

Escape from Freedom Revisited: Anxiety and Freedom within Groups

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Abstract Content (EN)

This panel, we will explore how freedom and anxiety erupted as prominent issues in the IPA sponsored Group Relations Conference in Thessaloniki in May 2024. During the event, 2 groups were formed: one group devoted to the study of “anxiety” and the other group, fleeing the claustrophobic atmosphere of the conference, left the venue and explored the city on their own. The first group named themselves “the anxiety group” and the second group was named “the freedom people”. When the freedom people returned, they were invited into the anxiety group, enlivening the interaction for the anxiety group and anchoring the freedom people. The participants concluded that “freedom without anxiety leads to mania and anxiety without freedom leads to paralysis.” Group members noted that these issues are poignantly present in many aspects of our society today including a movement towards authoritarian dictators, toxic polarization and irreverence to cultural norms. We will explore the work of Erich Fromm, specifically his ideas about freedom leading to loneliness and anxiety and Vamik Volkan’s concepts of large group identity and chosen trauma which can lead to toxic polarization. Finally, we will identify the role of psychoanalysis in addressing these issues.