



A Group Relations Conference  
on Asian American Authority

# Variations of Very Asian +

**Online August 3-6, 2022**



People of Asian descent have settled within what is now the United States since 1763. Yet, today, to the frustration of many, Americans of Asian descent are still seen as foreigners, people who should go back to their own country. Anti-Asian bias appears to be on the rise due to the pandemic, but these sentiments have been evident for a long time and are historic and systemic in nature, as illustrated by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Japanese American Incarceration during World War II.

At the start of this year, news anchor Michelle Li from KSDK in St. Louis, Missouri noted on air that she celebrates New Years Day by eating dumplings, as many Koreans do. Michelle Li is a transracial adoptee and has been living in the U.S. since the age of six months. An offended caller responded that Li was being “very Asian” and that she should keep her Korean to herself. Li then tweeted a video of herself listening to the phone call, and by the next morning, her video went viral and the #VeryAsian movement began, which became the inspiration for the title of this conference.



## Context

So, what does it mean to be very Asian, or Asian and American, or of Asian descent and live in America, or simply put: “Asian and/in America/n”? Asian countries span a geographic region from the Pacific to the Suez Canal, intersecting with countries on two other continents, and including roughly 50 countries, with many historic rivalries and tensions between countries. The term Asian American is an umbrella term that encompasses all of these ethnic groups, a term that has changed more than once over time with the most recent iteration being AA&NHPI (Asian American, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, see 2021 Presidential Executive Order). The variety of experiences that come under the umbrella AA&NHPI seems exponential.

Additionally, while on the one hand there is bias and discrimination toward Asian Americans, on the other hand, there are also unearned privileges afforded Asian Americans based on skin color, social class, education and other advantages within the context of racial history in America. Asian Americans themselves may also participate in and perpetuate internalized racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and other “isms.”

Within this complexity, what does it mean to be of Asian descent and in America? How do Asian Americans take up authority individually and collectively? How is this authority worked with and experienced, by others of Asian descent, by different generations, and by others of non-Asian descent? How are concepts such as role, boundary and task understood through an Asian American experience? How do we work with Asian American presence?



# Invitation

**Variations of Very Asian+: A Group Relations Conference on Asian American Authority** is an opportunity to focus on the complex experience of the ‘Asian and/in America/n’ experience. This conference is a space and place for those who seek to understand the realities of Asian American lives in the organizations and social systems in which we live in the Americas. **The unique opportunity offered by this conference is to work with staff who are all of Asian American descent, but who have different racial, cultural, gender and sexual identities while those who join as members of the conference represent diverse communities and reflect a range of gendered and social identities.**

To our knowledge, this will be the first time ever that an all Asian American staff has been assembled to offer a group relations conference. This will also be a first time experience for many of us. The leadership model of the conference consists of three directors and reflects an invitation to work with the intersectional nature of Asian Americans. This model emerged from our collective work in organizing this and other intersectional group relations conferences and reflects our ambition to work openly with the systemic complexity and intersectionality of Asian American lives as these dynamics emerge during the conference.

We invite you to **JOIN US** and look forward to exploring with you **Variations of Very Asian+: A Group Relations Conference on Asian American Authority, online, August 3-6, 2022.**

## Conference Directors



**Betsy Hasegawa**



**Cathy Chen**



**Evangeline Sarda**



## Group Relations Conference Methodology

This conference is based on the Tavistock tradition of group relations work. We will explore issues related to Asian American lives in diverse group and organizational contexts while also exploring themes central to group relations — such as conscious and unconscious dynamics that affect group functioning, including boundary formation and management, authority relations, overt and covert tasks, formal and informal roles, group defense mechanisms, intergroup dynamics, organizational processes, and the effects of local and global contexts.

Learning here is not from presentations given by experts – but instead through a heightened focus on experience. Experiential learning is both painful and playful, but also, potentially deeply transformative.

We co-create a temporary organization where the task is to learn about hidden and not so hidden authority dynamics that impact the organizational culture that develops and the way people take up authority. In the conference, we make use of our individual and collective experiences to understand what is happening, and then perhaps develop ideas to test how we can be more effective. By focusing on the conscious and unconscious processes that impact groups and influence leadership styles, we learn to see and hear what is underneath the surface and how different parts of the system are connected without us realizing it.

The opportunity offered is to grapple with the deep ways we influence each other, and to develop new narratives that enable us to be more effective and more able to explore, contain and enjoy our experiences of what it is to be human today.



## Primary Task / Aim / Purpose

The **primary task** of this conference is to study the conscious and unconscious dynamics of power and authority in relation to Asian American authority as we take up roles within the conference and experience these dynamics through interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional relations that develop during this event.

The **aim** of the conference is to provide opportunities to learn through experience about the rational and irrational ways that organizations and groups function in an online space, and the impact group processes and technologies have on the exercise of authority particularly as it relates to the experience of Asian American authority.

The **purpose** of the conference is to build capacity to improve leadership and organizational effectiveness and to develop a spirit of inquiry into each of our lived experiences of authority in order to build a better world.

## Training Track

A consulting training track will be offered at this conference for those who are interested in training related to group relations consulting. Preference is given to Asian+ identified. Participation in at least one group relations conference is required. Those interested in applying for the training component should contact [GRleastGRC@gmail.com](mailto:GRleastGRC@gmail.com) for more information about the application process.





# Conference Events

The conference is organized as a series of events that provide opportunities to learn through experience in a variety of social contexts in online spaces. Each event offers a different view from which one experiences and perceives oneself and others, which may change over time. Participants develop different capacities as they adjust to the distinct dynamics of each event and explore the reality of their situation in the here-and-now. The events will begin and end promptly at the times designated. A final schedule will be provided at registration.

## Opening and Closing Plenaries

These sessions open and close the conference, providing an opportunity for members and staff to express and explore their thoughts and feelings on crossing the boundary into the online conference space during the opening plenary (when the organization begins), and the experience of closing the boundaries of the conference space during the closing plenary (when the organization ends).

## Here and Now Small Study Groups and Large Study Groups

Here-and-Now events use a “group-as-a-whole” context and focus on the relationships and relatedness that develop in the moment within the group.

**Small Study Groups** consist of 12 or fewer members with one or two staff as consultants and provide an opportunity to experience and learn about dynamics in intimate groups similar to teams and committees.

**Large Study Groups** include all members and a team of 3 or more consultants and provide an opportunity to study the dynamics that arise in larger groups where it is more difficult to know or see every member as an individual and where myths and assumptions about each other and about what is happening can arise quickly and powerfully to impact emotions, thoughts and behavior.

The **TASK of the Small and Large Study Groups** is to develop the skill of being in the here and now (focusing on experience in the “room”) while also developing an attunement to the conscious and unconscious group dynamics as they arise in the online space. The **AIM of Small and Large Study Groups** is to engage the primary task of the conference-as-a-whole which is to study the conscious and unconscious exercise of authority. The **PURPOSE** is to provide an opportunity to learn and build capacity to improve leadership.



# Conference Events

## Intersecting Systems Event

In the Intersecting Systems Event (ISE), members have an opportunity to form their own groups and determine their own group task. The ISE takes place during several sessions and provides an opportunity to study the systemic and political forces that arise as different groups form and interact with each other. This event opens and closes with plenaries to cross the border into and out of the ISE system.

The primary **TASK of the Intersecting Systems Event** is to explore Asian American authority and intersectionality within the conference-as-a-whole, as well as the more hidden relatedness between and among groups in the conference system, and within the surrounding context. The **AIM of the Intersection System Event** is to better understand the relatedness of intersecting systems. The **PURPOSE** is to build capacity to improve leadership within intersecting systems.

## Silent Event/ Social Sensing Matrix

All conference participants, members, and staff participate in these events. The **TASK** of these events is to explore the state of the conference system through silence, through creative expression, through the body and through dreams and associations. The **AIM** of these events is to access conscious and unconscious dynamics of the whole system through a different means and form of expression. The **PURPOSE** is to build capacity to improve leadership by accessing the unconscious through different modalities.

## Review and Application Groups

The **TASK** of these groups is to provide members the opportunity to reflect (in the there-and-then) on the conference roles they have taken up and their experiences in conference events, and to begin to apply the learning to life outside the conference.





## Conference Staff

Staff administer and manage the conference as a whole and take up consulting roles during conference events. As **administration**, staff articulate the primary task, aim, and purpose, and design the conference to serve those goals. As **management**, staff manage the conditions of conference events, particularly in relation to time, task, and territory. Staff do not manage the participants or their behavior. Instead, participants are free to engage in the primary task, aim, and purpose as they choose and as they authorize themselves and each other to do.

As **consultants**, staff link their own experiences to the activities of the conference and offer working hypotheses and reflections that explore the unconscious aspects of the organizational behavior that is emerging. In these roles, staff are actively involved in the life of the conference. Their reflections focus on group level dynamics rather than on the individual, and on unconscious as well as conscious dynamics. The ways in which staff work are always open for examination. Staff for the conference will be drawn from the list below, and may include others not listed here. A final list of staff will be provided in the days preceding the conference..



## Conference Directors



**Betsy Hasegawa,  
Ed.D.**

Betsy Hasegawa (she/her/hers) Ainu First People of Japan and Japanese heritages; Ed.D., Harvard Graduate School of Education) serves as Associate Vice President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at South Seattle College. Betsy is still amazed that she was asked to build community, develop leadership, and promote healing as part of a large scale change process to co-create an intentionally anti-racist college. As part of this, Betsy gets to work with faculty and staff to promote more active, relational, and connected ways of teaching and engaging, with the hope that we can improve educational experiences and achievement for BIPOC students. Dr. Hasegawa also serves on the Lummi Nation Peacemaking Circle Leadership Team, is a Fellow of the AK Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems and is a Co-creator with Group Relations International.



**Cathy Chen,  
CPCC, MA**

(she, her), Principal, Capriole Consulting; Program Manager Lead, Google; Board Member, GREX Organization for the Study of Authority, Leadership & Group Dynamics; Member, CSGSS; Certified Consultant, AKRI; Registered Yoga Teacher, Yoga Alliance

American born Chinese daughter of immigrant 'Asian Brain Drain' generation parents from Taiwan and the Philippines. Cathy grew up mostly on the west coast in Silicon Valley but now lives in Pittsburgh PA where there is an acceptable number of dumpling restaurants.



**Evangeline  
Sarda, JD**

(she/her/hers) is of Philippine and Indian descent. Born and raised in the United States, she currently resides in Massachusetts. She earned a J.D. from Columbia Law School and a B.A. from Yale College. She is an Associate Clinical Law Professor at Boston College Law School, and is Co-Director of the Criminal Justice Clinic / Director of the Prosecution Clinic and former Faculty Director of Leaders Entering and Advancing Public Service (LEAPS).

She recently joined the Board of Trustees for the University of the Cordilleras in Baguio, Philippines. She is a board member of both Group Relations International (GRI) and Centre for Social Dreaming (CSD). She is a fellow of the A. K. Rice Institute (AKRI) and also a member of several of its affiliates. She is Treasurer of the Research and Education Collaborative with Al-Quds University (RECA).



# Associate Directors

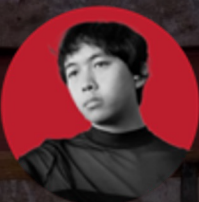
## Associate Director of Administration



**Grace Bagunu, Ph.D.**

Grace Bagunu is a higher education professional and leadership expert. Grace currently serves as the assistant dean of student affairs at Revelle College at the University of California San Diego. Grace earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a minor in Family Studies and her Master of Arts degree in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Higher Education from the University of Missouri – Kansas City. Most recently Grace completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Leadership Studies at the University of San Diego. Grace has participated in group relations conferences and trainings, has served on staff for conferences, is a co-creator for Group Relations International, and a new member of GREX, West Coast Affiliate of the AK Rice Institute.

## Associate Director of Technology



**Tang**

(they/them). I am various things and am ambivalent about many of them. Some of these things include: Asian-American, a software engineer, an artist, a group relations person, living in Texas, transgender, and your tech administrator for this conference (which I am not ambivalent about).



## Consultants



**Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu**

Andrew (he/him) has been on a never-ending quest to better understand his Asian+ identities with the hope he can be in service to his two children as they navigate the complexities of being Asian+ (Palestinian, Okinawan, Yemeni, Filipino, Chinese) in the continental US. Andrew has had the opportunity and privilege to live in two countries, Japan and Jordan. While in Jordan, he served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in a small village 10 miles south of Petra. He met his wife in Jordan, a fellow PC volunteer, and they both moved to San Diego in 2014 after completing their service.

Andrew was introduced to group relations work as a master's student at the University of San Diego. He currently serves as the Assistant Director of Admissions and Marketing at UC San Diego's School of Global Policy and Strategy. Andrew recently visited Kaua'i for the first time with his family where he had one of the most Asian+ experiences in his life - uncovering the immigrant story of his great grandparents and meeting relatives living on the island. In his free time, you can find him hitting the San Diego streets with a double stroller or figuring out what to do with his excess goat milk.

(they/them) is a Ritual Designer, Creative Entrepreneur, and Organizational Psychologist based in San Diego, CA. An academic researcher turned leadership consultant and Chief of Staff at MongoDB, Angel found a language for complexity and taught people about elusive work of rituals, ceremonies, spirituality, emotional intelligence, etc.

Angel grew up in Hong Kong, Los Angeles, and New York. They earned a B.A. in Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and an M.A. in Social-Organizational Psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University. They are a former Member-At-Large and current member at the New York Center for study of groups, organizations, & social systems, a current member of A. K. Rice Institute, and a Co-Creator Group Relations International.



**Angel Hu**



**Keith Lequay**

An organizational and social psychologist by training, Keith has had GR staff experiences in the Caribbean, USA and South Africa. Currently a lecturer at the University of the West Indies- Jamaica, he is a former board member of the AKRice Institute and former president of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists. With lineage from West Africa and Southern China, he is constantly curious about systemic psychodynamics and the leadership and human development potential, in former colonized spaces.



# Consultants



**Kimberley A. Turner,**  
**Ph.D., M.Div.,**

(She, Her), Member and Past President, Washington-Baltimore Center for the Study of Group Relations; Associate, AKRI; Mentor, Training and Certification Program, AKRI; OD Consultant, Executive Coach; Associate Minister, Metropolitan Baptist Church; Member, NAACP.

Mojgan Jahan (she/her/hers) is a clinical psychologist in private practice in San Diego, CA, specializing in mindfulness and compassion- based therapies. Most recently, she served as a member of the University of California San Diego Student Health and Wellbeing EDI committee. Her experience as an immigrant from Iran, living in different cultural milieus helps her appreciate multiple perspectives. Mojgan’s application of Group Relations concepts has benefited her work with many healthcare organizations.

Mojgan is a member of the AK Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems, GREX, its West Coast affiliate and the Adaptive Leadership Network.



**Mojgan Jahan**



**Suma Jacob,**  
**M.D., Ph.D.**

(she/her/hers) South Indian heritage; M.D., Ph.D., University of Chicago; currently the Gloria and Dr. Martin Segal Family Professor at the University of Minnesota, Director of Autism Research, Co-Director of CANeurodevelopment Lab, Associate Director of the Medical Scientist Training Program; Adjunct faculty at Mayo Clinic; Co-Creator, Group Relations International; Associate, AK Rice Institute. Dr. Jacob’s federally funded research uses data-driven approaches and technology to study biobehavioral differences in early childhood that predict dimensional and categorical disorder outcomes in community samples.

She also investigates ways to tailor and to optimize neurodevelopmental interventions across the lifespan. More recently, Suma has integrated her work in social neuroscience with systems approaches including group relations to co-create peer and multigenerational mentoring groups for women-of-color and to direct the Hierarchies of the Collective experiential-learning conference series.

Psychotherapist and Associate Professor of Mental Health Counseling, Counseling and Behavioral Health Department, William James College. past Executive Committee Chair, The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. Member, Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems (CSGSS).



**Yousef Al**  
**Ajarma**



# Attendance

**All who are interested are encouraged to apply and join. A diverse membership creates the possibility for rich learning.**

The conference is designed to be a single integrated educational experience. Individuals who know in advance that they are unable to attend all sessions are discouraged from applying. Anyone who must leave for any reason is requested to inform the administration.

**Special note:** The conference is an educational endeavor and does not provide psychotherapy or sensitivity training. Although the experiential learning available can be stimulating and enriching, it can be emotionally demanding as well. Thus, applicants who are ill or experiencing significant personal difficulties should forgo participating at this time.

## Conference Dates and Times

**August 3-6, 2022  
(EST—New York Time)**

Wednesday

August 3

5:00 PM to 8:30 PM (EST)

Thursday and Friday

August 4-5

12:00 PM to 7:30 PM PM  
(EST)

Saturday

August 6

12:00 PM to 6:30 PM PM  
(EST)

## Conference Fees

Early Bird Suggested Fee (by 7/24/22)

\$375

Early Bird Sliding Scale (by 7/24/22)

\$200 - \$450

Late Application Suggested Fee (after 7/24/22)

\$450

Late Application Sliding Scale (after 7/24/22)

\$250 - \$600

**APPLY HERE**



If you have questions, please contact  
**Grace Bagunu** at [griestgrc@gmail.com](mailto:griestgrc@gmail.com)

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