

# Times of Transition: A Study of Authority Social Identity and the Unconscious

A Group Relations Conference in the Tavistock Tradition  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
July 22-25, 2021



The conference will take place across four 6-hour days:

Thursday	07/22/21	8:30 am -- 2:30 pm
Friday	07/23/21	8:30 am -- 2:30 pm
Saturday	07/24/21	8:30 am -- 2:30 pm
Sunday	07/25/21	8:30 am -- 4:00 pm

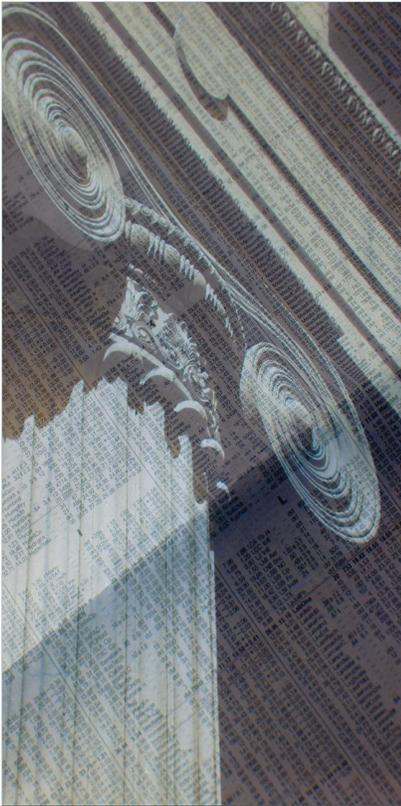
We ask that, to the best of your ability, you join the event on time and log in where you have a strong internet signal.

Final Zoom Gathering on Sunday from 3:30-4:00 pm

This online group relations conference will take place on Zoom.

Meeting instructions will be shared a few days prior to the first event.

All times are listed in Eastern Daylight Time.



## Agape

To do this work involves courage, commitment, and competence, but above all, it requires love. Working with groups is based on the ancient Greek concept of agape. Love for mankind is the source of the group-taker's courage. Love of learning is the source of the group-taker's commitment. Love and wonder of being fully human is the source of the group-taker's competence.

[Leroy Wells, Jr.](#)

## The History

The Tavistock Model of Group Relations, developed in London, England in the 1950s is the model upon which this conference is based. In 1965, Margaret Rioch and A. Kenneth Rice, for whom the A.K. Rice Institute is named, imported the model to the United States. This time-honored method of studying unconscious dynamics in groups has been the basis of conferences held in France, Italy, Israel, China, Argentina, India, and many other countries around the world. In this work, staff and members are asked, within their roles, to explore the conscious and unconscious dynamics of the conference, also known as a 'temporary

organization.' We do this by studying our own behavior in the various events, and using as tools, both intellect and emotion, without neglecting one for the other.

In an event that purposefully studies authority, it is especially important to address issues of authorization. The Social-Organizational Psychology Program of Teachers College, Columbia University, in partnership with the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, authorizes this conference. However, there are many other levels of authorization supporting this enterprise. We will identify and study these as a part of our work together.

## Transition

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us all into transitions – physically, emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. If transition means movement, passage or change from one position, state, or concept to another, then this conference theme is an invitation to consider our own transitions – internal, organizational, and systemic. Currently, individuals, groups, communities, organizations, and nations are continuing the complex, variable and sometimes fatal dance with COVID-19. We often hear phrases such as 'going back' or 'returning to the way things were' or "getting back to normal." Yet, we know there is no "back." Indeed, we can only go forward. If we think with intention about this transition, how do we understand and shape what is and what will be even as they contain elements of what was? This conference provides time and space to study the myriad transitions we are experiencing as individuals, groups and systems in real time together.



## Conference Design

The Group Relations methodology provides opportunities to raise our awareness of the dynamics that occur in groups and organizations through *experience*. Primary among these dynamics is the opportunity to study the nature of authority and its partner, responsibility, as it is being exercised. In this conference, members and staff are particularly invited to highlight the study of group identity and unconscious processes, but are not limited to these concepts. Organizational dynamics such as leadership, followership, power, roles, norms, task, boundaries, attractiveness, responsibility, individual differences, and many others are available for study as well. All of this constitutes the core work of the conference.

The conference is designed to provide these opportunities for learning through events that offer different experiences of authority, task, role, membership, and setting. For example, some of the events, known as here-and-now events, provide an opportunity to consider the group's dynamics as they are occurring. Others, known as there-and-then events, provide an opportunity to review and reflect upon what has already occurred. All conference events are described below on page 5.

# Core Themes

**Authority** is defined as the right and responsibility to do work. Authorization involves giving over or delegating some of one's formal authority so others might do work on our behalf. Authority can be formal and informal. Both staff members and participants possess authority, and both will choose to exercise it in particular ways, the nature of which forms the basis of much of what we will study.

Authority in an organizational context is derived from both the roles one holds and from one's person. We will discover together how staff and members exercise their authority to do conference work.

**Identity** includes such groupings as gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religious preference, sexual orientation and identity, marital status, ability/disability, geographic location, age, socioeconomic status, caste, and culture, etc., as well as organizational identities. Some of these memberships are permanent, others temporary. In addition to the way in which we embrace or reject our group identities, those identities interact with the identities of others, and to make matters even more complex, they interact with the perceived group identities of others. Finally, we may experience one or more of our own or others' group identities as more salient than the others. This is the nature of human interaction and this conference provides an opportunity to explore that, rather than make assumptions, or ignore it entirely.

**Unconscious** or out-of-awareness dynamics are often associated with the context of psychoanalysis. Data such as slips of the tongue and dream content have long been studied in that discipline. The Group Relations methodology also considers phenomena that may rest outside of common awareness as a tool to explore group dynamics. Therefore, valid data at the group level include not only conscious thought and manifest behavior, but evidence of a group unconscious such as archetypes, synchronicity, myths, fantasies, fleeting thoughts, unconscious planning and conference dreams, the sharing of which contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of this temporary organization.

“Silence helps us to re-engage with the poetry of life, it helps us to notice and become more aware. It may also help as a holding space for creative work, for contemplating new ideas. In this [moment of] retreat, we purposely seek the combination of silence and work.”

[-R. Molenkamp & A. Van Linge](#)

# The Events

## Conference Plenaries

Plenary events provide all staff and participants the opportunity to meet together for the purpose of sharing information and providing opportunities for reflection and discussion. The conference plenaries include the Conference Opening and Discussion, the Organizational Event Opening and Closing, and the Reflections.

## The Small Study Group

The building block of the group relations model, this event provides members with the opportunity to study their own behavior in the here-and-now in groups of approximately 8-12 with the consultation of one or occasionally two staff members. The small group replicates real life groups such as work or sport teams, clubs, etc. The consultant will provide intervention only when he/she believes that it will advance the group's learning.

## The Review and Application Group

Members work in smaller configurations with one or two staff members who facilitate their work in reviewing and reflecting upon their conference experience

and in beginning to apply their learning to the complexities of their lives outside of the conference.

## The Large Study Group

The unique opportunity of the large group is to study the dynamics of a system with so many members that size limits the opportunity for face-to-face interaction. This replicates large-scale events such as conventions, concerts, or school board meetings. The large study group includes all conference members and a team of consultants who offer here-and-now consultation when they feel that it will advance the learning of the group.

## The Organizational Event

This Organizational Event exists as a small conference within the conference. Its purpose is to provide opportunities to learn about dynamics between and among groups. It provides an opportunity to choose one's group membership, to take up formal and informal leadership roles, to be deliberate about one's choices around followership in those groups, to experience and observe staff in administrative, management, as well as consulting roles, and to co-construct and co-manage the closing plenary event along with staff.

## The Staff

It is the purpose of all staff working in administrative or consulting roles to encourage and support participant awareness, analysis, reflection and understanding of the emerging conference dynamics. Staff members are not only observers of the process, but are actively involved in it. They will be examining, interpreting, reflecting upon and making sense of their own as well as the various groups' experiences, particularly those that may lay outside of awareness, that is, in the unconscious. The consulting staff's interpretations will focus on group-level phenomena rather than on individual behavior. For those who have not yet experienced this approach, it may seem unusual. Staff photos and brief biographies will be provided digitally a few days before the conference.

## Registration & Fees

This conference is primarily available to graduate students at Columbia University, with a limited number of spots open to the general public. To preserve the integrity of the group dynamic, members should be prepared to attend all events.

To secure your place in the conference membership, please complete the following steps by 11:59pm ET on **Monday, July 12:**

**Step 1:** Complete the online registration form:

<https://form.jotform.com/200245132662141>

**Step 2:** Pay the conference fee online:

[https://commerce.cashnet.com/continuing?itemcode=CE\\_PS-0017](https://commerce.cashnet.com/continuing?itemcode=CE_PS-0017)

Regular Rate	\$350
Non-Profit/Government Rate	\$300
Student Rate	\$250

*If you are a current student in Dr. Brazaitis's Group Dynamics course, you do not need to pay the conference fee – it is already covered by your course fee.*

Note: Experiential learning is sometimes experienced as intense or stressful. Please note that the conference is an educational offering and is not a substitute for psychotherapy, counseling, or life coaching. If you are going through a period of extreme personal difficulty, you are advised to speak with your professor (if you are a student) or the conference administrator about deferring attendance.

Please direct any questions to the Conference Administrative Team at [teacherscollegeGRC@gmail.com](mailto:teacherscollegeGRC@gmail.com)

Conference Director: Flora N. Taylor, Ph.D.

Director of Administration: Helen Bibilouri, M.B.A., M.A.