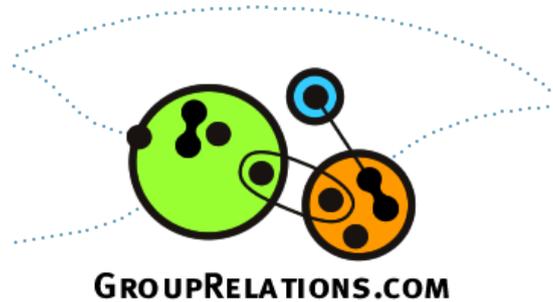


Stitching up the Patchwork

A Group Relations response to Covid-19



This is a set of reflections about how Group Relations thinking can assist people and systems to explore the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not intended to be complete, but is a snapshot of a moment in time from a group of systems-psychoanalytically informed people.

The contributors are members of a group which has been meeting on Zoom following on from a tri-annual meeting that took place in Belgirate, Italy in November 2018. The Group has been exploring the hypothesis “Are we Better Together?” – can we as group relations practitioners, theorists and advocates live and work through, the dynamics that we invite members to encounter in a Group Relations Conference. As a result of COVID-19 the question of being “better together” is now one for us all, as we “Social Distance”.

We hope that this set of reflections may assist in your own sense-making of the impact of the COVID-19 in your part of the world.

How we hold the whole in mind, whilst living in our “part”, as a fractal of the whole, is an element of the gift of the Group Relations learning modality.

The Patchwork that follows, invites you to engage with the eye of an artist. The offerings are rooted in institutions and geographies but are the vistas of the authors.

There will be another set of reflections to share in approximately 6 weeks.

STICHING UP THE PATCHWORK

The process of making this patchwork quilt has been interesting. The brief for every member of the group was 250 words on COVID-19 in their context and what a group relations perspective could add. Our job was then to (attempt to) sew it together, to metabolise. Quilting is a very traditional technique, and uses scraps, which can be very disparate, but still work together to create something interesting. Quilting is also about being frugal, 'make do and mend'; in this time of quarantine people are taking up hobbies untouched since childhood, baking bread, growing vegetables.

One might ask on reading this, which countries are missing from our GR collective? There are many. And who out of this group didn't manage to contribute – the members from Germany, Taiwan, Spain and Switzerland. Of course the members of our collective do not really 'represent' the countries themselves, though in our minds/in phantasy, they may do.

This starts with thoughts on reading all the contributions...though that privileges one response to the source material.... but in a sense this can't really be an overview, we each can only speak from our place in the patchwork, in this case as a Londoner, who works in the NHS. I did discuss these ideas with other London GRC colleagues, but all of us were I think looking through quite a similar lens.

The patchwork of contributions which then follows has been somewhat edited, at times for clarity, but also the pace of change meant that statistics seemed pointless and out of date already. There is a notable variation in the balance of Personal vs Organizational vs National viewpoints. There is also a degree of similarity in experience, some issues may ebb and flow more, for example trauma seems more pronounced in Israel and Russia, but also there is so much shared experience.

SOME IDEAS AND THEMES

One could say there has been a collapse of omnipotence. In the West particularly we have previously felt our place on this planet is unassailable, even in the face of a threat like global warming.

Societal fault lines have deepened in all cultures:

Privilege vs poverty, Basic assumption Fight Flight vs Basic assumption Dependency.

Several people spoke to a difficulty with appropriate dependency on leadership, due to 'fake news' and distrust or suspicion.

We notice in the news a relative inattention to issues of privilege and bias and how that interplays with Covid-19. It was mentioned in the patchwork; interestingly India was where it was particularly located. We are seeing that class, ethnicity, gender have significant relationships with mortality and morbidity, but it seems hard for this to be talked about and then attended to. Attempts to bring this up by people of ethnic minorities have not gained traction. Who has the authority and right to speak and be listened to?

Past trauma seems like another underlying factor - the Holocaust, communist regimes, 9/11. This now is also a shared global trauma, how will we respond post C19, what will be needed for national healthy psychological functioning and how do we care, or not, for the traumatised 'heroes'? What going forward, will they symbolise? History suggests they are often forgotten or neglected.

So many unknowns are causing fear. We can't really assess risk, so we can't be reassured. The global nature of the threat means there is no safe place. This creates primal infantile fears and means that splitting and projection don't work as mechanisms to locate the problems elsewhere. If there's 'no safe shore' then there can be no effective boundaries. There is a difficulty in thinking, at a personal level, which was owned in some of the accounts, but also what we are witnessing in the seemingly mindless activity of individuals and leaders/governments. The USA health system may be collapsing in plain sight. Doctors are doing things that should work, but don't.

At the same time people seem to be seeking comfort in tribalism and judgemental, competitive defences...some countries are labelled 'bad' or 'incompetent', even our friends and neighbours can be 'othered' and reported to the police for minor infringements. Othering seems a shared significant issue: countries and individuals, from China to the sweaty jogger! What will be the implications for individual and global relationships the other side of the pandemic?

The issue of 'othering' seems very important, and maybe where this wasn't mentioned was significant. The US leadership in particular, but not exclusively, has really been hammering home a xenophobic narrative – in an attempt to deflect blame, and bring the in-group together more?

Is there a more generalised failure of authority or leadership? Like an Inter-group event – leaderless groups in search of authority but unable to find it even where it should be, eg WHO. Thinking about authority and the paranoia that we see in GRC events when members don't feel contained by leadership, also feels very pertinent. The idealisation and vilification that occurs in an attempt to manage anxiety; and those splits are really apparent.

There seems to be a wish for purity or cleanliness or uncontaminatedness. This may link also to a longed for oceanic feeling, (a feeling of "being one with the external world as a whole). Freud deemed this a fragmentary vestige of a kind of consciousness possessed by an infant who has not yet differentiated himself or herself from other people and things.

The above patchwork stitching was authored on behalf of the group by **TAVISTOCK & PORTMAN NHS TRUST: UK**

THE PATCHES

IL NODO: ITALY

Here in Italy, a deep social fear of death, the contagion of fear, people are used to doing what they want in this wonderful country and world, now they're in closed in houses.

We tend to think of the human species as having conquered nature, and even the universe. The helplessness in the face of a contagion like this is, in part, **a collapse of omnipotence** that may be exacerbated by the problem of the planet warming up which we think is due to us...It seems like a time when humans have to be aware we are a part of nature and not the conqueror of it and that we've got limits.

Pascal says "our nature consists in motion; complete rest is death" we live with the impossibility to move now, we're in house arrest and there is abundance of restlessness: it seems impossible to rest and now we're forced to rest and hopefully to reflect on what's going on and learn from this traumatic experience

The title of our next GRC is an antenna of what's happening: subjection and subjectivity: crisis of institutional containers and identity despair.

We've need to reimagine human relations taking time to pause, sense, and connect and then act better together.

OFEK: ISRAEL

Since our Zoom meeting the world has further changed, what was here at the beginning of looming threat, became an unfolding lived reality.

Our whereabouts, location, work situation, family situation, habits – much of what defines us is being challenged as the number of sick and dead people is climbing, Societal fault lines have deepened.

Specificities of Covid-19 in Israel:

1. **Alert button:** The Israeli society has an "**alert button**", mobilized in response to wars or threat of wars. Leading to a state of being with specific societal rituals, a switch to survival mode. In this sense the Israeli society may be more resilient than countries that were not threatened since WW2. Covid-19 has pushed this button.
2. **Democracy at risk:** In parallel to the Covid-19 pandemic a political crisis is unfolding as a result to a post-election bind. The pandemic is used as a shield/weapon to introduce political changes. Under the pretext of caring for the population civil rights are compromised. Policy decisions of the leadership are suspicious of being political self-serving.
3. **Politics and societal divide:** due to political considerations (minister of health being an ultra-religious person) restrictions were postponed for the religious community. The contagion is the highest in these communities.
4. **Holocaust and the pandemic:** Holocaust associations are very close to the surface in Israeli collective mentality, the situation in which doctors will have to select whom to let die is terrifying everywhere, but has

an unbearable feeling here. The image of "Selection" has an echo to the "there and then" of the Holocaust, tragically so when some of the "disposable" older generation are Holocaust survivors.

5. The similar but different event in our life time is the "**Gulf war**" (1990). Israel was under threat of a nerve agent missiles attack. Gas masks and other kind of protection, discovered later as fake protection, was the order of the day. The terror was similar, the main difference was that the enemy was outside, "Social closeness" was the comfort. Now the Other may be the source of danger. "Social isolation" is the guiding principle. The Israeli culture is one of social coherence and reaching out to help, this is unfolding now in many forms, as the situation is worsening.

More similar than different

6. The flood of **virtual meetings**: family, professional, social. To counteract the "social isolation". Social defense at work.
7. The **generational divide**: "high risk" older population becoming the sacrificial lamb to the wrath of Nature carried by Covid-19.

I try to keep the situation as an uncanny reality against the temptation of adapting too fast.

Like all over the Globe, very quickly we found ourselves gathering in small zoom windows: large groups, small groups, trying hard to think, to make sense of our experiences. It is so difficult to think, to make sense, to plan the upcoming future. Everything is vague. Like there is no view from the zoom window... but we are all together trying hard to keep being in contact with each other, to be in contact with our past, with our future, in order to be.

GROUP RELATIONS INDIA: INDIA

There hasn't been a time since World War II where globally citizens wake up with the thought of impending danger to life. COVID 19 is not just about the spread of the virus. Equally potent is the spread of fear; of a sense of vulnerability from the familiar being, perhaps irrevocably, disrupted.

It is true that COVID 19 does not discriminate. But that it has primarily spread to the rest of the world via international travellers, disproportionately affecting celebrities & politicians; and impacted and locked down many countries in the global north, has had a huge role to play in how the media and elite-middle class nexus has chosen to report and respond to this.

While in other countries COVID 19 has exacerbated feelings of xenophobia and the dangerous other, in India it has primarily deepened the well-entrenched fault lines of hierarchies and privileges. Social distancing is not new to Indians, with caste being a marker of it for centuries! The disruption COVID has caused in the minds of people is because it does not recognise or respect the known boundaries set by the powerful (in the hierarchy of caste, class, gender, or religion) to determine the privilege of who's safe and unsafe, thus leading to a sense of confusion, anxiety, unease, and even anomie. Now that the rules they set are in disarray, the elite and middle classes have taken recourse to the privilege of claiming victimhood, instead of being also rooted in the reality of the devastating and disproportionate economic and social impact on the poor and the marginalised. There is much evidence of baM at play.

The biggest threat that COVID 19 poses is to our notion of self-sufficiency, built on the edifice of privilege. To sustain the baM culture that has lured us for the last 50 years, we're falling back on baD: our fantasy being that an omnipotent leader / government that will somehow restore life to what we knew as.

This is evident from public narratives in mainstream and social media, as well as in statements and choices of those in leadership¹. What is pandered to is the craving in us for The Strongman, who exhorts us to sacrifice for the nation, who reassures us that if only we listen to him, all will be well, instead of preparing citizens, the political establishment, and industry to face reality and take timely, bold and appropriate measures.

The more pervasive virus of entitlement and narcissism has been around for centuries. It has been nurtured more in the recent past by unfettered capitalism and the idealizing of consumerism. Its vaccine: a moral compass based on spirituality, ethics, compassion, generosity, equity, and sustainability, has been out of fashion for long. COVID 19 is an

opportunity to focus on the vaccine instead of the virus; a moment of time in history that behoves us to find the courage to let go of our sense of entitlement to privilege.

GROUP RELATIONS AUSTRALIA: AUSTRALIA

'We are not hoarding, but I know people who are'

As Australians, we like to think of themselves as self-reliant and self-directed. Likeable mavericks. Not particularly worried about formal authority. But we do like to be able to trust each other for support and honesty in times of need. This was genuinely evident during the recent bushfires and floods. It is under stress now as an emergent tension between the common good and self-interest.

National identity, if there is such a thing in Australia, is in flux. Many people are now making their own plans for self-protective isolation. This, of course, increases fear and mistrust in the community as whole. It becomes a positive feedback loop.

Fear + mistrust + 'Australian' self-reliance = 'Fight-flight' / withdrawal and self-interest

This seems to be leading to a panicked splitting of who is being responsible and socially distant in everyone's interest and who is not and regarded by the former as stupid, or irresponsible.

'We are all in this together' vs Mistrust of Government

There are many instances of people looking out for each other; offering common courtesy, practical support and establishing new virtual relationships. Many employers are continuing to employ staff even though the organisation has little work. Many landlords are waiving rent. This is very heart warming.

But the impact of the virus has also exposed the weaknesses in health, welfare and housing programs after 20 years of progressive defunding of public programs under a conservative / ideological push for 'smaller government', lower taxes and self-reliance. Health systems in particular are fearful of not being able to cope when the full strength of the pandemic hits Australia – as we have seen in Italy and expecting in the UK and the USA.

So we are all in this together, but that means 'flattening the curve' of the infection rate so that our health system can cope and that sick people don't die needlessly. This requires that we all consider other people we will never meet. This shared understanding and humanity is being driven by the general population and many health experts and some commentators, despite confused messaging from government. So the 'we' is seen as separate or 'split off' from government. Appropriate dependency on Government now seems very difficult.

GRA has initiated a Listening Post for members. Members and their guests fully subscribed this event within 72 hours of it being advertised. This clearly reflects a wish / need for a shared, thoughtful, hopefully less panicked discourse.

Personal fears and moral dilemmas

Crises like this are a once in a lifetime experiences. I find that trying to marshal my own capabilities in this set of circumstances is very difficult. All sorts of decisions present new and 'wicked' practical, intellectual and personal ethical problems. How do we feel about sharing our house with friends, with grown, adult family – for example. Umm? Arghh.

And today, for the first time I felt frightened.

ARIFANA/IFSI: SWEDEN

A question:

In the Nordic culture, there is a high value laid on control and self-control. We have an image of ourselves as good organizers, inherited from the Vikings.

The Vikings were boat builders, which made it possible to travel far away to plunder and conquer, but, on the way, also to learn from others and import things and customs to our country. To be able to row a longboat, you must be

able to adapt to one rhythm and one force, otherwise there will be chaos and the boat will only turn around its own axis; hence the need for control, consensus and adaptation.

So, when the Corona virus hit us, the foremost fear was of losing control. Since we stand in front of the unknown, our ordinary means and ways to control have disappeared. Sweden is one of the few countries that is hit hard by the virus, and that has not yet closed the schools. Denial or a sense of being reasonable, of not overreacting?

A reflection:

This 'being better together' movement is a strong support in these strange times. The GRC/Institutional Transformation world can help counteract panic, through our connection and interest in the invisible processes in groups, organizations and institutions.

A here-and-now snapshot:

Our yearly Conference on the theme of creativity, "Transformation: Organization, Leadership and Creativity 2020 " was hit by bad news; the Conference hotel had gone bankrupt, because of Corona virus cancellations. The future needs to be invented, and is unclear...

GROUP RELATIONS RUSSIA: RUSSIA

The main process we are experiencing in society is the lack and inconsistency of information and uncertainty, anxiety, fears. It is clear from what people are saying that the virus was in Russia since December as some people were experiencing the same symptoms as corona virus, so there is also a disappointment and distrust with the information flow (again).

Also at some level the virus is considered to be a relief from the pre-revolution/ political crisis mood, which was in the air the last few months or the year. So the tension is channeled into the fears and survival actions now.

It is a reminder of the previous "soviet" dynamics – basic goods disappearing from the shops, there are some restrictions, police coming with doctors to homes, etc. We are back to the Regime, which probably we never really left.

And also some fantasies people are creating about the present, based on the past. For example you are allowed now to come out to shop for food, for short walk etc, but people are sitting at homes being afraid to be stopped by police and put in the jail.

The oldest generation has a connection to WW2, Stalin's repressions, genocide of Jews, the mid generation - to the socialist bloom and cold war, the youngest to ethnic conflicts (with massive murders) and post Soviet union territory wars (eg Chechen conflict) and 90s gangsterism and corruption. The last two (but not only) also influenced the psychological systems and behaviors of current Russian leaders. Unmentioned cross-generational traumas like the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, total nationalization of land, property, estate, art etc. All these memories and (unconscious) associations are popping up now on all levels.

Also the financial crisis we were already having here (drop of local currency, massive bankruptcy of local, small and midsize businesses) is influencing people. We experience instability and a lot of anxiety and loss. The topic of privilege comes to the surface again. Those who have more money or connections have more chance of surviving or even being tested for corona virus. That causes envy, anger, frustration and weakness in society.

From a group relations perspective the main thoughts/processes we have now are:

Bringing the awareness in society of inner psychological processes such a frustration, loss of control, other losses (usual way of life, connections, lives), weakness (or impotency), narcissism (we are not that grandiose), sexual energy, importance of physical (body), massive regression both individual and collective ("good" as it is easier to explore the roots of behavior, "not that good" as it should be worked out and contained somehow) , meeting inner self.

Looking for tools and instruments to work with that: both maternal (embracing, nurturing, healing) and paternal (structured, straight forward, with clear boundaries).

We are organising zoom meetings with consultants, psychoanalysts, GRC professionals, to continue to explore our thoughts, feelings and unconscious processes to inside society. Because it looks like it will be changing with weeks. So – creating the space to express and explore. And create something new.

PS: Moscow is under the snow since day before yesterday. People are joking that finally we got classical Russian Christmas (which we missed due to absence of snow in Dec and Jan).

That makes me think again about the connection between deep inner traditional purity (the white and untouched snowy empty streets) and, somewhere around, the shadows.

GROUP RELATIONS INTERNATIONAL: UNITED STATES

From my perspective the prevailing and somewhat competitive narratives in the US news are:

How can we keep the economy going and how can we take care of the sick and prevent the spread of the virus? Both seem to be very much about numbers and predictions, statistics, but also about comparison and competition. In this narrative division become more obvious: president versus medical expert, country to country, state to state, old versus young, rich versus poor, the sick and the healthy, the compliant versus the non-compliant, the digital divide etc.

It seems to me that many are focused on "solutions" that fix the presenting problem (seen as health and economy) and very few are focused on the underlying dynamic that got us here.

I believe we are invited to not just live with but become intimate with "not-knowing" (including death) and not being in control. It appears people are terrified of it. Can we hold the not-knowing as creative and fertile space from which new things will emerge? Are we invited to think about the relationship between globalization and localization, perhaps also particularly relevant to GGRLC? Can we allow an economy of love and kindness to flourish more than an economy of money (and there are some hopeful signs in this emergency situation)?

Inspired by our conversation GRI launched a virtual Facebook event: "Making sense of what is going on in the world." We are writing about the experience and we are offering "Spiritual Path Explorations."

CHINA-AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF GROUPS AND SYSTEMS: CHINA

When it burst out at the end of 2019, I could not believe it at the beginning, or I think it will disappear soon. Then I heard lots of news, and saw lots of videos, some I believe, some I thought untrue, some I thought were politically manipulated.

Later, one of my friend phoned me to buy food at least for two weeks, I still could not believe, I thought it won't be so terrible. But I went downstairs and bought some food.

Later, I fell into strong anxiety, and began to do something, so began the program of "Anti-COVID-19 Group Service Program".

I can still remember the death, anxiety and loneliness during those days, I wanted to talk with my friends everyday, I spent lots of time talking with others. I felt lonely, very lonely, and scared by COVID-19. The connections with other people helped me at that moment.

Now, COVID-19 is under control, people in China begin to work and still wear masks. I noticed myself begin to feel the depression, lack of motivation, lack of happiness, and still worry that I will get sick.

TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE CHINA: CHINA

Everything has made me lose my language. When I saw Denmark put the image of the virus on the five yellow stars of the Chinese flag, it was clear to me that this was not anti-chinese people, but an authoritarian party system with privileges. This is what the Chinese people are up against too, and we know it.

However, with the development of the epidemic, almost all countries are in emergency. The dictatorial party and the system were in line, and won the first round in a strict and rigid defence in China. At this moment, I can't make my voice heard. It harmed people? It seemed yes. It saved people? It seemed yes.

The daily rising death toll was painful to me, and I didn't know whether the hand of nature was punishing human arrogance, or whether it was a leak of human biological weapons developed in the laboratory, a technical error. What is the truth, and who has the final proof, or is there only an indefinite uncertainty? These make me not know what to say; my heart is heavy.

We have a hypothesis that "it's better to be together," as if it were the only certainty; When we came together, we didn't know what our mission was, and when we asked, there was an outbreak, city after city, country after country; We cut each other off to quarantine to stop the spread of the virus, we pause our busy bodies in all kinds of flying stories, in all kinds of fear mongering... I hope, my mind can be quiet, and in the heartache of the cold, that I can see clearly the truth: this is my prayer from the bottom of my heart.

CHINA-AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF GROUPS AND SYSTEMS: USA

I sit at the intersection between China and the US in my role as a co-director of the China-America Society for the Study of Groups and Organizations (CASSGO). In addition to being a director of group relations conferences in Chicago and China, I am also an addiction psychiatrist and group psychotherapist; these roles have also affected my experience of the epidemic.

I have consulted to a group of Chinese group psychotherapists, whom I met through our work in group relations conferences, for two years every week using Zoom. We had a break in our meetings for two weeks prior to the Chinese New Year, and when we met again the epidemic had become visible in China. One member of the group who works as an academic in Beijing was visiting his family for the New Year celebration in Hubei province, where Wuhan is the capital. He has been in quarantine there since that time, so I had first hand reports from both the epicenter of the epidemic as well as from areas distant from Wuhan, including Beijing and Yunnan.

A central piece of my learning from conference work in the US and China relates to the tension between maintaining the autonomy of the individual while protecting the safety of the community. While my Chinese colleagues were initially disturbed both by the delay in their government's response to the epidemic and simultaneously by the restrictions imposed by the quarantine and sheltering in place, I believe that we now have enough information from the experience of other countries that the model in China of protecting the safety of the community, has much to recommend it. Our Western attitudes and behaviors, including my own, may have contributed to life-threatening denial that we have not seen the end of.

Our American Group Psychotherapy Association went blissfully into New York City with more than one thousand members from March 2-8 just as the virus was beginning its exponential contagion there. While we bemoaned the inability of our Chinese colleagues to attend our conference because of our governments blocking their entry into the US, we fancied ourselves invulnerable to infection. Our denial broke in the weeks following the conference, as our organization's list serve multiplied exponentially with hundreds of messages daily including new cases of infection among those in attendance at the conference.

As I went into sheltering in place, I contacted my patients to let them know I would be working virtually for the foreseeable future until the crisis resolves. I also opened myself to a more radical dive into the work of online relationships including meetings with colleagues and mutual support meetings, in addition to meetings with my patients. My experience of our western means of protecting the safety of the community has been enhanced by my exposure to the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. Their first tradition states: "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress depends upon AA unity." I have been awestruck at the rapidity with which the Twelve Step fellowships have moved from face to face to virtual meetings to offer seamless support to its many members. I maintain hope that our colleagues invested in group relations conference work may learn a lesson that I believe that this epidemic offers to teach us. Not only may we be better by cooperating and working with each other; our very survival may depend on it. This cooperation may entail physical distance among us; this physical distance need not impair our ability to maintain a strong commitment to an ongoing working relationship.

FINOD/METANOIA: FINLAND

1. Polarisation: As reactions toward corona virus we seem to create "either or" solutions, but missing "both and" solutions.
2. Panic and omnipotence: People are dividing themselves to those who are scared and those who don't seem to care. This is creating splits and anger between people. One kind of split is between those who don't want work in any possible danger and those who believe in duty and want to be heroes at work.
3. Female and male leadership: Since Finland has a strong young female cabinet with five parties all having a woman chair; it creates male opposition from the Right. For some people it's almost unbearable that women are capable of creating safe, strong and clear leadership. Corona virus is also calling out some yearning toward more authoritarian leadership. This creates tension with constitutional basic rights and more liberal views.
Consistency with decisions, versus ongoing changes. Some people have great difficulties to put up with fast changes needed to adapt with corona. Ongoing transitions seem to create mistrust.
4. Tensions in working life: People are worried about their personal economy, which is impacting to overall economy. Our social security takes care of most of people up to two years, but those who are employing them self can be in trouble.

5. Digital jump: In Finland we have had discussion about digital jump especially in education but also in working life. Now the digital jump was made in two days after government declared standby laws. There has been much more hidden capacity than expected.
6. Shaping up primary task: As ways to work are fast changing, there is a need to shape the primary task. New methods, new tools and changing environment create new meanings to work and unaccepted consequences.
7. Uneven workload and envy: Since some are able to work in home and some have met danger of corona there are some difficulties to organize workloads. There is also envy between those who earn money by being heroes of work or those who can be in safe at remote work.
8. Asocial habits and need for connections. Fins do have reputation as unsocial and lonely people. Corona virus and remote work has created new social habits, need for contacts and responsibility for neighbours. Since gyms etc are closed and city centres are empty, fins have been found walking in nature, as they would have found again long lost relation.
9. Saturation about Corona discussion: There are many who are tired of news about corona. This links with the ongoing fight with official information and rumours and false news in social media.
10. Fear for other countries and areas. To some extent there is fear of places like Italy, US, Spain, Germany etc, where corona virus seems to be loose. I am personally worried the fear also comes between the Helsinki area (at the moment 60% of corona infections) and the rest of the country.

TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RELATIONS: UK

The Leicester Conference 2020 Task Authority Organisation has the sub theme: 4C's C-Change.

The world has been brought to a complete stop: planes are not flying, people are advised to stay at home, governments are preparing for 1000's of deaths, and "social distancing" is a global slogan to prevent the spread of the virus.

Cancellation and postponement of everything from sport to work are changing the social order, and simultaneously virtual communications are bringing us closer together. Can we deliver a whole GRC online?

If COVID-19 were a member of a group relations conference, we would be curious about how and when it shows up, where it goes. We would try and explore what that might tell us about the state of the conference as a system in its context.

We might ask:

- what does COVID-19 represent and why does it appear now, and why in these locations?
- How are the social systems responding to the virus? What do their reactions tell us about possible fantasies they are holding?
- What does it mean to be infected? Where are we contaminated in our thinking and behaviour?
- What role is the media playing on behalf of us all in mobilising fear – is it laying the ground for compliance and conformity OR creativity and connection?
- What is being split off and located in COVID-19 on behalf of the system as a whole?

There are broader issues of equity and equality embedded in the narratives of prevention. Many have talked about overpopulation and the resource implications if the whole planet chooses to live by the USA/UK model of "the good life".

- How to keep 6ft away from any other human being in Bangladesh or Tokyo?
- Possibility of washing hands in running water for 20 seconds in a rural village in Sudan?

The key concept of Authority is on the table. Could this be the heralding of legitimacy to the UN System to create a global government (as the EU project faces Brexit). Perhaps there is a change so broad and fundamental to the nature of Authority that we cannot conceive it?

LITHUANIAN GROUP RELATIONS SOCIETY: LITHUANIA

The level of anxiety is very high. This unknown, unpredictable situation generates lots of anxiety in me. Anxiety is paralyzing, blocking my thinking. I find it very difficult to concentrate my thoughts and writing. Writing is very

important part of my job. It seems that I have perfect conditions for writing now, but my thoughts are clumsy, foggy, distracted, unfocused... I worry not about myself but about my beloved ones.

There are signs of defenses against the anxiety: denial and ignorance of the reality. Some people behave as if they are immortal or have fatalistic view on life and death. For the older generation who are highest risk it is the most difficult to adjust to working on the Internet and technologies, and they keep going to offices, riding on public transport ignoring the risk. Some employers force employees to come to offices without real necessity, denying the risks and trying to control uncontrollable.

Technologies of course provide conditions for connections and continuation of the work, but at the same time they give opportunities for this never-ending communication, which becomes a noise: disturbing, distracting noise.

There is lots of splitting in the society, authorities are blamed for incompetence, and decisions are sabotaged and made to look bad. Isolated people are claiming their freedoms, threatening to take the authorities to court for isolating and violating their freedom, ignoring the fact that their freedoms can violate the rights of other people to be healthy...

Government cannot provide full protection and satisfy all needs for services because of the lack of human resources as well as medical supplies. On the other hand, there are many examples of initiatives from citizens, who are taking care of elderly neighbors, and donating money. There were more than 700 000 euro raised for supplies by businesses and citizens. There are at least two nationally operating networks of volunteers providing free services through call centers.

It is difficult for all of us to understand that our task has changed. We all have the same task for the pandemic period – to prevent the spread of the virus and to ensure health. But negotiations between individual and collective needs are not easy. There are competing values in this arena: human vs business, health vs money, freedom vs survival etc. We all know there will be losses and it is difficult.