

# **Group-As-Mother: A Dark Continent in Group Relations Theory and Practice**

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In this chapter, the impact on group functioning of the construct of the Group-As-Mother (G-A-M) is explored. This construct has been widely adopted at a surface level only, without fully examining its far-reaching implications for the experience and behavior of individuals in groups, and for collective experience and action. This chapter lays out a number of corollaries to the idea of the G-A-M that relate to the lived experiences of men and women in groups. Theoretical and clinical data from several disciplines are presented to illustrate psychological and social factors that underlie the development of this phenomenon, and which reinforce its salience in understanding group life. Some implications of a deeper understanding of the G-A-M are then explored, and linked to work with individuals and groups in training, therapy, and consulting activities, especially around issues of power and leadership. An extension of G-A-M theory and application to explore aspects of the behavior of the group-as-a-whole on any scale is proposed. Areas for research and for practice development that must be explored more deeply and with greater personal and professional rigor than has been the norm in the literature to date are suggested.

This construction is only one of many used to understand the life of a group, and it is intertwined with a number of other structural and individual factors that affect the course and development of any given group. Summarizing all those factors, or reviewing group development theory in detail, will not be attempted, as that is done better elsewhere already.<sup>1</sup> Nor will all the extant literature on gender in groups be explored, though findings from such exploration will be referenced as they relate to the concept. This chapter highlights a specific aspect of group life that is frequently referenced in the literature, sweeping in impact, but poorly understood and largely unexplored as it pertains to actual behavior. It is to be hoped that it will stimulate thought and debate on the subject.

## I. THE GENDER AND POWER OF THE GROUP-AS-A-WHOLE: OBSERVATIONS FROM THEORY AND PRACTICE

“I have often found it useful after a postulation...  
to see what happens if I try to use the new theory for purposes  
for which it was not, in origination, intended.”

—*Bion, 1961, p. 91*

The idea of the group as a subjective entity has been described by theoreticians in varying terms as the “group mentality” (Bion, 1961), the group “mind” (Freud, 1921), or the group “Gestalt” (Wells, 1985). The group is seen as having a collective will and power that is distinct from a simple sum of the individual members’ wills or actions. The analysis of this group-as-a-whole as a distinct and essential level of human functioning in groups has long been seen as critical to the study of group behavior. Many formulations regarding the identity of the group have been proposed in various contexts, including the group as patient, as judge/jury, as emissary, as container (especially for unwanted, projected material), as representing parts of the self, etc. These metaphors are all useful in understanding the role of group life in human existence. One of the most deep and far-reaching metaphors or archetypes of group-as-a-whole functioning, however, is that of the G-A-M.

Group Relations theorists have postulated that the group identity or consciousness is unconsciously experienced by members as maternal, more specifically as a representation or psychological analog of the internalized mother of early childhood. In brief, it has been observed that individuals in groups experience wishes and fears around joining/merging with the group on the one hand, and wishes for/fears of separation and isolation on the other. These wishes and fears have been linked to various group phenomena, including such behaviors as role differentiation and scapegoating, and psychological processes such as splitting and projection (Eisold, 1985; Rice, 1965; Wells, 1995). These phenomena have been explained as individual regression in group settings toward early experiences, and the early defensive and coping mechanisms aroused by the feared and loved other, that is, the group.

Let us first briefly revisit some of the theoretical underpinnings of this powerful construct of the G-A-M. Bion is credited with connecting the relation of the individual to the group to the relationship of the infant to its mother. In his analysis of a series of therapy groups he conducted, he identified individual regression to part-object internal representations of the group (1961). He linked his observations of adult behavior to defenses, such as projection, projective identification, and splitting, that had been described by Klein (1952) as part of the arsenal of the developing infant to cope with the experience of both gratification and frustration of desires by the omniscient and omnipotent mother. “It is quite inevitable that a group must satisfy some desires and frustrate others...” (Bion, 1961, p. 44). Group members employ these regressive defenses to manage strong feelings of anxiety and ambivalence that are aroused by group membership. Bion further described the wishes of the individuals in a group to express unacceptable impulses anonymously by

projecting them onto the group as creating the “group mentality.” Out of this process arise the “basic assumptions”; that is, patterns of irrational and off-task fantasies/behaviors that challenge the ability of the group to fulfill its reality-based or “work-task”—in the case of Bion’s groups—providing therapeutic healing for its members.<sup>2</sup>

Little attention has been paid to the psychological or behavioral implications of a central feature of this formulation: namely, the group is experienced specifically as both powerful and female. That is, the group is experienced not as a parent in general, not merely as a potential source of comfort, frustration, authority and so on in the abstract, but as a representation in unconscious fantasy of the most powerful woman in any individual’s life. In order to explore the significance of this idea, and the significance of the relative silence on this topic to date, work arising out of social psychology, social criticism, and sex-role theory that have not generally been linked to the psychodynamic and group-relational theories in which the concept of G-A-M is grounded will be used. Through the lenses of these disciplines, it will be seen that the “genderedness” of the group Gestalt has significant implications for understanding some aspects of behavior by groups and in groups (for individuals of both sexes).

While a comprehensive review of the growing body of theory and research addressing gender roles in society is beyond the scope of this chapter, there are two important concepts to which I would like to draw attention in the context of this discussion: the development and perception of the maternal role, and the existence of gender-linked sociological (i.e., group-level) structures.

### *The Maternal Role*

Maternal responsibility in western cultures now extends well beyond biologically determined tasks of birthing and nursing to encompass all the daily needs of the infant and small child, as well as most of the burden of early socialization and teaching. If these tasks are not taken up by the birth mother, they are almost always assumed by another female care giver. Various explanations for this division have been proposed, most based on unchallenged assumptions of “natural” evolutionary and instinctual development (Freud, 1917). Feminist theorists have more recently begun to challenge these assumptions, and to suggest that the emphasis on all aspects of parenting as the woman’s natural responsibility is a social construct. Chodorow (1978, 1979), for instance, has suggested that the mothering role, after the biological tasks of birth and breast feeding are completed, is “reproduced” through modelling from generation to generation of mothers and not an innate part of being born female. Chodorow’s work has been criticized as being too heavily based on individual clinical cases (Walsh, 1987), as failing to address social privilege as an explanation for the inequitable status of women (Pleck, 1981), and as discounting the biologically based developmental needs of infants (Rossi, 1987). Her discussion of the impact of the difference between a same-sex parental bond and an opposite-sex bond remains, however, a major insight into sex-based differences in psychological development and socialization.

Although motherhood has historically been extolled as the “highest calling” for women, it has not been valued in kind by any concrete societal reward for supposedly important work, either material reward such as payment, or social standing such as power over resources or decision-making. Many feminist writers and social critics have pointed out that women are constrained by a social system that values gender-based inequities in status to pass these roles on to their children (Rich, 1979; Rubin, 1975). The role of mother is further consistently described only in terms of its nurturing and self-sacrificing aspects and frequently includes an implicit or explicit requirement that the woman taking on the role give up her identity as an autonomous individual.

The powerful control that a mother must exercise over a small child as part of fulfilling the role is ignored, except insofar as mothers have been widely blamed for any pathology or unhappiness in their children (Caplan, 1989; Miller, 1991; Unger & Crawford, 1992). The exercise of power and authority over every aspect of a child’s life from feeding to toilet training to exploration is cited often in psychodynamic theory as a crucial component of early development, and the basis for the formation of part-objects, mechanisms such as splitting and projection, etc. It is consistently ignored, however, as an area worthy of direct study by those investigators interested in understanding human attitudes toward power, authority, and leadership. Further, the normality of real (not only imagined) aggressive maternal impulses toward children is generally denied. One exception is Cantor and Bernay’s (1992) work on women and power, in which they concluded that “the reality of the power of motherhood lies somewhere between the denial that there is any power in motherhood and the myth that the mother is omnipotent and controls everything in her children’s lives” (p. 54).

The relational theorists at the Stone Center suggested that women’s power is based on the development of empathy and has as its goals influencing others through nurturing potential and mutual empowerment (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). The difficulty with their argument is that they did not distinguish between innate characteristics and the results of socialization. They echoed earlier theorists’ assumptions that this gentle, unthreatening model of power is the only form female power should naturally take. They thus colluded with societal wishes to suppress the existence of competitiveness, aggressiveness, or wishes for control in women, and especially in mothers. In contrast to men, who are raised with more open acknowledgement of the wishes to compete as fathers and sons, women are taught to feel guilty about, and/or to deny any aggressive impulses toward their children.

Mothers are thus socialized to be less well equipped to manage these feelings constructively and to model such management for their daughters. Yet, the particular role mothers play in their daughters’ later development is quite germane to this discussion. The fear of surpassing their fathers on the part of men has been well studied, beginning with Freud’s discussion of the consequences for boys of Oedipal victory (1924). The parallel of this conflict for women has been much less acknowledged and is often viewed only in the context of competition with the mother for the father. It is rarely addressed

in terms of a girl's fear of surpassing mother in other ways, as it has been for sons and fathers. This conflict is more difficult for women to resolve because it is so hidden. It is even harder for those whose mothers express jealousy or hostility toward their achievements, because daughters fear, as a consequence of their success, the loss of their connection to their mothers, on which much of their identity may be based (Moulton, 1986).

This psychodynamic argument, while compelling, is often taken as sufficient explanation for female anxiety about success, thus placing the blame within the mother/daughter dyad without reference to the role played by fathers, other family members, and the larger social system. Horney (1926) pointed out the significance of mother's role as the primary agent of socialization through both gratification and frustration of the infant's desires. The mother thus becomes the target of primary sadistic impulses that result in a "dread of women." Horney focused on the genesis of this feeling in men, however, rather than as a universal reaction of any infant to the experience of maternal control.

The resistance to acknowledging the power of the mother's role directly, despite the weight of practically omnipotent power accorded mothers when discussing the ego development of the child, suggests a form of social reaction formation. That is, the good mother is seen in terms of selflessness and instinctive nurturing, and she is castigated if she deviates at all from this "ideal" (Unger & Crawford, 1992). This serves as a defense against our unconscious collective fears of the powerful mother, who may or may not have our best interests at heart at all times and whose angry or competitive feelings are terrifying to acknowledge. This is a fear that we all, male or female, retain from early childhood.

### ***Gendered Social Structures***

"Society has not yet been driven to seek treatment  
of its psychological disorders...[b]ecause it has not achieved  
sufficient insight to appreciate the nature of its distress."

—*Bion, 1961, p. 6*

Dinnerstein (1976) proposed a provocative theory for understanding the historically overwhelming preference of human social groups for patriarchal social structures. This theory has received relatively little attention from the larger psychological community engaged in understanding human relationships. Her model provides an explanation for both the universality and the lack of conscious study of the power inherent in the role of mothering. The one exception is the explanation of pathology, when a mother's power and influence is often considered as the primary causal factor.

Dinnerstein began with the observation that a majority of human infants in all cultures are raised by women. As the child develops autonomous ego functioning and simultaneously becomes aware of its separateness from mother, an awful quandary emerges. The infant relies on consistent acceptance by its mother and her "mirroring face" to learn about its own

existence. The increasing understanding of its separateness is accompanied by both a great sense of loss of omnipotent merger and a concomitant fear of the omnipotent, omniscient Other. The mother's task is simultaneously to nurture and support the child's first steps toward autonomy, while also restricting, controlling, and occasionally punishing the newly willful infant to prevent it from hurting itself and to convey the first codes for socially acceptable conduct. In this exercise, she becomes both the first object of the child's complete love and dependency and the first subject against whom the child opposes its will and often fails.

The child, still partly longing for a return to the unconflicted euphoria of merger with the mother, now struggles to define itself by opposing itself to the first subject it experiences as separate; it must, in fact, seek some conflict with her to confirm its tenuous mastery of its own body, material objects, and self-awareness. The price of opposing her, however, is the terrible fear of being crushed, overwhelmed, or re-engulfed by the apparently omnipotent mother. The "good-enough" mother does not abuse her power over the infant and continues to encourage its strivings toward independence, but a loving tyrant is a tyrant nonetheless. Without direct recognition of this fact, Dinnerstein drew a central principle of certain object-relations theories, in which early experiences of parental figures are internalized by the infant and influence adult patterns of behavior.

The emphasis in most psychological theories of development that is placed on anxiety related to fantasies of merger with and rejection by mothers specifically, rather than parents in general, seems based largely on an over-focus on the experience of being fed (the good breast that feeds, the bad breast that withholds), which is biologically specific to mother's role. There is much less attendance to other types of gratification and frustration the infant can experience with either parent, such as being warmed when cold, held when crying, and changed when wet, that can be performed by either parent. The possibility of significant fears of both parents clearly exists for the infant, but the father's role in this early developmental period rarely enters into the discussion by most developmental theorists (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Stern, 1985). No attention is paid to early fantasies or fears of fathers in this context, either by classic psychoanalytic theory or by many object-relations or group theorists. Perhaps this is due in part to unexamined assumptions arising out of the increasingly rigid gender role-training of post-industrial patriarchal culture, and an unstated reification of the role assigned to the father in western family structure.

It has been postulated by some since Freud that the father in a traditional family unit represents agency in the outside world, the ability to exercise autonomy and authority in society. He is experienced as more separate and therefore less threatening to the infant's developing but fragile sense of self, and as occupying the enviable position of being at least partly beyond mother's power to control. For the infant of either sex, the father thus represents an alternative source of power to the omnipotence of the mother, a potential refuge and ally with whom the infant can join to combat its fear of engulfment. "So the essential fact about paternal authority, the fact that

makes both sexes accept it as a model for the ruling of the world, is that it is under prevailing conditions a sanctuary from maternal authority” (Dinnerstein, 1976, p. 176).

Although Dinnerstein did not directly draw on Group Relations theory in her formulation, her theory has significant implications for this domain of study. If we fear maternal power, and society or any group is experienced by the individual as the mother of early childhood, it then follows that we will seek to counterbalance this power by placing men at the head of social institutions.

Evidence of the salience of gender, as represented by parental metaphors and analogs, in the power distribution of our social arrangements can be found repeatedly in strong cultural and archetypal views of the world in which we live. For example, the physical earth is frequently seen as female, and revered for “her” essential role in providing the resources necessary for our survival as “Mother” Nature. Demeter, the Greek goddess, creates winter in her grieving for her daughter Persephone, kidnapped by Hades and compelled to return to him for six months of the year because she eats six pomegranate seeds he offers her. In almost every culture “mother earth” is balanced, and ruled by, “father sky,” Zeus, or some other male god.

Modern religious institutions, which can be seen as one form of large-group social regulation, are almost always controlled by male gods and male representatives of those gods. In Catholicism for example, “mother church” is described as the “bride of Christ,” who rules over her. Goddess worship has declined with the rise of capitalist, industrialized, and centralized economic groups, and women are only recently beginning to attain positions of authority in the male-headed monotheistic religions that dominate most of the modern world’s spiritual communities. Bayes and Newton (1985) cited the anthropological finding that, in our current culture, women are consistently cast as acceptable only when they embody the nurturing and caretaking mother archetype, and not the angry, aggressive or powerful archetype of the goddess.

A strong desire to tame, control, and otherwise improve on nature can be seen as another extension of human fears of the provider of resources upon which we all depend, but that is beyond individual control. This desire to engineer nature has also been strongly gender-linked throughout history (Griffin, 1978). Another facet of this fear is manifested in reactions toward female energy/power that is often described as more chaotic, less organized, less predictable, than male energy. It is held as both less valuable, and more frightening, especially if manifested by a female leader.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Gender and Leadership in Groups***

In his discussion of the dependency group culture, Bion (1961) suggested that a group first looks to the consultant or other formal leader for direction and control. When a group fails to force the consultant to lead in the manner it wishes, it frequently elects a “mad” genius member as an alternative, a member (often, though not always, male) who exhibits “paranoid trends.” This insistence on the production of a leader (however shifting and

transitory any one individual's tenure in the role may be) represents more than the group's projections onto a future scapegoat/martyr/messiah that have been described in the past. Such an action may also represent a regression to a schizoid position that is driven by a feeling of insecure attachment to the group-as-a-whole/G-A-M. This insecurity is heightened by the consultant's (i.e., "father's") refusal to exert overt control over the mother.

Bion also noted that groups are consistently afraid of new ideas, which represent the powerful unknown. To the infant, the mother is one of the first and most direct representations of that unknown world outside the self, so learning, with its attendant anxiety, may also be associated with her. And from a male perspective (his-story), the female must always be experienced as other, more mysterious and unpredictable than the familiarity of the male (more on this below). Thus, the fears of the G-A-M do not arise only out of regressive ambivalence about wishes to be nurtured vs. desires for independence, or even fears of the withholding of nurturing. They are specifically fears of the power of the group, both real and projected. As a result of gender divisions in parenting, these fears become tied to the repressed early fears of maternal power and authority described above. And these fears in turn fuel social arrangements in which a variety of mechanisms are employed to constrain and defend against the power of the maternal object.

The group dynamics literature contains numerous descriptions of gender/authority-related conflicts within larger groups or systems (Gabelnick, 1993; Gillette, 1995; Ringwald, 1974), without making much attempt to explain them. These processes have a strong impact not only on the experiences of the individuals involved, but on the group's development and its success in accomplishing whatever task it is undertaking. In a variety of group settings, including work groups (Gwartney-Gibbs & Lach, 1994), therapy groups (Alonso & Rutan, 1979), and training groups (Mayes, 1979), women have been reported as expressing high levels of ambivalence and anxiety about competing for attention, status, or positions of authority. They report feelings of shame, fear of abandonment or reprisal from others, have difficulty openly acknowledging competitive or aggressive impulses (Wallach, 1994), and express preferences for egalitarian and supposedly leaderless work groups even when this group structure impedes task-oriented activity (Mayes, 1979). In her exploration of competition and gender in therapy groups, Wallach (1994) provided several clinical examples in which a female group leader was denigrated or devalued in marked contrast to reactions to a male group leader, and linked this to unacknowledged group anxiety about her "malevolent power" (p. 34). Wallach provided several suggestions concerning the particular tasks a woman in a leadership role must address in order to identify and manage gender-based differences in reactions to her leadership.

Cytrynbaum and Belkin (2004) reported a mixed and complex pattern of gender-based differences in responses to authority figures in their review of over 25 years of research in Group Relations conferences, including increased



distress of females in groups and devaluation of female consultants by members of both sexes, especially during times of stress or anxiety. They suggested (as have others) that the process underlying these phenomena is complex, and they provided several hypotheses relating to both psychological and sociological processes relating to attitudes toward women. In a study of learning styles of men and women in several Group Relations conferences, Berman (1987) found that men were more likely to engage in counter-dependent, active struggling against the authority of the group consultant, and that this struggle enhanced their learning (based on post-hoc self-report measures). Women were more likely to take a dependent stance, and their learning was not enhanced by conflict with the consultant. Bayes and Newton (1985) presented case data and an excellent discussion of difficulties arising for women in leadership positions in organizational settings. They presented strong arguments for the presence of group-level factors such as socialization against such roles for women, and they pointed to the search for male authority as a major factor in work-group struggles with a female manager. They addressed the dependency needs a female leader may evoke more strongly in a work group (in Bion's basic assumption model) but did not address the concept of the G-A-M in this context.

With some exceptions, much of the work on gender and power within the Group Relations domain is either theoretical or based on anecdotal clinical experience, rather than empirical research. There are consistent indications of gender differences, however, that could and should be more thoroughly studied, in both work and training settings, from a systems-level perspective. None of these reports has examined these gender-related findings in the context of the group-as-a-whole and the theory that the group itself is unconsciously experienced as gendered. Yet this idea should have a vast impact on our understanding of these observed gender differences in assumed group roles, and in particular for male and female leadership in groups.

A similar gap exists in theoretical discussions of authority and leadership. For example, Kahn and Kram (1994) provided an excellent summation of the theoretical links between adult internal models of authority relationships and early familial experiences. They drew on psychoanalytic and developmental theory and used Bowlby's attachment model as a template for understanding adult attitudes toward authority. They pointed out that relationships with primary care givers give rise to internal models not only of attachment and dependency, but of authority relationships. Baum (1993) provided another cogent analysis of the links between adult and early experiences of authority using Erikson's stage theory as the template for adult attitudes. Both models fail to consider, however, the implications arising from the identity of most primary care givers as female, or to acknowledge the resulting gender-specific nature of adult internal models of authority. The more regressive the state that is aroused by the life of the group, the more longing and terror are likely to be associated with authority, and the more likely it is that that authority will be unconsciously experienced as gendered.

## II. IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

### *Individual Behavior in Groups*

“We are constantly affected by what we feel to be the attitude of a group to ourselves, and are consciously or unconsciously swayed by our idea of it.”

—*Bion, 1961, p. 23*

At the level of individual experience, the fear of female domination and the flight to male power as a defense against it creates a particular dilemma for women. For girls, self-object representations are based on identification with the mother. Thus, the fear of their mothers' power becomes intrinsically linked with fear of their own power. That is, women grow into the very objects of their fear, wielding the same omnipotent power over their own children from which they subconsciously remember shrinking. It is this identification that can make women afraid of exercising their own authority beyond strict limits, and that makes them willing partners in the establishment of male-dominated social structures (Dinnerstein, 1976). They unconsciously fear that their own power, if not contained or opposed by external forces, might become the engulfing, devouring power of the mothers they remember dreading in infancy.

This underlying fear is one reason for findings that women suppress parts of themselves that do not fit traditional, assigned sex roles, and feel ambivalence, guilt, or fear when deviating from these roles. For instance, studies have shown that many women experience ambivalence about exercising authority even within the traditional mother role. They have great difficulty admitting that they don't feel perfectly comfortable with the “instinctive,” or “natural” mother role prescribed and idealized by society, however, so this ambivalence is largely unspoken and unacknowledged (Swigart, 1991).

When encountering the group, this ambivalence should be expected to accompany the experience of the G-A-M. For women, the group becomes both self-object and love-object: the projected image of the early mother they loved and the authority figure they feared. They must make some integration and/or accommodation of their ambivalence in the group just as they must to take up their own role as mothers (either literally or metaphorically). Thus, women might be expected to feel more comfortable identifying with the group, feel a greater wish to ally themselves with it, and feel a greater fear of opposing it or exerting individual authority over it, as it represents themselves. And this is indeed what is frequently found in studies of gender differences in group behavior. Yet they also share with men the fear of re-engulfment or merger that is part of the early stages of individuation for any infant. The resulting bind is tightened further by societal taboos against acknowledging the existence of maternal power in anything other than a loving, selfless context, much less owning fears of this power. An unexamined collective awareness of both the presence of maternal power and the fear of it is expressed indirectly in frequent jokes and demonified archetypes: the

over-controlling mother that is a stock figure in comedy, the “schizophrenogenic mother” that is still the target of blame for any pathology in her children, the wicked stepmother of fables, and so on.

For men, a complementary experience is to be expected. Fears of the group (e.g., fear of dependency on a too-powerful entity) are more likely to be experienced as fears of the Other, a love-object but not a self-object. As love-object, the group becomes the target of wishes for possession, accompanied by fears of engulfment and inadequacy, as well as of retaliation from competitors in Oedipal terms. Men’s early need and training to shift their self-identification from mother to father is often accomplished without social permission to acknowledge this shift as a loss. They are thus predisposed as adults to combat re-engulfment from a more alienated and adversarial stance. This tendency is reinforced by post-industrial western culture, in which men are discouraged from expressing relational wishes and fears except through competitive striving (Gilligan, 1997). Men in general might thus be expected to experience a greater sense of separation and alienation from the group than women, which again is what is found in group research.

For both women and men, the leadership of a group by women can be expected to intensify the ambivalence and fear already felt toward the G-A-M. This can occur in two ways. First, the real physical presence of female leadership serves to intensify the projection onto the group-as-a-whole of a powerful female entity. Second, the absence of a counterweight to this power in the shape of a male authority figure increases everyone’s unconscious anxiety about the potential for uncontrolled and uncontrollable exercise of that (female) power by the group.

### ***Consulting to Groups and Organizations***

So what is to be done with this understanding of the bases for the experience of gendered group power and gender-based differences in responses to it? Dinnerstein has suggested that in order to ease the rigidity of gender roles and loosen patriarchal social structures, it will be necessary to reintegrate fathers as both authoritative and nurturing figures in the lives of young infants. This view is supported by writers and social critics as diverse as men’s movement author Bly (1992) and feminist theoretician Gilligan (1997). While powerful in potential impact, this level of analysis and intervention may be more the province of those interested in social change and those engaged in individual healing (e.g., therapists). For organizational and Group Relations consultants, until such time as these social shifts and individual integrations occur, it may be more useful to focus clearly on what is than on what might be. To that end, if one understands the gender-based predispositions current arrangements often produce, one is better prepared to consult to them.

For instance, it is frequently remarked upon by organizational consultants that their women clients seem to have difficulty in the following areas: effectively mentoring junior (especially female) colleagues, constructively managing competition with peers and seniors, and maintaining task-based roles in the workplace. Some of these perceptions are undoubtedly the result

of gender bias on the part of observers regarding women in organizational roles.<sup>4</sup> When these difficulties are accurately perceived, however, it is crucial for the consultant to understand the underpinnings of such phenomena and their social context in order to assist change effectively.

These struggles can be understood developmentally not as evidence of inherent inability of women to perform well in leadership roles at work, but rather as products of limited training in the constructive exercise of non-maternal power, especially aggressive and competitive impulses. Further, women's participation in teams and work groups will be deeply influenced by group-level ambivalent identifications and reactions to the G-A-M. These responses include phenomena such as an overvaluation of the scientific and rationalist methodologies, while the emotional expressiveness and emotional intelligence associated with femininity are often devalued as off task. This collective bias ignores the centrality of healthy inter-relatedness in effective group functioning. The devaluation of qualities associated with the feminine can be seen as an expression of the fear of potentially overwhelming, destabilizing energy that we associate with our unconscious gendered construct of the G-A-M. With this understanding, a very different diagnosis and assessment of needs for a female-led group emerges.

Conversely, consultants frequently find male clients in the position of trying to dominate team and group processes, and/or competing with team leadership. They struggle more overtly with authority figures in general and with female authority in particular. When in leadership roles, they may tend to view their team or work group quite possessively, as something to be conquered, tamed, and/or seduced. They may respond with fear and anger toward exercises of collective power on the part of the group that threaten this construction. Again, if these behaviors are understood not simply as individual personality, but as an unconscious, socially constructed reaction to mother analogs, it becomes possible for the consultant to intervene to shift maladaptive strategies in a different way by addressing the underlying fears and wishes inherent in group membership for men. For the consultant, more effective work with women or men is thus predicated on a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamic challenges posed by the G-A-M.

Reactions of an organizational client system to the consultant may also be profoundly influenced by the G-A-M. This reaction is likely to intensify to the extent that the consultant is authorized to lead activities with the work group. Effective work at this level requires the ability to examine and challenge one's own gender-linked assumptions and group responses as well, combining intellectual mastery of the concepts with relational skills and integrity of purpose. An integrated stance will be hard to hold in the face of a dysfunctional system if the consultant has not done adequate internal work and preparation around these issues. Armed with a deeper understanding of the roots of hostility or anxiety that seems irrational, the consultant is in a better position to allay group fears and to avoid becoming overwhelmed by emotional responses to such dynamics.

From this framework, consultants can devise a number of interventions and training strategies to assist such a client (or client system) to work more

effectively in role in two ways: first, by shifting their awareness of these group dynamics and their impact on leadership, and second by developing their skills to overcome or manipulate gender-role training that blocks effective leadership. For example, women and women-led teams may find themselves caught in a dysfunctional double-bind of beliefs. On the one hand, proverbial maternal values of caretaking and self-sacrifice must be emphasized (to make female power safer and therefore palatable). The controlled aggression that underlies productivity and creativity (as we know from Freud), however, must then be cut off, undermining the woman's capacity to lead effectively and the team's capacity for high performance. Such groups will benefit from exercises and interventions that further their capacity and tolerance for constructive competition (i.e., in service of the task). In such teams, it can be vital to coach the leader on accepting and managing such competition (in herself and others) rather than suppressing or punishing it. It may not occur to a male consultant who has not considered the impact of gender in groups that such learning is necessary, or that unconscious fears of the exercise of female authority are at the root of conflict or competition avoidance. Conversely, a female consultant may unconsciously collude with the fears of the team leader rather than assisting the client to confront and move past them.

A male consultant may dismiss female wishes to be liked, or for identification with the group, as weakness or as lack of ability or vision, when in fact these relate to realities of group life that women are unconsciously trying to manage. A female consultant may reify her client's wishes and fears and become stuck with her in a no-win situation where her management style impedes the work to be done, or paralyzes her in the face of conflict within her team. Of course, these are generalized statements. Given individual variations in gender-role training, personality, and other factors, these role conflicts may also be held by clients and consultants of the opposite sex.

For Group Relations consultants, a fuller understanding of the impact of the G-A-M will also increase effectiveness. Forewarned is fore-armed. The consultant who maintains awareness of the influence of the G-A-M is less likely to be seduced or coerced into over-controlling the group, after being pulled into collusion with group fears of its own power. The consultant can bring increased tolerance for the group's hatred, and for dependency and seduction fantasies that are a result of ambivalence toward the G-A-M. The female consultant can be less threatened by group wishes, both overt and covert, for the presence of male authority.

The following vignettes serve to illustrate the impact of the G-A-M on members' and consultants' experiences in training and work groups.

### *Vignette 1*

A conference review session for members and staff was held approximately one month following a three-day Group Relations conference. In this conference, staff consulted to Small Groups in senior/junior pairs. A male member whose Small Group was co-facilitated by a mixed-gender pair described his experience as follows: "At first I thought the Small Group was

a safe, nurturing kind of place [as distinct from the scarier Large Group experience]. But then I realized it really wasn't safe at all, and I really wanted the male consultant to take charge and provide some structure so I could feel protected."

Note that his wish was specifically for the male authority in the room to take control of the chaotic and frightening energy of the group. This wish is particularly notable given the fact that in his group the female consultant was clearly identified as senior and the male identified as junior in the consulting pair. No mention was made in the context of this conference of the concept of the G-A-M. One can imagine this member's experience, however, as a typical example of the unconscious impact of the gender of the group itself. His fear of the group's chaos and unsafety was, unconsciously, a fear of female power and energy. It thus required a male counterbalancing presence. The fear also fueled his need to ignore or repudiate the presence of the more experienced consultant because her gender added to his discomfort with the feminized group.

## *Vignette 2*

A Group Relations conference was held as part of the training program for graduate students in organizational or school counseling programs. The membership was largely female, and the Conference Director was female. One Small Group consisted entirely of women and was assigned a female consultant (the author). In the first Small Group session, the group expressed disappointment and frustration that there were no men present in the group and that the consultant was also a woman. Longing was expressed for one of the male staff seen in the opening plenary.

I was aware of an initial pull to internalize feelings of inadequacy and rejection. Without some sense of the concepts described above, I might have responded in either of two unconstructive ways. I could have become defensive or angry and taken this out on the group through hostile or punitive consultations, potentially freezing the group early on in a primitive form of counter-dependency or fight/flight. Or, I might have more or less consciously agreed with the construction that male leadership would be better and colluded with a fantasy that the group was both defective and uninteresting without males to focus on.

I had had some training and study regarding the G-A-M, however, and thus had a context for understanding the gender-linked biases at work in the group's longing for male leadership. My consultations therefore encouraged members to examine the meaning of their challenge to my authority and adequacy in role based on my gender (and the Conference Director's). The group then began exploring wishes for leadership to look a particular way and shared ambivalence about their own leadership strivings.

As the conference progressed, competition for leadership of the group emerged between two of the women related to a struggle about their way of self-identifying their respective racial/ethnic identities. On the heels of one such exchange, a third member asserted that it was too bad that, since

there were no men present, there was nothing to compete for and thus no excitement or juice in the room. Given the previous activity, it was a patently ridiculous postulation that without men there was no competition occurring among the women. Several other members prepared to collude with this fantasy, however, with the apparent intent of avoiding the emerging power struggle going on in the room. I remarked that such a fantasy would certainly be a convenient way for members to disavow their own strivings for power. They could instead displace them onto absent men, as if only men had those nasty wishes for power, and simultaneously restrict their awareness of their own competitive activities to the socially acceptable arena of competition to attract men, rather than owning their struggles in the room.

It also became clear to me that the group's G-A-M-based enactment of projection was serving as a powerful defense against addressing competition within the group related to race and racism. The group began to deepen its awareness of the collective fears and ambivalence held by most of the women about owning competition and power strivings in this much more loaded arena. I suggested that one factor in the apparent difficulty working openly with competition along diverse racial and ethnic lines in the group was also a reflection of the group's unacknowledged ambivalence and confusion about the authority of the Black, female Director, and her representation in the room by a White woman (whom the group kept trying to recast as some other race).

The group's discussion then became a meaningful exploration of the intersection of their gender and ethnicity/racial identity with deep-felt longings for power and authority. One member, for example, was moved to tears reflecting on her sudden consciousness of very mixed feelings about her acceptance in the Ivy League university hosting the conference. As an Asian woman, she had been aware of her negative feelings toward this historically White and male bastion, but had not noticed before how deep her longing was to be a part of the power the school represented to her, and further, how guilty she felt about having such a longing.

Further exploration of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and attitudes toward power that became a theme in this conference is beyond the scope of this chapter. This chapter has illustrated the power of the G-A-M in the life of the group, and the potential for getting so stuck that the learning of the group does not progress if the consultant is unaware of this phenomenon or unable to work effectively with its enactment.

### ***Vignette 3 (taken from Wells, 1995, Groups in Context)***

Wells (1995) provided a powerful case example from an experiential training conference for a work group of drug treatment counselors. During the course of this five-day event, a conflict emerged between Ms. A, a Black woman, and Mr. K, an Anglo man. The conflict escalated over time, as these two participants became polarized around the validity of the theoretical material being presented, the utility of the experiential method, and the competence of the consulting staff. Ms. A consistently defended the work, while Mr. K consistently criticized and devalued it.

In his analysis, Wells focused on two main issues. First, he described the process of projective identification employed by the group to relocate its collective ambivalence about the training entirely in these two members, who could then be scapegoated and blamed for wasting the time of the rest of the group. Second, he asked what factors might contribute to the group's election of these two members to play out this conflict. He focused on the race of each of these members, noting that Ms. A, who defended the task was Black, as were the consulting staff, whereas the critique of the enterprise was carried by a White man. His presentation of the situation provided evidence for racial identification and bias as playing a significant role in the way this conflict was played out, and for the group's unconscious wish to simplify their experience into Black and White terms.

Wells made no note at all, however, of the gender of these two participants as a factor in his analysis of the roles they took up for the group. He did not link their behavior to the G-A-M construct he so elegantly described. Yet, if the group is perceived as mother, a predisposition to two very different relationships to the enterprise could have been predicted for its male and female members. For men, as we have seen, fears of mother are fears of the Other, of the object with whom they have been forced to dis-identify (often harshly and quickly) at an early age. They learn to revere and to compete with their fathers (self-objects to emulate and fear) for possession of the Oedipal prize (mother, or G-A-M). In Mr. K's case, one could thus interpret his battling with the authority of the staff in these terms alone, were all the staff White. This struggle was compounded, however, by his unacknowledged discomfort with being in a subordinate role to Black authority (both within the training event and in his usual work life), which he undoubtedly carried for others in the group as well. Women, on the other hand, grow into the object of their earliest fears through their capacity for motherhood (whether actualized or not). Their fear of mother (the group) is thus more closely tied to fears of self and their own power and authority. Further, they have a self-identity that has been hypothesized to be strongly grounded in their relatedness to others. Thus, women in general (and Ms. A in particular) might be pulled toward greater identification with any group enterprise.

If it is difficult to link one set of ideas with clinical data effectively, it is even more difficult to entertain two simultaneously in such an analysis. This is more so when the two referents, race and gender, are both fraught with the tension and emotional freight of a long history of social inequity and violence. An example of both the difficulty and the need for taking up such complexity can be found in Weston's (1997) moving essay on the trial of O.J. Simpson for the murder of his estranged wife and her friend. Speaking from her social identity as a Black woman, Weston examined the confluence of gender, class, and race "in that order" as deeply rooted social constructions that resulted in those tragic events. No attempt will be made to rank gender and race in order of importance or value in explaining how the two individuals in Wells' case example were selected to play out the group's ambivalence. (Unfortunately, data were not provided about the gender of the consultants, only their race.) Rather, the dynamics he described seemed more related to a



confluence of race (which he analyzed) with gender (which he did not). Ms. A's behavior as described supports the hypothesis that a confluence of race and gender identity was at play in her election to her role.

For a Black woman, the relationship to the G-A-M may have a somewhat different character than for a White woman, at least if her ethnicity is African American. In African-American culture there is an expectation and a valuing of maternal strength and authority that is, at least traditionally, greater than that accorded mothers in predominantly middle-class, White, American culture. There is also a backlash, however, against this strength and authority that can be seen in the escalating violence toward Black women by their partners in rap lyrics, in pop culture, and in images of all kinds. This backlash is of increasing concern to Black feminists (Wing, 1997), especially as women of color have less access to institutional and legal supports to protect themselves against violence than do White women (Almeida, 1998). Her racial and cultural background may have served to simplify the nature of Ms. A's identification with the G-A-M, if she was less burdened by ambivalence about her own power. It may simultaneously have increased her reasonable expectation of a backlash, however, against both the power of the group, and her own power in supporting the authority and competence of the group leadership.

### *Application in Therapeutic Settings*

“...I was really suffering, as all members of the group suffer, through dislike of the emotional quality in myself and in the group that is inherent in membership of the human group.”

—Bion, 1961, p.103

Both men and women are frequently pathologized in treatment settings for behaviors that deviate from socialized gender norms or from the therapist's gender-based assumptions about healthy behavior (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974; Rosenbaum, 1998; Segal, 1990). In group settings in particular, therapists who are unsophisticated about differences in the impact of the G-A-M on male and female members' participation are likely to collude with the group in reifying roles that block integration and healing. For instance, women may have a harder time individuating from the collective effectively, and this will affect their individual progress. Men may find themselves role-locked in counter-dependent or competitive stances toward group leaders (formal or informal), which again will affect their ability to work effectively on individual issues. These are examples, and behaviors will vary widely depending on the nature of the therapy group. But the ability to see and name phenomena in terms of the individual's relationship to the group-as-a-whole should serve to advance the “work-task” of providing therapeutic benefit to all members.

Western (1999) has suggested that the task of the consultant can be seen as twofold; the consultant must achieve the “maternal reverie” in which emotional underpinnings of the system can surface and be explored, but must also create the container in which such work can safely occur and that links it effectively to external outcomes. He calls this second task of containment

the “paternal reality” metaphor, which he feels is lacking in current thinking about consultative roles, whether in therapy or organizational settings. The importance of this paternal reality lies in its ability to counterbalance the fears raised by encountering the G-A-M.

While providing a compelling picture of two recursive processes that are essential to effective work, Western’s delineation of gendered functioning once again fails to recognize the power of the maternal role (as distinct from the more general feminine) to create structure, enforce rules, etc., rather assigning these functions to the paternal role. This powerful and pervasive tendency to describe parental roles (whether actual or symbolic) in terms of socially constructed assumptions must be guarded against ceaselessly by any therapist wishing to provide truly neutral exploratory space for clients of either gender. Studies have shown that mental health professionals sometimes participate in and aid in constructing “health” as adherence to traditional gender roles (Rosenbaum, 1998). Western’s contribution lies in his synthesis of these two equally important functions of the therapist or consultant. It is this integration within the person of the therapist, regardless of gender, that enables the provision of both structure and liminal space for growth needed by clients of either sex.

#### *Vignette 4*

The author was asked to conduct a support group on secondary trauma (i.e., emotional trauma in caregivers that can result from repeated exposure to the traumatic lives of their patients) for the staff of a nationally recognized health-care program serving an urban, low-income population. Another therapist, a Black woman, was invited to co-lead the group. Participation was voluntary and open to all staff members. Approximately half of the staff chose to attend, including all the managers. The staff of the program was largely female, and its entire management team was female. The management team was entirely White, and the rest of staff was mixed with Whites in most of the professional positions and Blacks in most of the support staff roles. Just prior to the start of the group, two young male relatives of staff members had been fatally shot, in separate incidents, within the public housing projects the program was created to serve, deeply impacting the whole staff.

At first, the group’s work focused on processing these two specific traumas. But as the group progressed, it became clear that the staff had a pattern of absorbing the chaos and despair felt by the surrounding community in relation to a pervasive experience of past and present trauma. Staff members told story after story of abuse, violence, or neglect in their clients’ lives, and reported feelings of grief, anger, and disorganizing helplessness in the face of these stories. In addition to the ongoing stresses that are daily partners of poverty, one community the program was serving was in the process of being literally dismantled and dispersed, to make room for newer (more expensive) housing to be built. The co-therapists provided interpretations and education regarding the processes of projection and displacement, through which the chaos, fear, and anger of the community—the sequellae of institutionalized racism and

classism—were being imported into and reenacted within the health program. This served to relieve staff guilt and depression. Returning energy enabled the staff to take several concrete action steps to reduce the level of chaos in their internal functioning and to set better functional boundaries, including an emergency response system and clearer lines of communication.

As the group experienced some relief from the external emotional pressure and began improving its boundary management, however, internal subgroup conflicts emerged. These included tension between the clinical staff and the fiscal staff, and between management and subordinates. These conflicts were clearly related in part to the level of stress their work entailed, but also to more universal group dynamics with regard to authority and leadership across racial and class differences. The program Director was generally perceived as saintly in her dedication and vision, and nurturing to a fault with patients. But she was also viewed as somewhat autocratic and inconsistent in her responsiveness to staff. Wishes were expressed for firmer leadership, yet complaints were voiced when she made executive decisions without first obtaining consensus from her management team.

The ambivalence attendant on her leadership, both in her own experience and in that of the group, was consistent with the gender-related pattern described by Bayes and Newton (1985) in that she was not perceived as someone who could fully and effectively exercise her authority. Her participation in group sessions was inconsistent. The group character was substantially different in her absence, but tensions related to her management style went largely unspoken in her presence, despite encouragement to work these issues from both therapists. Instead, energy was diverted into a power struggle between two other managers, representing the fiscal and clinical departments. This battle was experienced by the group as very frightening. The group, with the unconscious help of its therapists, then proceeded to undermine its ability to work.

Members' expressed desire for group cohesion and safety to explore internal tensions grew. The program Director had insisted, however, on a drop-in model for participation. There were therefore frequent shifts in membership, and difficulties arose in maintaining confidentiality boundaries with staff members who were not participating, which sabotaged creation of a sufficiently safe space. A split emerged between management and non-supervisory staff. Staff had expressed strong desires to work as a mixed group on their shared experience of stress, but subordinates struggled with finding voice and with perceptions of consequences for speaking frankly. Meanwhile, there was increasing pressure on the co-therapists behind the scenes to end the group. This pressure came from a female senior manager in the larger parent-organization, who felt we should stop tying up the organization's limited therapy resources by continuing a group that only served one program.

The group disbanded after approximately 16 sessions without resolving some of the internal struggles that had surfaced. After interviewing members and conducting a post-hoc review, the two therapists concluded that we had colluded with the group in tolerating a looseness of boundaries around membership and confidentiality that undermined the group's ability to con-

tain its emotional energy and rechannel it more effectively. Reflecting on our process in terms of the G-A-M, the following picture emerges. The group's struggle in the first stage of work was with its experience of itself as an impotent caretaker in the face of overwhelming tragedy in the larger system it was serving. In the second stage, the group struggled, paradoxically, with anxieties around a growing sense of its own power. The success of initial work in fact served to heighten anxieties about the group-as-a-whole's potential for exercising leadership. Staff were frightened of the emerging conflict and competition within the program and of fully taking up differentiated authority positions and working openly with them. They felt insufficiently contained, by their female leader or by their female co-therapists, to work through fears of aggressive and competitive impulses.

The subsystem's anxiety was mirrored by the larger organizational system's unconscious fear that this work-group might actually create substantive changes that would threaten its status quo. This fear was enacted through the pressure from the senior manager to end the group. This example provides a clear parallel, on a group level of behavior, to that of the individual client who is afraid to integrate or exercise her own power as this would be too threatening to the status quo of her family and social system. The struggles of the group were thus quite consistent with what might be predicted in the context of the theory set forth in this paper.

### *Institutional and Social Group Functioning*

“First,...the individual should perceive clearly his [sic] freedom to belong or not to belong....Second,...the individual should see the essential unity of himself and his group.”

—Rioch, 1971, p. 272

The formulation of the G-A-M has significant implications for the functioning of groups on a large scale in the world. Oberman and Josselson (1996) proposed an heuristic model for understanding the experience of motherhood from a subjective, rather than an objectified, frame. They suggested that a woman who becomes a mother confronts a series of tensions or polarities inherent in the role, including omnipotence/liability, isolation/community, and destructive/promoting energy. Successful integration of the mothering role results from the ability to balance within this matrix of tensions. This is surprisingly similar to one model for understanding effective organizational functioning. Mintzberg (1991) proposed various forces at work, such as cooperation, competition, direction, efficiency, and innovation, any one of which can dominate an organization. He suggested that an effective organization is one in which the interplay of these forces is balanced gracefully. His description of these forces bore a remarkable similarity, using organizational terms and concepts, to Oberman and Josselson's description of the tensions in mothering, using psychosocial terms and concepts. The parallel in the two models lies not only in the types of tensions described, but in the conclusion that balance is the key to successful functioning.

The construct of the G-A-M can be seen as a meeting point, where maternal behavior and organizational behavior share common tasks and challenges. As in both models, balance of forces is key to successful group functioning, and as in both models, this balance can be quite difficult to maintain. The developmental and social factors described above combine to pull the G-A-M toward behavior that is fear-based, unbalanced, and ineffective. The chain of postulations runs as follows: a) the group-as-a-whole has a subjective identity and power; b) this identity is collectively experienced as the potentially loving and terrifying mother of early childhood; and c) the group's anxiety related to this identity leads it to believe it needs containment and control to prevent it from fully exercising its power. Applying this formulation to our analysis of group functioning provides a powerful addition to our understanding of both intragroup and intergroup behavior.

For instance, this formulation sheds a different light on the well-documented wish of groups to have an opposing or outgroup. When one examines the behaviors of social groups from neighborhoods to tribes to nation-states, it is apparent that we are constantly seeking or constructing an opponent against which we can define ourselves: one that functions as a repository into which we displace internal fears and hostilities. For example, in a study of leadership impact on group and intergroup dynamics in remote but interdependent teams, Penwell (1992) found that teams with a designated leader experienced their groups as friendlier and more differentiated than those without a leader. He also pointed out that members of a group will tend to rate members of their own group more favorably, and members of an outgroup less favorably, especially in conflict situations. The more traditional explanations for this phenomenon involve the concept of projection. The outgroup becomes a receptacle for uncomfortable anxiety, aggression, or other unwanted feeling, and this provides for a mechanism through which a developing group can define its own identity. In relational theorists' terms, perhaps groups are also more comfortable exercising "power against" an outgroup because this implies some checks and balances provided by one's adversary. By contrast, in the supposedly more feminine construction of "power for," there is no inherent limitation on the power that might be wielded; there is no limit. Indeed, the phrase "the sky's the limit" takes on new meaning in the context of the metaphor of the earth as mother.

Hayden and Carr (1993), in their paper on responsibility and ethics as applied to the evaluation of Group Relations consultants, have written that the A. K. Rice Institute, like other organizations and institutions, must struggle with questions of integrity and values in order to pursue any task effectively. Perhaps all groups, AKRI included, struggle with the collective experience of power for precisely the same reasons that individuals struggle with the power of the group. That is, to the extent that we identify as a group, we collectively experience the group in which we have membership as potentially powerful and destructive, if not contained or bounded. To that end, we may unconsciously seek to undermine our own group's striving for greater agency and influence in the world as an expression of our ambivalence about our collective identification with a maternal object. This desire is likely to inten-

sify in the absence of a clear counterweight to control or direct our power, and thus allay our anxieties. This counterweight may be provided through a strong leader, whether human or ideological, or through the creation of an adversary. Both can serve to allay the fears of its own unbounded power that haunt any group.

On becoming president of South Africa after years of imprisonment and torture, Mandela (1994) suggested in his inaugural address that “our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.” This is an idea that is very familiar to psychologists working with individuals in their struggles to fully realize their potential. What can be learned, however, by applying this idea to the struggles of groups, who so often fail in their (our) objectives by imploding from within rather than being crushed from without? Imagine what we might accomplish in groups if we could learn not to fear our collective energy and power. In order to do this, we must first understand the early underpinnings of our fears of the power of the G-A-M.

As with any significant shift, such understanding is only a first step. The ultimate goal, which is at the heart of Group Relations work, is to better integrate our experiences as autonomous individuals with those of being interdependent social animals, with collective as well as independent power and purpose. To move toward this goal there is a need for well-designed research into gender and authority along the lines set forth by Cytrynbaum and Belkin (2004) in their review of Group Relations research. This should include the study of various leadership and membership combinations along gender lines, as well as other factors such as race and age. There is also a need for study that focuses on group-level processes, however, and not only individual reactions. This type of exploration is harder to construct, as it is harder to quantify what “the group” does or feels than it is to measure responses of individuals. One method for accomplishing this may be through counting behaviors and verbalizations of behaviors and verbalizations reflecting anxiety about the group’s power and wishes for containment or control from some stabilizing agent (e.g., a leader or another group). These data might be linked with measures of the defensive strategies being manifested by individual members (such as splitting, projection, etc.) and with measures of productivity on the group’s work task. Such studies could be carried out in conferences, therapy groups, and/or organizational settings. The focus of such research should remain on the qualities of the system’s functioning rather than the individual’s.

Meta-analyses of group functioning around work tasks at a larger level might also be very fruitful. For instance, when do social groups seek out leaders? When do they look for adversaries? How do groups respond to their own successes and failures to complete work tasks, and when is group anxiety most manifest? Work from sociology and anthropology may have much to contribute to our understanding of how unconscious, psychological processes play themselves out at the level of group behavior.

## SUMMARY

The concept of the Group-As-Mother is one that has significant implications for understanding the behavior of men and women as individuals in groups, and for understanding the behavior of the group-as-a-whole. While this construct of the group as gendered has had a place in theoretical discourse, its relevance in applied settings has been largely overlooked and undeveloped. At one level, the mother metaphor can be viewed as simply a shorthand way of capturing unconscious wishes and fears related to early dependency needs that group life seems to evoke. This chapter, however, has attempted to set forth some of the developmental and social antecedents that produce the gendered quality of group experience in our collective unconscious, and that make its genderedness of great significance. Examples were provided of some ways in which this gendered experience of the group interacts with both developmental differences and socially constructed gender roles to produce important behavioral outcomes for men and women—outcomes that have been observed but not fully explained. This discussion is best viewed as an impetus to further analysis, exploration, and research that will expand, refine, and challenge the postulates set forth here to the enrichment of our collective understanding of group functioning.

