she create/invoke other forms of authority?

Power, Gender And Sexuality In Groups

By contrast with debates in feminist theory and psychoanalysis, within group-analytic arenas few papers specifically address sexuality in groups (*pace* Courville and Kepper, 1985; Moss, 1999). This

does not, of course, mean that sexuality does not appear in accounts of groups. Indeed, many published accounts of groups contain analysis of sexual transferences between group members, with homoerotic relations and desires often portrayed within the pathological frame of dominant sexual morality.⁷ As with Foucault's (1981) discussion of the myth of Victorian repression of sexuality, it seems that, paradoxically, the more this is not discussed the more we seem to be talking about it.

In general, women's exercise of power (inside and outside therapeutic relations) is usually discussed in mixed gender contexts. Further, the general conflation of gender and sexuality seems to intensify around arenas where women relate to each other without men. In these contexts they are seen to claim power by virtue of their separation from or non-dependency on (sexual relations with) men. Yet stereotypes of lesbians and feminists presume, rather than explore, the really interesting questions of what indeed does happen in women's groups, including feminist groups; and of whether these could, or should, generate separate bodies of theory/analyses to match women's 'difference'. To answer this prematurely would be precisely to beg the key question. Difference in relation to what? . . . (power, body parts, subjectivity?) This recalls the slipperiness of Freud's discussion of the binaries of masculinity/femininity; activity/passivity – as related to, but not quite mapping on to, male/female, let alone his separation of sexual aims and objects (see Mitchell, 1974).

Existing discussions of gender and sexuality within psychoanalytic literature are mostly confined to dyadic work. Indeed Freud's unacknowledged debt to women belies his foregrounding of hysteria as the prototypical psychoanalytic condition. Significantly, hysteria is concerned with both gender and sexuality; hence it is surprising that there is little discussion of it in relation to groups.⁸ However while Moss (1999) recently linked hysteria with sexual phantasy in groups, Einhorn (1999) in response points out the unacknowledged significance of the gender of the conductor in eliciting as well as interpreting sexually-charged material.

As a key acknowledged axis of subjectivity, it is perhaps surprising that relatively little is written on gender in groups. Gender is largely presumed as a fixed constant, unless the relation to gender orientation itself figures as a 'problem'. This treatment stands against the drift of much psychoanalytic theory which emphasizes gender as a construction that (like the rest of the edifice

of subjectivity) is always fragile and incomplete. Where it is discussed, gender is usually both regarded as concerned with women (rather than as an effect or relationship between men and women), and is largely written about by women. Apart from feminist analyses of women's organizations or groupwork (which are usually non-psychoanalytic e.g. Butler and Wintram, 1991; Bewley, 1995; Crawford et al, 1992; but see Ernst and Maguire, 1987 and Hollway, 1993), discussion of gender in groups is mostly concerned with mixed gender groups and in terms of the gendered representations that circulate there. Single sex groups are usually regarded as 'homogeneous' or 'special', implying that the group members are somehow uniform or similar, and thus subordinating differences of 'race', class and sexuality (for example) to gender in their analyses of structural organizers of subjectivity.

Similarly gay men and lesbians are either invisible, or tend only to be discussed when problematic. This portrayal, as Phoenix (1987) notes, reflects a dynamic of homogenized absence/pathologized presence that structures the representation of other socially marginalized groups, such as black and working class people, both inside and outside therapeutic contexts. Yet psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic analyses are now questioning the conventional opposition between having and being (which is often articulated in terms of the relation to the phallus) underlying notions of gender and sexuality, seeing this as predicated on a static, concrete notion of identity (O'Connor and Ryan, 1993). These challenge both the binary logic that constructs such an opposition (see e.g. Benjamin, 1995) and the portrayal of lesbians as either male-identified, or alternatively regressed or fixated.

Often . . . the sexualized homosexual transferences that develop are viewed as pre-oedipal – a defense against deep early longings for the 'unavailable' mother – rather than as the oedipal/genital transferences that they may be. Thus lesbian sexuality gets pushed down the developmental slide toward domains of arrest, deficit and infantile sexuality. And as we have seen, such fixed paradigms can obscure the vision of the analyst to other paradigms in the transference. (Schwartz, 1998: 173)

Indeed as I argue elsewhere (Burman, 2001), whether men or women, homo- or heterosexually-identified, the 'lack' that lesbians are conventionally accorded may yet turn out to be a common condition: for psychotherapeutic questions of agency, desire and authority posed by the position of the lesbian are what we all face in groups, especially as conductors.

A Transference/Countertransference Story?

Dream 25th/26th November 1999: I was in a women's studies group, but with few women present. The group's efforts to talk together were stilted and fragmented, but gradually other women arrived – another colleague (staff), plus others not only from women's studies but including one of my former tutees (a young black woman) from another course on which I was teaching. One of these few women started talking about a recent conference or a set of theoretical debates and slowly more women arrived, listened and became engrossed in her account. She was talking about discussions about the end of history. At some point later another woman – whose dissertation I was at that time supervising – came over to me and held my hand – something between a handshake and a gesture of closeness/comfort.

The writing of this paper inscribes a trajectory of my own reflection, with what is presented here emerging within its process. Engaging with material around sexuality and authority is necessary in order to address key questions around the commonality or specificity of women's (including feminist) group dynamics. Yet while comfortable with exploring the transference features of dominant gendered dynamics of power and authority relations as they were replayed in the group, I, like other analysts, seem to have been slower to explore specifically erotic dynamics.⁹ Perhaps my process reflects Maguire's (1995: 142) comments:

Female clinicians' reticence about sexuality in the consulting room must to some extent reflect a more general cultural silence about all aspects of female desire. Women psychotherapists have lacked the support of a tradition, language and imagery to express their own erotic experience.

This was despite my conscious commitment to acknowledging and affirming homoerotic desire as an inevitable (but conventionally suppressed) expression of the mobility of gendered and sexual identifications so central to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

The above dream material would seem to indicate some intellectual and erotic engagement with the women's experiential group I had recently started. It perhaps illustrates how I was struggling to determine how this group was similar or different to other (mixed gender) groups, and the extent to which general models of group development might apply – hence the question about the end of history (posing the correlative question: whose history? His-story, her-story, or hy-story?). The ambiguity between the 'handshake and the gesture of closeness/comfort' perhaps indicates some dilemmas in determining my multiple relationships

with the group (as tutor, as conductor, as member) – with its fragmented character displayed both in the lack of clear temporal and membership boundaries of staff and students from a range of different groups, and in the shift to foreground ‘race’ rather than gender. Further, my recognition of the black student also prompted me to wonder whether this ‘marking’ (or attention to the minority ‘colour’) meant that the rest of the group (as is often the case in educational, as in therapeutic, contexts) was white. Indeed the experiential group (although diverse in other respects) was indeed an all-white group, and early sessions had included some explicit reflections upon this as expressing something of the particularity of experience available within the group, and as an index of the structure of class and racial privilege of the process in which we were engaged.

Hence we begin to see how sets of exclusionary practices (around ‘race’, class and sexuality) link together.¹⁰ The silence within group analysis on erotic – especially homoerotic – transference and countertransference reflects a longstanding absence in psychoanalysis. Where erotic transference and countertransference have been discussed, this is primarily as a form of resistance to analysis, with countertransference only being regarded as a useful analytic resource more recently, especially with the development of interpersonally-oriented varieties of psychoanalysis. As Mann points out, psychotherapy seems far more able to address anger, rage and envy than ‘positive’ emotions of ‘love, affection and tenderness’. Yet if we take the erotic as ‘what connects and unites’ (Mann, 1999: 20), then it is an inevitable and necessary part of any psychotherapeutic process, indeed ‘potentially the most transformational opportunity in the analytic process’ (Mann, 1999: 12).

Women analysts and therapists have been active in the emerging debates on erotic transference/countertransference, including consideration of its gender specificities. Moreover there appear to be gender differences in the evaluation of erotic transference/countertransference, with women more likely to explore it as a positive resource, and more open to discussing homoerotic transference – but usually in a less sexualized way. Men, it seems, have focused on more explicitly sexual aspects – but are typically less willing to contemplate same-sex erotic dynamics:

... by and large the women are describing issues about love in the homoerotic transference. The overtly sexual, especially with men, is conspicuously absent.

The male writers are primarily focusing on the sexual aspect of the heteroerotic transference. Issues about love and homoerotic material are not generally not mentioned. (Mann, 1999: 173)

There is now an emerging literature exploring gendered and sexual dynamics in therapeutic (including same sex) relationships (e.g. Domenici and Lesser, 1995). O'Connor and Ryan (1993) note that heterosexually-identified therapists' difficulties in identifying and addressing homoerotic transferences can have the effect of inhibiting further expression of sexual feelings and confirm the patient's fears of rejection through conveying that her sexuality is too threatening. Maguire's (1995) case example indicates other possible consequences of this. She explores how collusion between analyst and patient over avoiding difficult aspects of the transference and countertransference led to a displacement of erotic – especially homoerotic – and aggressive feelings out of the analytical situation, on to outside or past relationships, in this case even giving rise to the fabrication of an account of childhood sexual abuse.

False memories of childhood sexual abuse may, for example, be the expression of the patient's desire for special love from the parents or psychotherapist, and a way of avoiding the pain of not being the object of parental desire. The psychotherapist might be defending against anxieties about an eroticized transference, or the feelings of aggression or intrusiveness associated with it. (Maguire, 1995: 169)

This analysis concurs with Haaken's (1998) discussion of what is avoided by the current clinical focus (especially in the US) between women therapists and clients on childhood abuse.

In terms of the themes of the women's group I conducted, I interpreted the early focus on being victims of bad practices on the course or in the University as an avoidance of addressing issues of power and difference both within the group and in relation to me. The response was 'well focusing on the course is much safer; it gives us something in common' – except, as I pointed out, in relation to me. But as I will develop here, the two very different images of my authority that emerged indicated a central dilemma for the group around how to relate to the conductor as a transferential authority figure. These included a position which was potentially both an inspirational alternative to existing (or preceding experiences of) power/knowledge/sex relations, but also highlighted how the conductor's position could be a most abusive example of these.

‘An Experienced Lesbian’?

In session four a woman described being strongly attracted to a woman colleague at her workplace who was ‘an experienced lesbian’. The feelings were very powerful, but she reported that they had decided to remain just friends although they were continuing to talk very explicitly about sex, and what they liked sexually. The group began to explore what this meant to her, including the fact that it was the other woman who was saying ‘no’ to the relationship, also moving on to acknowledge their own different experiences and positions as mostly women in heterosexual relationships. Later they discussed their sexualities in terms of relationships rather than as an identity, and also feelings of asexuality in that context.

Elsewhere (Burman, 2002) I have attempted to map out a range of positions available to (women)¹¹ conductors in relation to groups, including: sister/sister; mother-daughter; the masquerade, the androgyne, honorary man, the father of whatever sex, and the lesbian. My aim there was to highlight how the prevalent focus on the maternal character of relations between women occludes other areas of connection, relationship and identification. Dominant representations of motherhood have displaced sexuality and desire from the mother-son, and especially the mother-daughter, relationship (Flax, 1993). Conflict between women and dis-identification are also thereby occluded. Instead a structural analysis of gender and power relations is needed whereby women’s authority in groups (whether as teachers or therapists) is not romanticized as inherently more benign than, nor necessarily intrinsically different from, that of men. For, as I have already suggested, the models available for being autonomous, authoritative and even competent, are already covertly gendered (as culturally masculine). So, in relation to my analysis here, the fact that I am drawing on material from a women’s experiential group does not imply that such questions are either specific to, or only relevant to, this arena¹². Rather, the features highlighted here may bring to the fore underlying issues present in all groups – including mixed groups of men and women, and irrespective of the gender and sexual orientation of the conductor.

Within the explicit material of this group, there was a parallel process between the woman-identified sexuality discussed as outside the group (with the woman’s attraction for her colleague) and the developing closeness emerging within the group, with its deepening disclosures and possible or even likely erotic dynamics. Moreover in terms of positions for a woman group conductor within

transference relations, it would seem possible that I was also invested as the 'experienced lesbian', who was also drawing boundaries in saying 'no' to a special relationship (of joining with them as another member of the group). Even if not actually a transference communication, the position of the 'experienced lesbian' can be read as a condensation of key questions structurally (if not overtly) addressed to me as conductor – in terms of my experience as a conductor, and my orientation to this group as a women-only arena.

As a female authority figure within a woman-identified pedagogical and experiential space – of the available positions (such as sister, mother, father, androgynous or honorary man, Burman 2001), I propose it is necessary (if also politically difficult) to assume – in addition to those other positions – that of the lesbian (see also Rich, 1983). It is currently difficult to articulate a place for lesbian or female homoerotic identification within psychoanalytically-influenced models that does not reduce it to one of the previous six positions. Yet in a prefigurative sense, in terms of the structure of the group's desire, a female conductor (whether within all-women or perhaps also within mixed gender groups) can work to sustain the possibility of a woman-identified erotic. This as Audre Lorde (1984) has suggested, can function both to resist the weight of patriarchally-defined meanings and authorities, and to evoke, or inspire, other possibilities. Significantly, this is not a position that eschews or denies power inequalities, but rather affirms and engages with (the possibility of) alternative conceptualizations of women's resources and relations (see also Burman, 2001).

The Murderous Doctor

By two thirds of the way through the life of the group it seemed as if members had resolved their earlier expressed uncertainties about my position by regarding me as not quite part of the group. This designation seemed to be at the expense of further exploration of questions of difference in positions within the group. Moreover it succeeded an earlier strategy of wanting me to position myself as one of them (indicated by inviting me to join them for drinks in the pub after the session). While group members acknowledged me as facilitator, and worked well within the structure and boundaries of the group, discussion indicated that my non-reciprocity of disclosure was experienced as withholding, and was seen to mark the

inequality in power relationships. Eventually publicity surrounding the verdict of Harold Shipman, a General Practitioner in Greater Manchester, UK, who had recently been found to have murdered possibly hundreds of his (mainly older women) patients, prompted an explicit exploration of the group's experience of me and my interventions. Here we see a graphic example of how contemporary events outside the group can provide a mirror for pre-existing structural tensions to be expressed and reflected upon. As with mirroring (Pines, 1982, 1998), these are not of course actual reflections, but refractions whose particular distortions help to reveal, and so make available for analysis, the psychic arrangement of the reflecting surfaces.

The session began with rather subdued and fragmented reflections on the local publicity surrounding the trial, and connections group members had with people in the convicted doctor's practice. This included disbelief, with talk of how patients in his practice had bought flowers for him in anticipation of his acquittal. Then, with mounting fear and indignation, tales of abusive experts, bungled surgical operations, and medical mismanagement emerged. There was talk of 'you trust them as experts when you are vulnerable, you are told that they know best, but can you really trust them?' I first commented only on the palpable sense of heightened anxiety in the room, and this was confirmed by more responses involving shock, disbelief and betrayal. Once the exchange over this had stabilized the group a little, I spoke of wondering whether this discussion might not also be about how I too might be an abuser of their trust; I was, after all, a supposed expert, in whom they had invested their trust in relation to this group. This intervention prompted some strong and focused discussion of perceptions of my role, my competence, and my intentions for the group;¹³ including some direct questions about my technique, and criticism of the sense of indirectness in relation to my 'steering' or 'leading' the group.

Later in the session there was some thoughtful reflection on how little up to now they had felt able to discuss their experience of my authority as a group (although individuals had tried to do so). Moreover there was reflection on their own positions as (mainly) working women in professional roles as well as students on the course, and how they wielded, as well as were subjected to, power relations. It seemed that acknowledging the potential for me to abuse my power, and their anxiety around this, worked to open the way for more explicit consideration of gender and power relations,

in ways that helped group members address their own various authorities as well as subjections.

While this was not the first time group members had challenged or interrogated my authority, the general cultural climate of questioning of the presumed benign authority of experts brought discussion of my position strongly to the fore. That this was a pre-existing preoccupation within the group was indicated by how rapidly and easily they took up the invitation to explore this. Further, it may also suggest their own increasing sense of power and ownership within the group. An alternative interpretation would be that perhaps this extreme situation enabled me to allow and support discussion of these issues within the group. Moreover while it was not a pleasant experience for me to be transferentially identified with a multiple murderer, it was nevertheless important to acknowledge the potential for institutional abuse warranted by designated experts, and to support group members' analyses of their perceptions and relations to this. I would have been colluding in the prevailing group norm of avoidance of acknowledgement of issues of power and difference to have seen transference as limited by prevailing gender and professional norms (as in: surely I, as a feminist teacher, could not be compared to an murderous medical practitioner . . .?) Indeed group members were very aware of being subjected to a very new and unusual 'treatment' since such a group had not run before within the University, and early on my group-analytic (non-)interventions had frustrated requests for certainties and structure in relation to the process and outcome of the group.

But there are two further points to note in relation to my overall concerns here. First, I want to ward off the implication that this power was abusive simply *because* it is masculine-identified. Indeed it is hard to know how one would identify any authority that was not potentially if not actually abusive. Yet even in relation to the putative prefigurative position I have elaborated for the position of 'the lesbian' (Burman, 2001) – at least in relation to the feminist commitments of this group – it is surely important that the 'experienced lesbian' (discussed earlier) was also saying 'no'. Typically as analysts we are comfortable with the interpretation of 'no' as asserting power and drawing limits, within the frame of maternal containment perhaps paternal or boundary-making, but drawing on the group material we might extend this also to include the position of the analyst as 'experienced lesbian', who while she

might potentially be able to manipulate her desirer, was also drawing some boundaries.

Secondly, as conductor, my difference in the group also mapped on to the patriarchal position (of the 'Master' they aspired to become/gain via their study on a 'Masters' course). In the group, discussion had already focused on whether (my and even their) cross-gender (attributed) identifications arose from institutional (rather than specifically gendered) dynamics. This was connected with broader analysis of how women's increasing success in the public sector as managers and people workers has neither brought a more caring, 'feminine' ethic into workplace politics, nor that such women are necessarily any different in their function or relationships from men.

Sex/Gender And Power/Knowledge Relations In Groups

In this paper I have attempted to indicate the range and diversity of sexed and gendered representations that enter into the forms and relations of authority within analytic groups. My aim in so doing is to extend the published material on gender and authority in relation to women group conductors which has tended to focus on biological/maternal imagery evoked by gendered representations (Conlon, 1991; Elliott, 1994; Ernst, 1997). Indeed psychotherapy might be regarded as an exemplar of the institutional rise of the female genre – with the shift from the (?masculine) religious confessional of pre-modern societies to the secular, modern (?feminine) consulting room (Rose, 1990). Thus, I would contend, questions of the gendering of power, of what kinds of power, and what forms of gendered/sexual/embodied authority we as analysts wield, are absolutely central to contemporary psychotherapeutic practice – whether acknowledged or not.

There is a need, therefore, to apply and develop in relation to group therapeutic processes the emerging psychoanalytic literature on gendered and sexual dynamics within female analyst-patient relations (Benjamin, 1998; Raphael-Leff and Josef Perelberg, 1997). Benjamin (1995) explicitly links erotic transference to the patient's desire for recognition, and to be known by – as well as to have the knowledge of – the analyst. Here questions of power, knowledge and sexuality structurally converge. Similarly in this account I have discussed two divergent transference positions emerging within material from a women's experiential group.

Conceptualizations of the relations between sex, gender and sexual identities are typically complicated and often confused. Craib (2001) has identified currents in contemporary social theory that offer fruitful resources for group analysts in theorizing socially unconscious dynamics to which we too are subject. Current discussions in feminist and constructionist theory (e.g. Butler, 1990a; 1990b) that I have also drawn upon in developing this paper offer some helpful clarifications. These portray gender as a *position* (within available dominant discourses) or as an activity performed or negotiated within specific relationships and practices, rather than as (only) an identity. Such perspectives foster a move towards interrogating, rather than presupposing, what women (or men, for that matter) are like, and instead open the category of gender up for scrutiny. This includes attending to how gender may not be the only or primary identification, since class or racialized positions (or age or (dis)ability status, for example) may be felt to be more salient than gender.

Such approaches also inform more general models of power relations, including analysis of the complicities and complex alliances between dominant and subordinate groups. Hence it is important to go beyond romanticized notions of relations between women – both politically and interpersonally – to avoid reconstructing a dominant orthodoxy as potentially oppressive as that produced by/about men (c.f. Burman, 1998). Taking this kind of constructionist position is both compatible with, and promotes, group analysis in tracing the relations within emerging group processes between the foundation and unfolding dynamic matrix – in which currently available notions of gender, sexuality and authority figure powerfully.

Notes

1. This paper has benefited from feedback from group members to whom an earlier version of this paper was sent for consultation – both for comment and permission to publish. The paper remains of course my partial perspective, and I am very grateful to the group members for their commitment and engagement in this complex process. For further discussion of ethical issues in publication see Polden (1988) and Jones et al (2000). Moreover, my explorations here by no means exhaust the issues posed by and with this group, but rather I elaborate this theme here by way of a specific theoretical contribution for group analysis.

2. Hollway (1993) describes running a similar group in a similar setting, although drawing on a more Kleinian-influenced framework.

3. Thus giving rise to the cultural divisions between mind-body, reason-emotion, male-female, white-black . . . subject-other.

4. This is notwithstanding – or perhaps as exactly expressed by – the recent sleaze scandals associated with key (mainly) male politicians across the world.

5. Pateman (1989) and Nicholson (1999: chapter 9) develop these arguments further.

6. See Boulous Walker (1998) on the possible value of Irigaray but c.f. discussion in Moi (1989) on the problems of her, and other cultural feminist, essentialisms.

7. Since my point is that this trend is cultural-historical, rather than intentional, it would be invidious and inexhaustible to offer supporting references for this claim, but suffice it to note that from before Foulkes and onwards this is evident.

8. This is despite the fact that Lacan portrayed hysteria as one of the two subdivisions of neurotic structure (the other being obsessional, sometimes referred to by Freud and Lacan as a 'dialect' of hysteria), with the cartels or studygroups for the reflection and production of Lacanian thinking regarded as occupying a hysterical position in relation to the generation of knowledge (Miller, 1986).

9. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present an exhaustive definition of eroticism. My use here follows discussions within psychoanalytic theory, drawing on Freud's account of sexuality as originating within early infantile experience and that therefore connects with more generalized feelings of sensuality and pleasure (as also with aggression and control/helplessness). While the erotic is conventionally associated with adult (supposedly genital) sexuality, it was one of Freud's greatest achievements that he instead highlighted the 'polymorphous perversity' of infantile sexuality in its fluidity of aims and objects, from which he suggested that it is only later – and only partially – that homo- or hetero-sexually-identified positions can emerge (and here we might turn to Foucault to add a cultural-historical analysis for the emergence of these terms). While 'stages' of psychosexual development (oral, anal, phallic, genital) were in any case formulated after Freud (principally by Karl Abraham and Ernest Jones), even these were regarded as building upon but not eradicating earlier structures.

10. See Burman (2001) for further discussion of this.

11. Given the argument I am making here about the mobility of gendered and sexed transferences, it holds that they are also available to men.

12. Although the fact that this was an experiential, rather than a therapeutic, group clearly limits the level of analysis I can provide here – as indicative for, rather than exemplifying worked-through examples of, therapeutic analysis.

13. It seems that Shipman's motivations for the murders remain unclear – they appear not to be primarily financial. This therefore connects with group members' queries about what I wanted from them as a group.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Liz Bondi, Karen Ciclitira, Sue Einhorn, Sheila Ernst, Colleen Heenan, Ian Parker, Gail Simon and Janet Smith for their comments and support in the preparation of this paper; and to the members of Feminist Group Dynamics for their inspiration for this paper and for their engagement with, and comments on, its drafts.

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Erica Burman is Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies based in the Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, The Manchester Metropolitan University, where she co-directs the Discourse Unit and the Women's Studies Research Centre. *Author's address:* The Manchester Metropolitan University, Hathersage Rd, Manchester M13 0JA, UK. *email:* e.burman@mmu.ac.uk.