

Hope, Dread, and Change: Exploring the Intersections of Authority, Leadership, Followership, and the Unconscious in Groups and Systems



Group Relations Conference
Teachers College, Columbia University
April 17-19 2026

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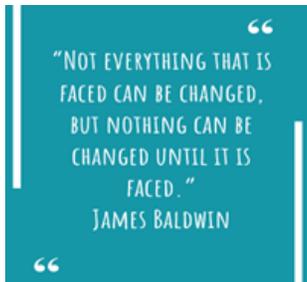
TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

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Dear prospective member:

Psychoanalyst Stephen Mitchell proposed that human development exists between two poles: Hope and Dread. This tension is rooted in our earliest relationships and shaped by how we navigate change. When faced with uncertainty, we naturally oscillate between these two states. Dread is driven by fear of the unknown, a lack of control, and isolation. It often manifests as a loss of individual and collective agency. By contrast, Hope is driven by the desire to grow and prosper, as well as by our sense of positive connections to others. It manifests as a reclaimed sense of power and a deeper connection to the groups we belong to.



A large portion of the current human experience has been affected by significant global shifts that pull us toward these opposite poles. We see evidence of Dread in rising anxiety, interpersonal conflict, and "us vs. them" group dynamics, as well as in a loss of a sense of security, identity, and community related to changes in the social order.

These psychological and social states concurrently fuel and are fueled by increases in:

- Nationalism, authoritarianism, and hardening borders and group boundaries.
- Wealth disparity, war, poverty, and climate change.
- The rapid, uncertain rise of AI technology.

Conversely, there is also evidence of an improved human condition over the last century including:

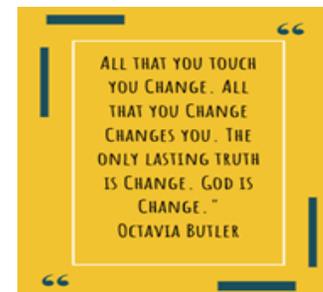
- Decreases in global poverty, food insufficiency, and infant mortality.
- Increases in lifespans, global literacy, and the development of renewable energy.
- Marginalized groups asserting their rights and nations pursuing accountable and citizen-focused governance.
- AI's potential to expand global connectivity, opportunity, and medical-scientific advancement.

This conference will examine Hope and Dread as opposite poles of the same psychological/social phenomenon. We will explore how these psychological forces influence authority, change, leadership, followership, and unconscious processes within groups and systems.

Questions we may collectively explore include:

- How do Hope and Dread dictate how groups respond to change?
- How do these forces influence who we authorize as leaders and how we choose to follow?
- What unconscious dynamics affect our roles within systems?

By collectively examining these dynamics in the here-and-now of the conference, we aim to experience the ubiquitous unconscious forces at play within the conference system and possibly find useful ways to explore and understand how these forces affect the group and systems that we belong to - perhaps enabling us to foster positive change and development for them.



Conference Directorate:

Jonathan Rust

Director

Lamya Razzouk

Administration Director

Laurie Nisco

Associate Director

Gavin Van Beveren

Administration Associate

Heidi Kim

Administration Associate

Conference Design:

The conference is designed as a temporary institution that includes many of the everyday features of organizational life and serves as both a case study and a laboratory for learning about how institutions operate. It is organized as a sequence of group and inter-group interactions. Working within this temporary learning institution, participants are able to study and analyze significant phenomena and events that arise in groups in ways that are often not available for discussion.

Primary Task:

The primary task is to study the inter-personal, group-as-a-whole, inter-group, and organizational dynamics as they occur in the here-and-now of the conference

You will have an opportunity to learn and explore:

- Conscious and unconscious factors that shape behavior in groups
- How authority functions in groups
- What roles we take up in groups and why
- How aspects of our social identity influence our roles and authority in groups

Role of Staff:

During the conference, the roles staff members take are open for examination and reflection by the membership and the staff themselves. Staff manage the conference boundaries, but they do not manage people. Lectures and didactic presentations by staff are not part of the design. The staff's consultations will focus primarily on group-level phenomena rather than on individuals' behavior.

Please note:

The GRC is an experiential learning conference and it is designed for members to learn about group and organizational processes. Experiential learning can be powerful, illuminating and also tiring and sometimes stressful. Self-learning often also occurs in the GRC, but the conference is not meant to be a clinical or therapeutic offering. If you are currently undergoing significant stress or managing a difficult personal situation you should forego attendance at this time.

Location:

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York, NY 10027

Schedule:

9:00 am – 7:30 pm Friday, April 17, 2026
9:00 am – 7:45 pm Saturday, April 18, 2026
9:00 am – 6:30 pm Sunday, April 19, 2026

Conference Check-In:

Check-in takes place on Friday from 8:25 to 8:55 am.
There will be a reception on Sunday from 6:35 to 7:00 pm.

Meals and Lodging:

Light refreshments and hot beverages will be available each morning in the Member Lounge. We encourage you to bring a water bottle as there are water fountains throughout the Teachers College buildings. Members are responsible for securing their own meals at the lunch breaks.

The conference is non-residential. Recommendations for hotels can be found [HERE](#).

Registration:

All invited members must register by 12 Midnight (EST), Friday, March 27, 2026, using the following link: <https://forms.gle/BcZJzTfU1FRuNCXu8>

Payment:

If you are not currently enrolled this semester in the *Group Dynamics ORL 5362* course at TC/Columbia University kindly submit payment now through this [payment portal](#) in order to reserve your spot. Standard rate is \$450, non-profit is \$400; \$350 for students.

The final deadline is **Friday, March 27, 2026** and if we do not receive payment by that date we will have to cancel your registration. Please note that the conference fee is NON-REFUNDABLE after **March 27**.

Additional Questions?

If you have questions, please email: teacherscollegeGRC@gmail.com

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