



# THE HEART OF AUTHORITY

# LOVE

LEADERSHIP | OPPOSITION | VULNERABILITY | EMPOWERMENT

**Friday, October 9  
to Sunday, October 11, 2026**

**Lesley University**

1815 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140

An In-Person Experiential Group Relations Conference

Sponsored by the **Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems (Boston)**

Co-Sponsored by:



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# AN INVITATION TO THE WORK

What does it mean to hold authority and to be held by it?  
What becomes possible when leadership is informed by love?

Love is a force that binds us to one another through care, sacrifice, and unwavering presence. It is not simply felt it is chosen, practiced, and lived out in every relationship and endeavor we pour ourselves into, through both the tenderness and the tension, the devotion and the betrayal, the joy and the grief and yes, even hate, which so often is love's most wounded expression. At its core, love is a commitment to show up fully for other, for causes worth fighting for, and for the truth, even when it's hard. This conference explores that same commitment through the lens of Leadership, Opposition, Vulnerability and Empowerment.

**L**eadership is never simply a personal attribute it is a role the group assigns, withdraws, and transforms. To explore leadership is to explore the interplay between self and system, authority and followership, and the hopes, anxieties, and expectations placed on those who step forward.

**O**pposition is not the enemy of authority it is its most honest mirror. Arising from within leaders as much as from those they lead, it surfaces through dissent, conflict, withdrawal, and rebellion, exposing the tensions and contradictions that power alone cannot see. To explore opposition is to understand that authority is never simply held it is always contested, always alive.

**V**ulnerability asks what becomes possible when we engage authentically with uncertainty, difference, and risk. Groups create powerful pressures to appear competent, and aligned yet it is often the moments of genuine not knowing that something new can emerge. Groups defend against vulnerability to manage anxiety, but those same defenses limit reflection, creativity and growth. Here, vulnerability is not a weakness but a threshold, the place where authority becomes honest and real encounters across difference and hierarchy become possible.

**E**mpowerment challenges us to consider how authority can create conditions for growth, agency, and collective flourishing rather than concentrating power in the hands of a few. It asks who gets to speak, whose knowledge counts, and how the structures we inhabit expand or constrain what any of us can do or become. Yet empowerment is not without tension, it requires confronting inequality, privilege, and the ways groups unconsciously maintain dependency.

At a moment when institutions are being questioned, leadership is being reimagined, and communities are searching for new ways to navigate difference and uncertainty, this work feels especially urgent.

I trust you will join us as we explore what becomes possible when leadership is grounded in love, opposition is met with inquiry, vulnerability becomes a source of strength, and authority is held together with love.

Journée, PhD  
Conference Director

# THE WORK

This conference is an experiential learning event, which means the primary container for the learning is what happens between us. Rather than studying authority from a distance, members encounter it directly, in groups, roles they take up, and the moments of tensions, connection and surprise that arise in real time.

To make that possible, members co-create a temporary organization with its own structure, roles, and authority that comes into being at opening plenary and ceases at closing plenary. The organization exists for no other purpose than to be studied, and because it is built together, what emerges within it belongs to everyone in the room. Because it is temporary, it creates conditions for a quality of attention to authority rarely available in the institutions we inhabit in the rest of our lives.

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## WHAT EMERGES FROM THIS WORK

Members will have opportunities to:

- Examine how leadership, opposition, vulnerability, and empowerment operate as living forces within groups.
- Explore the relationship between authority and love and discover what becomes possible when leadership is exercised not merely with competence, but with care, courage, and genuine concern.
- Observe, take part in, and analyze both the overt and covert dynamics of group life, studying how conscious intentions and unconscious forces shape what groups do, what they avoid, and what they cannot yet see in themselves.
- Examine your own reactions to well-defined authority and clearly drawn boundaries and explore what those reactions highlight about your relationship to power, structure, and the roles you take up in organizational life.
- Experience firsthand how groups form, establish leadership, and negotiate their relationship to other groups and to the institution as a whole.
- Engage with the ways in which race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, and other dimensions of identity are taken up and used by groups.

## WHAT WE ARE HERE TO DO (PRIMARY TASK & PURPOSE)

The **primary task** of this conference is to study the conscious and unconscious dynamics of leadership, authority, and power as they unfold in the here and now, through the roles taken up, the groups co-created, and the temporary system built together over three days. The lens for that study is the conference theme itself: what it means to lead with love, to meet opposition with inquiry, to find strength in vulnerability, and to exercise authority in the service of collective empowerment.

The **purpose** of the conference is to build something that cannot be taught from the outside: the capacity to lead from within, with awareness, with courage, and with love. Through direct engagement with the here-and-now dynamics of group life, members leave not with a framework or a set of tools, but with a deepened relationship to their own authority.

## CONFERENCE CONTAINER

The conference is structured around two complementary events. Here-and-now events place members inside the experience and allow the group to study itself as a living system, attending to what is conscious and what remains just out of sight, and sitting with the tensions and discoveries that emerge in real time. Reflective events offer a different kind of space: one for stepping back, making meaning, and beginning to ask what all of it might mean for the work and relationships members carry beyond these three days.

## Opening Plenary

This event serves as the threshold of the conference. The Opening Plenary brings the full conference community together for the first time, members and staff. The Director provides an overview of the conference and introduces the staff.

## Small Groups

Every member is assigned to a Small Study Group, consisting of no more than 8-12 members and a consultant. The task of the Small Study Group is to study the behavior and dynamics of the group as they unfold in the here-and-now with the assistance of a consultant.

## Large Group

The Large Study Group brings together all conference members and a team of consultants in a single space. In contrast to the Small Study Group, the Large Study Group highlights dynamics that may occur in large organizations and gatherings, where personal interactions are limited or close to impossible.

## Community Learning Event (CLE)

The CLE allows the conference membership to become a community in the fullest sense, one that members must co-create, navigate, and take responsibility for together. Members form their own groups. Opening and closing with plenaries, and unfolding across several sessions, the CLE turns attention outward to the dynamics between groups.

## Sensing Matrix

The Sensing Matrix invites all members and staff into a space where the boundaries between the individual and the collective become unusually permeable. Dreams, images, thoughts, and associations are offered freely not to be analyzed or owned, but to be held by the group as a whole and allowed to resonate. In a conference concerned with what lies beneath the surface the Matrix opens a door few other events are able.

## Review & Application Groups (RAG)

This event offers members a smaller space to pause, reflect, and make meaning. These groups consist of no more than 6 members and members work alongside a consultant to review their experiences in the conference to that point. Towards the close of the conference, Review and Application Groups provide an opportunity for reflection on the ways in which conference experience may be linked to 'real-world' experiences in organizations and society at large.

## Closing Plenary/Conference Discussion

Every temporary organization must come to its end, and the Closing Plenary hold that ending with intention. All members and staff gather to surface what has been learned, to sit with what is being left behind, and to mark the dissolution of something that was built together and cannot be rebuilt in quite the same way again.

# CONFERENCE STAFF

## DIRECTORATE and ADMINISTRATION



**Journ e, Ph.D.**  
**Conference Director and Consultant**

Journ e, Ph.D. has spent thirteen years in group relations work, drawn to the same question: what happens when we let ourselves be vulnerable instead of certain. Journ e supports the global community as an executive leadership coach. Journ e is administrator and Co-Creator of Group Relations International; member of Association of Black Psychologists, Inc.; member of American Psychological Association; owner of Wisdom Wear. Journ e is a mother of one daughter and proud grandmother of two.



**Janice Wagner**  
**Associate Conference Director and Consultant**

Janice (she, her, hers), is a Clinical Social Worker and Psychotherapist in Boston, MA. She worked in the Child Welfare and Criminal Justice systems, as well in a private multi-specialty medical practice before engaging in a full-time private psychotherapy practice. She is a member and Past-President of the Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems, a fellow of the A. K. Rice Institute and a Co-Creator of Group Relations International. She is an Executive Coach for Harvard Graduate School of Education, Ed.L.D students.



**Yihe Yang**  
**Director of Administration**

Yihe is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on the intersections of critical leadership, group relations, and intercultural dynamics. She currently serves as Secretary of the Executive Committee and as a member of the Board of Directors of the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems (AKRI). As a co-creator of Group Relations International (GRI) and International Group Relations China (IGRC), she has served in a range of leadership and staff roles at Group Relations Conferences (GRCs) in the United States and China, including Consultant, Consultant-in-Training, Cultural Interpreter, and Administrator.



**Gabriel Baldwin**  
**Associate Administrator**

Gabriel (he and she, not they) - has been immersed in group relations work for the past nine years and has experienced this work to be powerfully transformative in becoming myself. He is a forester, saw mill operator, builder, farmer, forager, hunter, and father in mid-coast Maine (Penobscot territory). She designs and publishes board games (HOMESTEAD or DIE), facilitates Biodanza dance, teaches traditional Buddhist meditation through a radical lens, offers Hakomi Somatic Psychotherapy, consults to groups, and leads rites of passage. He is a GRI Co-Creator, AKRI member and LDRS graduate, CSGSS member, and Grex Treasurer.

## CONSULTING STAFF



**Alan Ruiz, MFA**  
**Consultant**

Alan is an artist, educator, and group relations practitioner born in Mexico. His work as an artist examines how space is produced as material and ideology, and how it informs social and psychic life. He has taught at the Rhode Island School of Design, Columbia University, and currently teaches at The New School and Hunter College. Alan has Group Relations experience across a variety of roles. He is a faculty member of the CSGSS "Leading from Experience" workshop, a Group Relations International Co-Creator, a member and certified consultant of the A.K. Rice Institute, and past president of its regional affiliate, the New York Center for the Study of Groups, Organizations, and Social Systems.



**Salina Villegas**  
**Consultant**

Salina has spent over fifteen years working across nonprofit, corporate, educational, and government sectors, driven by a deep commitment to healing and the transformative power of authentic dialogue. Salina supports organizations and communities as a facilitator, coach, and decolonial educator. She currently serves as a Race & Equity Manager for the City of San Diego, where she guides city departments and community members toward more equitable policies and outcomes. Salina is a Co-Creator of Group Relations International. She holds a Master of Education in Prevention Science from Harvard University and a Master of Arts in Leadership Studies from the University of San Diego. Salina is a proud mother of three human beings and two black cats.



**Brian Mahoney, M.Ed.**  
**Consultant-in-Training**

Brian (he/him) is a group relations and leadership consultant. He leads a team of teaching fellows in support of two group dynamics-related courses at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is also a member of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 805. In his free time Brian enjoys bouldering and restoring the native habitat in his backyard.



**Jon Luke Tittman**  
**Consultant**

Jon Luke (he/him) has been involved in group relations work for seven years, drawn by the idea that groups carry wisdom that no one in them possesses alone. He has conference experience across AKRI, GRC, and IFSI. He currently works as a product marketing manager at Rula, a mental health company, and previously spent three years at IDEO and two years in clean energy. He also consults for WholeSchool Mindfulness, spent five years supporting Inward Bound Mindfulness, and serves as a retreat mentor at Insight Meditation Society's annual teen retreat.



**Jonathan Rust, Ph.D.**  
**Consultant**

Jonathan is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz. Jonathan is a New York State licensed psychologist certified psychoanalyst, who maintains a private practice in Poughkeepsie, NY. He is a member and a certified consultant of the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems and its affiliate the New York Center for the Study of Groups, Organizations, and Social Systems. Additionally, Jonathan currently directs the annual Spring Group Relations Conference at Teachers College, Columbia University.



**Rosette Cirillo, Ph.D.**  
**Consultant**

Rosette is a full-time lecturer on education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research and teaching presences the inner lives of teachers and their relationship to death and dreams in their pedagogies. She is a consultant and coach for educational and workplace ethics, inclusion, crisis management, and power dynamics in groups at Leadership Lab International. She has served as a board member for the Boston Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems and is a member of CSGSS and the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems, and a co-creator with Group Relations International. She is a proud former Chelsea Public Schools teacher and first-generation scholar.

## CONFERENCE ELDER



**Patricia Kummel, JD, Ph.D.**  
**Consultant**

Patricia began thinking about group dynamics while observing partner-associate interactions at her NYC law firm. She studied group relations at Columbia University while supervising a team of attorneys and investigators and used her learning to improve team functioning. While counseling and coaching clients in her NYC private practice, and assisting seniors with end of life issues, Patricia uses systems theories to expand her clients' understanding of their relationships and interactions. She has been involved with group relations conferences for over 35 years and has held every role from member to Director. Patricia is a member of the NY Center for Groups, Organizations and Social Systems and the Washington-Baltimore Center for the Study of Group Relations. She is a member and Fellow of The A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems (AKRI), where she currently serves as Co-Chair for the Change Committee. She is also a co-creator of Group Relations International (GRI) and a member of OPUS (Organisation for Promoting Understanding of Society).



**The Conference Director gratefully acknowledges the pre-conference mentorship provided by Elder in the work, Mary McRae. Your time and wisdom ensured the foundation for this conference was strong.**

## WHO IS CALLED TO THIS WORK?

This conference is for anyone who has ever felt the pull between leading and following, between speaking and holding back, between the authority they have been given and the authority they actually feel. No specific professional background is required members have arrived from mental health, education, healthcare, community engagement, pastoral work, organizational consulting, technology, the arts, law, first responders, and beyond.

Learning through experience about the overt and covert functioning of human systems asks something of us. It requires the capacity to tolerate paradox, sit with anxiety, and resist the interpretations that protect us from discomfort but prevent us from learning what the moment is actually asking. This is precisely the terrain that leadership, opposition, vulnerability, and empowerment all demand and where the relationship between authority and love becomes not an abstraction but a lived question.

A diverse membership created the conditions for that kind of learning, because it is at the intersections of differences that the heart of authority is most honestly revealed. Emotional resilience and genuine curiosity are the only prerequisites.

## CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

The conference opens promptly at **9:00 AM Eastern on Friday, October 9, 2026** and closes promptly at **5:00 PM Eastern on Sunday, October 11, 2026**. All events begin and end at the time scheduled.

Because the conference is designed as a single integrated educational experience each event building consciously upon the last, full attendance is not simply encouraged, it is essential. Members should plan to attend all events. Those who know in advance that they cannot attend all sessions are discouraged from applying. Anyone who must leave for any reason is asked to notify the administration team.

### **Friday, October 9**

Conference **Registration** begins at **8:30 AM Eastern**

Conference **Opening** is at **9:00 AM Eastern**

### **Saturday, October 10**

Conference events run from **9:00 AM to 9:00 PM Eastern**

### **Sunday, October 11**

Conference events run from **9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Eastern**

### **Event location:**

### **Lesley University**

1815 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140

# FAQ

## Fee Reduction

A limited number of reduced-fee registrations will be available for those with true financial need. Please contact the Director of Administration, Yihe Yang, at [weekendcsgssboston@gmail.com](mailto:weekendcsgssboston@gmail.com) for details before you register. Please be prepared to a written, clear, and compelling explanation of your financial need.

## Withdrawal Policy

Fees can only be refunded (less a \$100 administration charge) if a written notice of cancellation is received by 11:59 PM Eastern on September 18, 2024.

## Confidentiality

Staff will not report the behavior of any individual member to anyone outside the conference.

## Stress

The conference is an educational endeavor and does not provide psychotherapy or counseling. Although the experiential learning available can be stimulating and enriching, it can also be emotionally stressful. Thus, applicants who are ill or experiencing significant personal difficulties should forgo participating at this time.

## FEES due in full upon registration

|                                                              | Early Registration through<br>September 14 | Regular Registration through<br>October 5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Non-Discounted Rate                                          | \$550                                      | \$600                                     |
| Current Members of CSGSS, GRI, GREX,<br>AKRI, and CCSGO Rate | \$450                                      | \$550                                     |
| Group Rate*                                                  | \$450                                      | \$550                                     |
| Full-Time Student Rate**                                     | \$300                                      | \$325                                     |

\* Group rates are for 3 or more members coming from the same organization.

\*\* Full-time students must submit copy of current student ID

One discount per application. A limited number of reduced-fee registrations will be available for those with true financial need. The number and amount of these reduced-fee registrations will be based on the overall enrollment of the conference relative to the number of applicants seeking reductions. To inquire, please contact the Director of Administration, **Yihe Yang**, at [weekendcsgssboston@gmail.com](mailto:weekendcsgssboston@gmail.com) before registering. Please be prepared to submit a written, clear, and compelling explanation of your financial need.

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