

KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER: Leadership and Neutrality

S. Kolod¹, **G. Demby**², **J. Wise**³, **M. Mladenova**⁴, **M.P. Conte**⁵, **S. Kolod**¹

¹ *William Alanson White Institute, New York City, New York, United States of America*

² *Contemporary Freudian Society, New York City, New York, United States of America*

³ *New York Psychoanalytic Society, New York City, New York, United States of America*

⁴ *Bulgarian Psychoanalytic Society, Sofia, Bulgaria*

⁵ *Italian Psychoanalytic Society, Genoa, Italy*

Abstract Content (EN)

Following our panel in Dresden where Heribert Blass served as a discussant, 5 members of the first IPA sponsored Group Relations Conference, 2 from Europe and 3 from the US will explore the concept of neutrality when taking up a leadership role. Psychoanalysts are trained to be good listeners, to hold different, even opposing thoughts in mind, to listen to ourselves as we listen to others, and to forgo judgement, i.e. to maintain a neutral stance. Both Anna and Sigmund Freud emphasized the importance of neutrality in analytic work.

The Group Relations model provides the opportunity to study how toxic polarization can develop within a group and what the leader can do to address and overcome these splits. (W.R. Bion, 1967) Just as “the frame” in individual treatment helps maintain neutrality, attending to role, task and boundary are necessary in group work. We offer a case study of issues that arose during a leader’s tenure in their psychoanalytic society, and explore the role of empathy, insider and outsider status and sibling rivalry in maintaining a neutral stance. Finally, we ask the question, “When is neutrality is a virtue in a leader and when does it lead to dysfunctionality and paralysis?”