

# DENIED, EXCLUDED, INVISIBLE

A Group Relations Conference with a  
Systems Perspective on the politics of DEI

**SEPTEMBER 19 - 21, 2025**



**CLICK HERE TO REGISTER**



# GROUP RELATIONS CONFERENCE

In recent years, many have come to know the language of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as a moral and organizational imperative—an aspiration to build cultures where all can belong, contribute, and thrive. Yet, in the shadow of these noble intentions, another framework insists we go further. Denied. Excluded. Invisible. This alternate triad does not seek comfort in aspirations but asks us to confront the enduring and often hidden realities of systemic oppression. While DEI aims to open doors, Denied, Excluded, Invisible asks us to look at who built the doors, who decides when they're opened, and who remains unseen even when they walk through them.

Where DEI calls for inclusion, Denied, Excluded, Invisible questions what is structurally withheld. Denial is not a failure of awareness—it is an act of erasure, a systemic function that withholds access to resources, narratives, and legitimacy. Exclusion is more than not being invited; it's the mechanism that preserves power by determining who gets to participate in leadership, influence, and nation-building. And invisibility is not simply being overlooked—it is the social and institutional refusal to see, hear, or account for the lived realities of marginalized communities.

In their seminal work exploring the topic of othering, Skolnick and Green explore the dynamics of how individuals and groups unconsciously assign undesirable or feared aspects of themselves onto others, what is often called projective identification in systems psychodynamics. This psychological maneuver creates the denigrated other, someone (or a group) made to carry the blame, shame, or anxiety of the dominant or more powerful group. To that end, othering happens when those projected parts become activated to deny, exclude, and make others invisible.

Our task is not simply to learn about the denial, exclusion, and invisibility faced by others; rather, we must examine how we may all be complicit—consciously or unconsciously—in perpetuating these issues. We invite you to participate in this important reflection. This work is not easy; it requires not only contemplation but also action. The educator and philosopher Paulo Freire suggests that this process is essential for transformation, which he refers to as “praxis”—the intersection of words and actions (reflection and action upon the world, in order to transform it). It is necessary if we are to progress from mere symbolic inclusion to meaningful transformation. Will you take up this challenge?



# WHAT IS GROUP RELATIONS?

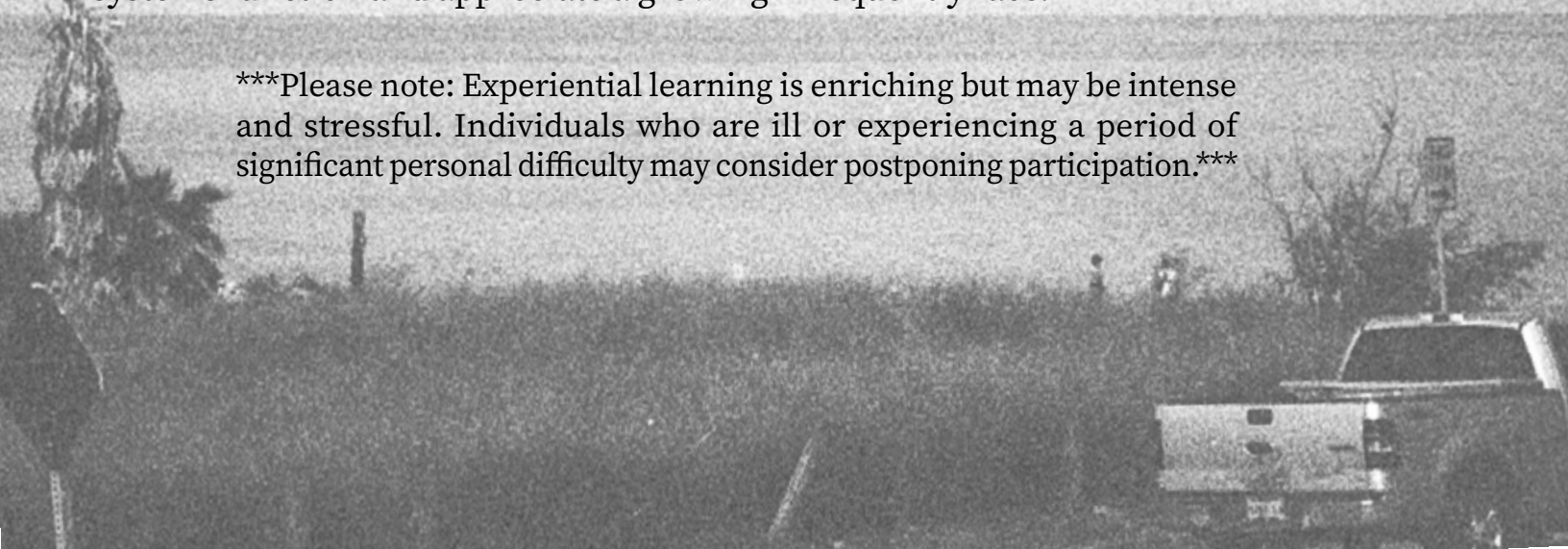
Group relations conferences provide valuable opportunities for experiential learning about complex group dynamics. These conferences aim to reveal often-hidden dynamics of power, authority, leadership, followership, and how our diverse identities—such as gender, nationality, political affiliation, and race—affect our interactions within various systems. Participants frequently report "aha" moments that not only change their perspectives on the world but also influence their behavior within it. They often feel more empowered to create change and gain greater clarity about their roles in life, among other transformations.

These changes occur as participants learn to cultivate awareness of their “here and now” experiences within the dynamics of both small and large groups, focusing on tasks, authority, roles, boundaries, and the exercise of leadership. Ultimately, participants come to understand how larger systems function and appreciate a growing

set of behavioral choices regarding their relationships in various contexts, including family, school, work, and both local and international communities. In this way, group relations conferences transform theoretical classroom learning into engaging relational and experiential experiences.

These experiences can be viewed as social and behavioral counterparts to traditional laboratory experiences in physics and other natural sciences. They create a dynamic learning environment that allows participants to apply insights from their interpersonal interactions to develop hypotheses and inform their decisions and actions in group settings. This approach has real-world applications in areas such as healthcare, education, politics, social justice, environmental stewardship, and global citizenship. This innovative experiential learning design effectively highlights the often hidden dynamics within groups, which are crucial for managing work tasks and the organizational pressures that people frequently face.

\*\*\*Please note: Experiential learning is enriching but may be intense and stressful. Individuals who are ill or experiencing a period of significant personal difficulty may consider postponing participation.\*\*\*



# PRIMARY TASK

The primary task of a group relations conference is to provide individuals with a space to explore the complexities of group and organizational behavior. By using systems psychodynamics as a theoretical framework, participants gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and unconscious forces that influence group dynamics. By bringing together a diverse group of individuals from various backgrounds and professions, we create a unique learning environment where participants can examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to the group dynamics. Through experiential learning, participants learn to recognize both the conscious and unconscious forces that shape how groups form, evolve, and potentially disintegrate over time. In the context of this conference, the task will also include examining the systemic realities of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

For someone who has never attended a group relations conference or has little knowledge of systems psychodynamics, the experience can be invaluable, yet potentially unsettling. The conference provides participants with an opportunity for deep self-reflection and self-discovery. By examining our behaviors and beliefs with respect to the group dynamic, we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and others. This enhanced self-awareness can benefit us in both personal and professional contexts. By developing a deeper understanding of group dynamics, participants can become more effective leaders, collaborators, and team members. This understanding could also help address issues in secondary and higher education, local and state government systems, think tanks, non-profits, and more.

**“I know you see me,  
but do you see me  
seeing you?”**

—Saul Williams, paraphrased from  
spoken word performance

**“If a white man wants  
to lynch me, that's his  
problem. If he's got  
the power to lynch me,  
that's my problem.  
Racism is not a question  
of attitude; it's a  
question of power.”**

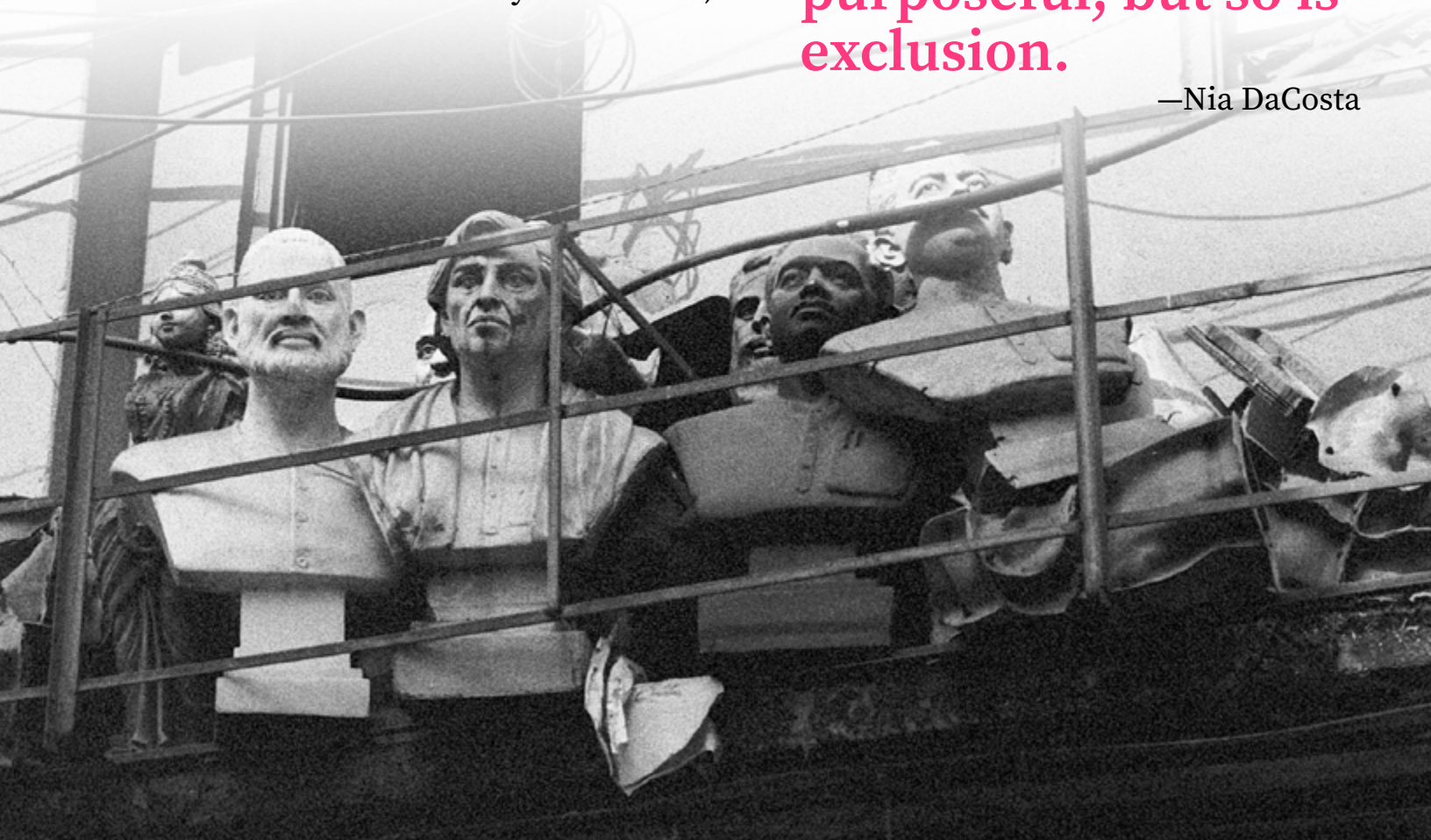
—Kwame Ture (deadname  
Stokely Carmichael)

**“The denigrated other  
is not outside the  
group system, but an  
indispensable part  
of how the system  
maintains its identity  
and coherence.”**

—Green and Skolnik -  
“The Denigrated Other”

**I think the thing  
about systemic  
oppression is  
that inclusion is  
purposeful, but so is  
exclusion.**

—Nia DaCosta



# CONFERENCE EVENTS

A person wearing dark pants and shoes is standing in a dimly lit industrial or laboratory setting. They are positioned next to a large, complex piece of machinery with various pipes and components. In the foreground, there is a circular opening in the floor, possibly a manhole or a large drain. The lighting is somewhat dramatic, with a bright light source creating a lens flare effect in the upper part of the image.

## Conference Opening

This event will introduce members to the conference, outlining its themes, structure, processes, and opportunities for learning. It will also provide a platform for members to share their experiences as they transition into the conference. As a result, the Conference Opening marks the beginning of collaboration between staff and members.

## Small Study Group (SSG)

This event focuses on the interpersonal relationships among the members of the group. The task of the group is to study behavior as it occurs in the “here and now”, in other words, focusing on issues as they are happening in the group. The role of the consultant is to provide observations to the group with respect to the primary task. In this setting, participants explore how they relate to the formal authority of the consultant and how the dynamics of Denial, Exclusion, and Invisibility impact their capacity to take up personal authority, as compared to formal and delegated authority.

## Large Study Group (LSG)

This event unites all conference participants to reflect on their behaviors in the “here and now”. Unlike the Small Group setting, this event highlights the dynamics that occur when personal interactions are limited and projections become more prominent. The role of the team of consultants is to provide systemic-level observations related to the primary task of the conference.

## **Praxis Event (PE)**

This event provides both members and staff the opportunity to engage with and examine the evolving nature of the conference as it unfolds. The purpose of this event is twofold:

- 1) To study the dynamics that arise among subgroups as they interact with one another and with conference management, aiming to understand the institution as a whole in relation to its primary objectives.
- 2) To work collaboratively on tasks that will lead to a discussion at the end of the event, allowing participants to explore insights and emerging hypotheses.

Members will have the chance to form groups based on their interactions and learning from both the Small Study Group (SSG) and the Large Study Group (LSG). These groups will also have the opportunity to engage with other groups, including staff.

## **Reflection and Action Group (RAG)**

This event is structured to allow members to reflect on their experiences from the conference, with the assistance of a consultant. As RAG groups are not intended to be "here-and-now" events, the consultants will approach their roles differently.

The Reflection encourages members to reflect on how they assumed roles and enacted behaviors during the conference. The Action provides members with an opportunity to examine the relationship between the roles and behaviors they adopted at the conference and reflect on what they have learned and how it might help them take action in the world.

## **Conference Discussion**

In this event, members and staff have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their overall experience of the conference as a whole. This event allows the conference to come together to review and analyze their experience of the conference. The purpose is to uncover patterns of behavior or deeper meanings that may influence one's actions in other groups and organizations.

# CONFERENCE STAFF

## **TYROME “TY” SMITH — Conference Director**

Ty has been grappling with the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion since childhood. Growing up as one of the few Black children in a predominantly white environment, he learned to navigate a world that sometimes acknowledged his cultural and political identity, but often scorned it. Raised in the heart of one of the most conservative areas known as “Pennsylvtucky,” Ty's experiences have shaped his understanding of contemporary issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. With over 30 years of experience, including a background as a police officer, he has been elected as an AKRI Fellow. In his day job, he provides technical support to underserved founders and startups. This conference is significant to him because he believes that failing to examine the political and social implications of denying people their humanity could have dire consequences for everyone.



## **DIANA CASTAÑEDA — Associate Director**

Diana has lived with the juxtaposition of diversity/segregation, inclusion/exclusion, and visibility/invisibility her entire life growing up in Chicago and throughout her career. She was fortunate enough to be born to immigrant parents at a time before gentrification made the neighborhood she was born into homogeneous. However, her early experiences with diversity, mainly racial and socioeconomic, were in stark contrast to many Chicagoans, who are heavily affected by segregation. Diana has had the experience of being included in privileged opportunities, such as access to an education at a prestigious university, and often excluded from the majority's experiences in that context. Diana has been a staff member at a Group Relations conference every year since 2012, requiring her to use her visible and invisible identities in the service of learning. Nowadays, Diana is a psychotherapist at her private practice.



## **MICHAEL LINDSAY — Assistant Director of Administration**

As a 1960's-born son of white European descendants in middle-class suburban Chicago, I have carried that heritage with pride and an unquestioned sense of inclusion. This pride, however, required an inner denial of my queer identity, and, later, often rendering it invisible to avoid denigration and possible violence, especially during the AIDS crisis when our government willfully neglected our community. Helping gay men in psychotherapy believe that they could survive HIV, physically and psychologically, became my work as a psychologist. Group relations enabled me to expand to working with the dynamics of systems, and I owe an especial debt to those colleagues whose work has helped me recognize my complicity in a system that perpetuates pervasive harm by constructing whiteness as superior. These learning experiences have been humbling, even painful, calling me to account for my part in working to transform our system. My current right to be gay, married, and raising our two sons is an unexpected, more authentic, and more joyous (re-)inclusion than I've ever felt. I see this conference on the politics of DEI as another step towards collectively building our capacities for just diversity, equity, and inclusion.



## Ashley Barnes-Cocke (they/them) — Administrator

I grew up as a white kid in north central Minnesota, in 99% white schools, never having a formal teacher of color until college, and never a black teacher until attending Harvard graduate school. Some of my earliest memories are fighting with my family members about brushing my hair, wearing a dress, stop playing in the dirt. Queerness was shameful, and I suppressed my bisexuality and out-of-the-binary gender expression to belong. As an outspoken 'why?' person, I was a designated problem child by many adults. While I was first radicalized into an anti-capitalist and anarcho-communist by the Palestinian struggle, my first experiences with the ways people wield power was through the lenses of adultism and gender control - it has taken me much longer to grapple with the ways I wield my whiteness. A group of young people experiencing homelessness were the first people to create a space I truly felt I could belong in a long time, and helped me come back to myself. I have spent the last 12 years working in communities to end, not just manage, youth homelessness, because they (and we) deserve beautiful futures. I now live in Seattle, WA, as a queer parent of a 3 year old and a 7 year old. We cannot leave all of the children around the world to the historical task of building a world that is more gentle, more humane, more free, more conducive to the human spirit - we are alive, and it is our task too.



## John Frazee — Consultant

I'm an older white man who feels like I've spent half my life deprogramming himself of the unconscious and conscious privilege, denial, exclusion, and invisibilizing that conditioned me to keep the world as it was. I grew up in a Kansas farm town believing my post-WWII country was the best of all. I moved away, slowly awakened, and made changes in the places I worked. I found teams that didn't look and think the same were more creative than their predecessors, saw problems sooner, and fixed them better. A kid who grew up in the Bronx had a different radar than I. My career as a journalist and leader required working with simultaneous competing priorities every day. The only way to keep track of the moving parts was by thinking of the whole as a system. My experience tells me to look at politics and society as a system if I want to affect the outcome. I have been a national officer of AKRI, the American group relations organization, and participated in many group relations conferences as a member and consultant.



## Diane Forbes Berthoud — Consultant

Diane has lived with the reality of being the Other most of her life and has had a complicated relationship with equity, diversity, and inclusion, in part because of her upbringing in an environment of mostly people of color, attending an all-girls school for close to a decade, and being affirmed in those identities, and then moving to Washington DC, where as a young, Black, educated immigrant student/professional later experienced being denied, excluded, and being made invisible. Some of this was experienced broadly in society, in her professional life as well as in group relations experiences for the past three decades. Her life's work, research, and passion have been dedicated to increasing access and success for underrepresented and underserved populations, and exploring the complex and nuanced dynamics of those groups' leadership. To further this exploration and to actively contribute to improving the lives of these groups, she held various roles at Howard University, Trinity University, and the University of California, San Diego over the last few decades. She also served as a founding faculty of the RISE San Diego leadership program and as Associate Director and Director of the most recent Black Authority Group relations conferences. Professionally, she serves as Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Professor, Graduate School at the University of Maryland in Baltimore.



## Nisha Shah — Consultant

When Nisha's parents left India in 1967-68 and landed in New York City, they were searching for opportunity—but also a sense of safety and belonging. Her father, a foreign medical graduate, found himself fighting to prove his worth in a system that rarely welcomed outsiders. The turning point came when one of his Indian co-fellows was murdered and he decided to move the family to a small iron town in rural Pennsylvania, a place that seemed quieter and perhaps safer. Nisha was born and raised there, in farm country surrounded by hard-working, white folk, who didn't really know what to do with the doctor's wife who wore a nose ring and argued with the grocer about his need to get cheaper fresh coriander, or his very Brown children. It was a place where she learned resilience, but also where the questions began—about who she was, where she belonged, and what it meant to hold multiple identities that didn't always seem to fit together. She's had the privilege of walking through many different worlds—serving as a volunteer land easement inspector for the Hudson Highlands Land Trust, riding in ambulances as a first responder in Hoboken and Jersey City, working in the nonprofit world in New York City during 9/11, and later, as a psychiatry resident working with refugees in Atlanta. Now a graduate psychoanalyst of the Emory University Psychoanalytic Institute, Nisha teaches and practices psychoanalysis with a focus on the unconscious aspects of race and trauma. She runs a private practice—where she offers psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and medication management. She also works with Emory's Goizueta Business School, where she teaches about the psychodynamics of coaching. She has also been involved in AKRI for the past eight years. This conference speaks directly to the core of her work and her life: the belief that when we deny, exclude, or erase the stories of entire communities—we severely limit the capacity of our own humanness.



## Leo Wilton — Consultant

“Oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and move to transform it.” These words by civil rights activist Ella Baker provide a context for my entry as a Black psychologist into the conversation around diversity, equity, inclusion, and transformative social justice. My commitment for addressing complex structural inequalities in society is rooted in a longstanding passion for this work. I came of age as a first-generation college student who identifies as an African American gay man, Black internationalist, and Pan-Africanist, who grew up with experiences of pervasive economic disenfranchisement based on social class. I have lived in three African countries and traveled extensively throughout the African Diaspora. It is within this context that I share Audre Lorde's challenge for us in moving beyond the “constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.”



## Mary B. McRae — Conference Elder

I spent most of my 30 years in academia teaching and exploring issues pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I am an ‘affirmative action baby’, born at the right time to benefit from many of the opportunities offered by the Civil Rights movement and legislation. Now I feel denied, excluded and invisible, all the things I and those who came before me, fought for are being challenged. So I am happy to take up the role of elder in this conference, hoping that the next generation might continue the persistent, never ending struggle to understand, engage, and work with the 'other' to move closer to a world where there is social equity and justice for all.



## Jaime Romo — Consultant

My relationship with denial, exclusion and invisibility began before I was born, when my father, a US citizen, was deported during the depression because president Hoover made an agreement with the Southern Pacific Railroad to deport Mexican railroad workers, who had incidentally replaced Chinese railroad workers decades before. My lived experiences of denial, exclusion and invisibility have manifested in family addictions, intersecting traumas, and what I then internalized. My learning and contribution for my own well-being and for others' healing has been through my work as teacher educator, a Traumatic Incident Reduction facilitator and trainer, a certified AK Rice group relations consultant, a conference director, and most significantly, as Spiritual Counselor. My Latinx identity holds various intersectional and simultaneous experiences of inclusion and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, and denial and continuing to metabolize past and present levels of white and other supremacies. I come to this conference to share in our collective complexity and co-author the story that will lead us.



## Patricia Kummel — Consultant

One of my early memories is my parents talking about being asked to leave a country club where they had been invited to dinner. They said it was because they were Jewish and the club was “restricted”. From this experience and others, I learned I was an “other” and that it was not necessarily a positive identity to hold. Over time, I have become aware of the benefits I have because my “otherness” is not obvious or even visible. I also recognize the dangers inherent in hiding aspects of myself. I’m excited to be part of this conference because it presents an opportunity to acknowledge and struggle our differences and disagreements, recognizing that (a) there are benefits to a diverse population where everyone is not the same and does not think the same and (b) not acknowledging/exploring the parts that we hide or prefer not to see in ourselves and others leads to unsuccessful outcomes, including war and destruction. I am a member of the New York and Washington-Baltimore Centers of AKRI, an AKRI Fellow, Co-Chair of the AKRI Change Committee overseeing the implementation of reparations recommendations and former Chair of AKRI’s Training and Certification Committee. I have a private psychotherapy, coaching and consulting practice in NYC.



## Amber (Williams) PaloSanto (they/she) — Consultant

As a Black, queer, female raised in the inner-city of Philadelphia, Amber didn't notice the nuances of the world. Their schools were always diverse in race, income, religion, etc. and genuine connections and relationships with people from all walks of life were made. Though their mother was one of the initial students to desegregate grade schools in Philly, and experienced KKK invasions at her HBCU in PA, those types of terror and exclusions felt distant and historical. Once at college, they encountered peers raised by people who created bubbles of homogeneity (both ideologically and physically) for their families that were in complete opposition to what they experienced. With the digital information age expanding, and modern forms of exclusion and denial (ex. redlining, food deserts, educational resource allocation issues) at the forefront, led by divisive authority figures, Amber's view of this society has shifted drastically. They now lean on a decade of Group Relations experiences, their career in higher education working with the future leaders of society, and other dialogic tools based in restorative practices and intergroup dialogue. The intentions are to open doors and light up pathways for change within their sphere of influence, with the hope that the ripples are felt in the broader societal landscape.



# FEES & SCHEDULE

## Scholarships

We understand that DEI initiatives are under attack, and many organizations are no longer supporting staff development in this area. We want to support those in need of financial support to attend this Conference to the extent possible. We have limited funds for scholarships, and the amount we have available is dependent on how many total registrations we have. Please note that in order to provide scholarships to the most people, we may offer partial scholarships. We will review scholarship requests starting on August 29th, and will review on a rolling basis after that. If you request a scholarship, please hold the conference dates on your calendar as tentative. We expect to be approved to offer 18 CE credits for psychologists – confirmation pending.

## Technology

We are choosing to use Zoom to provide the best opportunity to engage in this group relations experience by providing freedom for engagement, connection, and learning. For optimal Zoom performance, desktop and laptop computers running the Zoom desktop app are generally recommended over the web client. While the web client offers a convenient alternative for users who cannot download the app, the desktop application provides a more feature-rich and often more stable experience.



## Fees

Regular registration	\$400
Early Bird	\$350
Group Relations Affiliate	\$350
Groups of 3 or more	\$325
Current Student	\$300

CENTRAL DAYLIGHT TIME (CDT) UTC-5	SEPT 19	SEPT 20	SEPT 21
0900 - 1000	-	LSG	PE
1010 - 1020	-	SSG	PE
1030 - 1140	-	PE/Opening	PE/Discussion
1140 - 1200	-	Lunch	Lunch
1200 - 1300	Conference Opening	PE	SSG
1310 - 1410	SSG	PE	LSG
1420 - 1520	LSG	PE	RAG
1530 - 1630	SSG	PE	Conference Discussion
1635 - 1730	RAG	RAG	RAG