

**Foundations and Applications of Group Psychotherapy:  
A Sphere of Influence. Mark F. Ettin. Jessica Kingsley.  
1999. £18.95. pp 454. ISBN: 1853027952.**

This is the first British publication of a book first published in the US in 1992 and this current publication therefore makes this text easily available in this country, not least because it is part of the widely available and excellent International Library of Group Analysis series published by Jessica Kingsley.

Most readers of this journal will be primarily interested and engaged in work with individuals and may therefore be open to persuasion about the need to know about group functioning and group psychotherapy. There are at least three powerful arguments in favour of the individual counsellor or psychotherapist knowing something about groups. These are that:

- We all live and function in groups, whether these are family, work, organisational, leisure, or the larger group of our shared culture. We are beings that operate both as individuals and also as members of various groupings. As such, our identity is permeated and influenced by these various groups. There is good evidence to indicate that group influences are primary in many situations.
- Even if we see only individuals, they bring into the consulting room their “groups in the mind”, and the dynamics and processes of the groups to which they belong will be brought into the material of the session. Even when we work with individuals we are therefore inevitably dealing with the groups that they bring to us - work, family, leisure, etc. groups.
- We may well need, as part of the work we do, to relate to and work within various organisational systems and it may therefore be helpful to understand something about group and organisational processes

and dynamics in order to function more effectively within these organisations.

So then, to this book. It is a huge and ambitious book in all senses. It contains a great deal of information in the form of tables comparing and contrasting various approaches, lists of questions, clinical vignettes, and theoretical and practical discussions. The first quarter of the book is devoted to a discussion about the history of group psychotherapy, beginning with an illuminating account of the “walking groups” of Socrates and ending with a look at the theories and working methods of post-war theorists such as Lewin, Foulkes, and Bion.

This is certainly one of the most comprehensive historical surveys of the development of group psychotherapy that is available, and these discussions serve as an excellent introduction to the themes and issues that follow. Later chapters examine how a variety of types of groups, from psycho educational to psychotherapeutic, function, how groups can be established and facilitated, and how they can be used to help the individual group member. The author manages to maintain a good balance between theoretical and practical issues throughout his discussions. The use of structured exercises and didactic instruction in psycho educational groups, and an outline of ideas about the group matrix, working through in groups, termination issues, and mirroring, are just some of the issues explored in this wide-ranging book that manages to cover most of the important concepts and ideas about group psychotherapy in an original and compelling way.

This is a book that will provide the novice reader with an excellent introduction to ideas about group functioning, group counselling, and group psychotherapy but the wealth of detail will also provide the more informed and experienced reader with more complex and thorough discussions of the field. It is a book that can easily be read at a number of levels since it is so clearly structured and it successfully conveys a sense of the complexity and

subtlety of the group psychotherapeutic process. I recommend this book highly.

**Observing the Erotic Imagination. Robert J. Stoller. Yale University Press. 1992.**

**Presentations of Gender. Robert J. Stoller. Yale University Press. 1985.**

Two more books to add to Robert Stoller's expanding body of work on gender identity, sexuality, and perversion, in what has over time evolved into a very significant contribution to psychoanalytic thought on these subjects. There are two broad areas of discussion in these books. The first is a discussion about how it might be possible, within a treatment context and using essentially observational material, to obtain valid and useful information about states of mind, psychopathology, and relationships. The issue here is the validity of the psychoanalytic method. The second outlines current thinking about gender disorders using clinical and research-based information.

However, these two books also explore different, as well as containing overlapping, preoccupations. The focus of the first book, for example, is on perverse experiences and behaviour, contrasting this with "normal" sexuality, whilst the second concentrates on how gender identity is developed, and therefore takes a somewhat wider approach to sexuality and its disorders.

One of the major areas of discussion in both books is of how masculinity and femininity develops in boys and girls, and to this end Stoller examines biological, cross-cultural and clinical evidence. The biological evidence consists of studies of genetic abnormalities and the effects of hormonal imbalance at critical periods of development resulting in abnormal genitalisation. Clinical material is extensively quoted to illustrate Stoller's

ideas on the development of gender identity and disorder and cross cultural evidence is used as a test of the hypothesis that these concepts apply to cultures with differing child rearing practices to our own culture. Stoller examines this evidence to answer the question of what it tells us about the development of a distinct sense of belonging to a specific gender, of having an identity as a member of a particular sex.

The main theme of "Presentations of Gender" is the finding that children need to identify and also be rivalrous with the same-sexed parent, in addition to desiring the opposite-sexed parent, so that masculinity and femininity can develop satisfactorily. This book is an exploration of how this normal developmental process may be sidetracked, a study of the numerous parameters that might affect it. His thesis boils down to the maxim that "too much mother, too little father" results in feminine boys, and that "too little mother, too much father" results in masculine girls. In outlining his argument he questions the assumption that aberrant behaviour is always the result of trauma and conflict and he is in agreement with Fred Pines that the experience of "quiet moments" in infancy are extremely important. Gender disorders are seen to result not from too much conflict and frustration, as others have proposed, but from too much gratification. Stoller discusses perverse behaviour, transsexualism, transvestism, homosexuality, and other gender identity phenomena, examines biological evidence, and studies an American Indian culture in order to gather evidence for his thesis. Extensive case studies are provided to illustrate his arguments.

"Observing the Erotic Imagination" takes as its main subject matter an area that is only partly covered by the previous book, the theme of sexual excitement, both normal and perverse. Stoller's view is that the dynamics behind erotic excitement are not dissimilar in perverse and non-perverse sexuality, but the distinction is whether erotic experience brings one towards or away from intimacy with another person. In the perversions he finds, in common with others, a wish to humiliate, an attempt to reverse childhood trauma by triumphing in the present and gaining revenge. This is effectively a

process of dehumanisation through ritual and denial of the basis of the perverse relationship. Perversions are also seen, in common with Masud Khan, as attempts at self-cure. The later part of the book looks at homosexuality. Psychoanalytic views are criticised not because of their validity but because of their over-inclusiveness on the basis of his experience of clinical samples. Stoller then outlines his own views on the necessary criteria for obtaining valid knowledge in a clinical setting. These books constitute rich and essential summaries of Stoller's later thoughts on the nature of sexuality, gender, and their disorders.

## **Personal Transformations in Small Groups: A Jungian Perspective. Robert D. Boyd. Tavistock/Routledge. 1991.**

In this country we are much more familiar with the group approaches of Foulkes and Bion and the interpersonal approach of Yalom than with the relatively unknown area of Jungian theory and practice as applied to groups. This is a double separation from the psychotherapeutic mainstream since group psychotherapy and the concepts that group psychotherapists utilise are themselves not a part of the standard analytic paradigm, the paradigm of individual psychology and intrapsychic dynamics. However, it is clear that there are sometimes advantages in being able to take on an independent view if one is able to move away from seeing difference as something necessarily indicative of differing status, as better or worse.

Jungian theory and practice has often been in a similar position to the psychoanalytic mainstream, as has group psychotherapy - easily thought to be a somewhat strange and unknown body of ideas that is viewed with more than a little suspicion. A famous remark made by Winnicott in the middle of a conference intended to enlarge understandings between the Jungians and others seems to sum up the problem. "I cannot be spoken to in this language",

said Winnicott, perhaps merely pointing out the problem, or perhaps prematurely foreclosing on the possibility that learning might be possible. It is possible for any of us to wish to avoid being receptive to alien ideas and thoughts and to react to them with a sense of threat and resistance.

This book is largely a record of the author's attempts to research group psychotherapy processes: the focus of interest is on observing and understanding Jungian themes as they develop in groups, and they base their research firmly in a study of the experiences that people have, developing experiential specifications of group processes and evolving a conceptual framework with which to understand and capture symbolic language. The introductory chapter outlines the structure of the research study and this is essential reading for anyone who is interested in psychotherapy research in general or the even wider question of research into clinical phenomena. We need new paradigms for research if we are to move away from the dominant tradition of positivist research, mechanistic determinism, and value irrelevance.

Other chapters take a closer look at events in psychotherapy groups. There are case vignettes and one whole chapter is an account of an individual in a group. Further chapters discuss grief-work in groups, the role of groups in learning and teaching contexts, and the process of growth and transformation in groups. It is always interesting to see how the author applies Jungian ideas and concepts such as archetypal patterns, the animus and anima, the Great Mother, and so on, to small group events, as ways of seeing and categorising group processes and as ways of working with and interpreting group phenomena. Anyone who is interested in group psychotherapy will enjoy, and be educated by, this book. I enjoyed reading it and it provided thoughts and ideas that will certainly illuminate my own practice.