

## Reflection Groups and Conference Recap

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Since the Spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit us all with a powerful body slam. As we staggered to adjust to contagion anxiety, threats to health, possible illness or death, travel fears and bans, it became clear that the Analysis and Activism + Presidency Conference would need to adapt or be cancelled.

The conference planning committee reached a decision to shift from the intended live and in-person gathering in Berkeley, California to an online, live-streamed, and recorded program broadcast from the seminar room of C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco.

Many logistical adjustments and program reconsiderations were required. Part of the multitude of considerations was an awareness that meeting on-line rather than in-person would feel quite different. Discussion ensued about how to shape the conference so that as much relatedness, interaction, and in-the-moment and of-the-moment discussions might occur.

At a live in-person conference, so much happens when people mingle during breaks and over meals. Individually and together, thoughts and feelings are gathered, experiences are explored and shared, questions and responses formed. This is often when important social interactions and exchanges contribute to relatedness; to being together in something stimulating and meaningful.

The planners came to recognize that the remote format would not present the opportunities for this key set of meaningful connective experiences. That felt like a significant potential loss.

With discussion, the idea of having some form of group gathering at the end of the conference days began to form. Having group gatherings came to be a way for us, the conference participants, to connect with each other. We could meet for a time in a safe and secure space where reflecting and discussion might occur. The discussion might include or be separate from the presentation content and saying what one was experiencing would be welcome.

What are Reflection Groups and how did they become part of the conference?

These thoughts led to the creation of Reflection Groups. The intention was that the groups would serve as forums where thoughts and feelings about the conference and presentations could emerge between participants. The San Francisco Institute has integrated *process groups* into candidate training. And, a significant number of analysts meet multiple times a year to engage in our own group process experience. A core tenet of group process is that individuals in groups and groups-as-a-whole strive to bring unconscious material more into consciousness.

The thinking about Reflection Groups grew from these group process experiences. Yet Reflections Groups are not the same in purpose or in operation to group process. Experience with group process gave birth to the idea of conference Reflection Groups.

Part of the intention for the Reflection Groups was for conference participants to not feel like passive recipients of the talks but rather to be actively engaged in discussion. A goal for the groups was to provide settings for relating closely with others

with an eye and ear towards integrating both conference content and personal experience.

The conference planners asked me as to serve as coordinator for the groups. In conversation with my San Francisco colleagues, Lynn Franco and Tom Singer, the purpose, and construction of the groups was clarified. We initially envisioned four groups with two facilitators per group at the end of each day. Once the conference registrations shot past the anticipated 150 individuals to almost 300, we revisited the number and structure of the groups. Not having any sense of how many people would stay after the conference presentations ended - would it be 50 or 300? - we decided to have seven groups with one facilitator per group.

The facilitators were selected from analysts we knew who we thought could well contain the group, invite discussion, and be able to establish and maintain a safe space for sharing. The facilitators were Chie Lee from Los Angeles, Harry Fogarty from New York, and from San Francisco, Robin Greenberg, Christine Hejinian, Patricia Katsky, Gordon Murray, and Mario Starc.

On a personal note, I must say how honored I was and am that, when asked, each facilitator quickly said “Yes, I would like to be a facilitator”. I am grateful to each of them for serving and honored to have worked with them as they so ably facilitated the groups.

### What was shared in the Reflection Groups?

At the end of the conference day on both Friday and Saturday, the groups met. In welcoming the participants assigned to each group, the facilitators invited them to speak of what came up, what they were feeling and thinking, how they had been impacted by attending the conference.

Each facilitator, in their own unique way, invited thoughts or feelings about the experience of being in an on-line conference, a conference about intersections of analysis and activism, about *what has come up within you* as the conference has unfolded.

Group participants responded to the invitation with thoughtful reflections, considered engagement with each other, and a sense of having experienced something quite unanticipated.

It would be virtually impossible and likely inadequate to tell you what the group participants shared with each other. So much happens in groups that language barely captures. So, I relay some of the facilitator observations about what the groups offered:

- I was moved by the openness and directness between the group members, particularly at the end of Saturday.
- Themes on Friday night struck me as "re-constituting" - turning to archetypal motifs and comments on the particularly deep themes evoked by the mixture of profoundly distressing materials.

- Themes at the end of Saturday moved toward more personal sharing, particularly with regard to activated dread and fears of election and post-election destabilization.
- I was moved by the openness and directness between the group members.
- There was a lot of emotion both days. On the first day, the group fell into a state of deep, silent grief – an “existential despair”.
- On the first night, we began with dreams. On the second night, the themes arising involved strong emotion – a feeling of being “shattered” and profoundly moved.
- The group was trying to hold opposites. There is energy for repair and potential for new growth but also dangerous energies pulling for further regression into chaos.
- Overall, the groups carried a generous willingness, vulnerability, and unguarded energy in the process of sharing feelings, images and associations. There were many compelling moments of sharing.
- The presentations intensified anxieties, especially with talk of probable post-election violence.
- The presentations strengthened the need to face fears, to bear sufferings, listen to our deep nature and to act on it.
- The feeling tone vacillated between hope and despair (or fear of despair) with the group in a self-care position by encouraging each other with positive ideas and/or compassion.
- There was an obvious shifting back and forth between the political and the emotional, mirroring the conference itself.

- The discussions were a combination of problem solving that moved more into reflections on how a person was impacted. The experience was of the group becoming more alive in the here and now.
- Grief and confusion emerged as the primary emotions/feelings. Associations to the content presented during the days became more prominent over explications for how we might respond to the problems.

### Recap to the Conference

I was asked to recap what had happened over the conference's three days through the lens of what I, in my capacities of working behind the scenes with slides and images and as the Reflection Groups Coordinator, had observed.

As it was important to me that as many voices and experiences were heard, I invited the dream matrix leaders and the body movement leaders to send me their observations which I would fold into my recap.

I reported how successful the conference was. How nearly 300 individuals from around the world had attended and participated even if being in different time zones meant that the broadcasts from San Francisco were quite late at night or in the very early morning hours.

I shared my own impression as well as the impressions of others I heard from that the conference was incredibly moving. Moving even though there were some initial technical glitches, and when tensions around inclusion and fairness emerged, and as conference fatigue set in.

A few key turns of phrase that caught the attention of many were:

“Non-violent spiritual warfare.”

“Is now the time?”

I spoke of the quality of the presentations, of their thoughtfulness and deep feeling, of the depth and breadth of the material, and of the intersection of psychological thought with both historic and contemporary experience. I noted the videos on taking the knee, of a chorus of voices coming together, of very personal experiences related to archetypal dynamics, to current and historical socio-political events - all being metabolized through a psychological lens; through both analytic and symbolic attitudes.

### A Closing Observation

Future international conferences, especially those conducted online, would benefit from having some form of reflective gathering for participants. Gatherings such as Reflection Groups so participants can see each other, can share their experiences, can ask questions, can integrate within themselves and through conversation that came up, and can identify what they take forward within themselves, into their clinical practices or professional lives, and into their communities.

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