

## My Experiences at AGPA, 2012

What an honour and a delight to have received a Jackson Training Award to attend the Institute and conference of the American Group Psychotherapy Association in New York City (March, 2012)! In addition to greatly appreciating receiving the award, I am also happy to have this opportunity to share about the impact on me of having attended. I found the AGPA conference to be lively, invigorating, and rejuvenating.

With the support of the Award, I attended a Special Interest Institute on projective identification and countertransference. The Institute was intense, emotionally charged, and fascinating. It provided me with the opportunity for personal growth and growth as a therapist, and helped me reconnect with some of what our clients undergo when beginning, deepening, and ending their group work. The range and depth of emotion I experienced in myself and others left me quite drained by the end, but even so it was immensely valuable to have the Institute conclude with an instructional component during which we could use real life examples from our work in the institute itself. Although I have valued the process institute experience in the past, having this didactic piece felt like extra bang for my buck.

The three-day conference also provided me with important opportunities to integrate new theoretical positions into my work, specifically positions that are more fitting with contemporary times and current research; this is so challenging on my own as I struggle to read clinical texts in fits and starts while maintaining a full clinical caseload.

AGPA workshops provided me with validation in so many ways. I heard about others' practices regarding new types of groups, ongoing peer supervision, and day-to-day clinical practices that are similar to those that we practice in the clinic in which I work. Hearing from others from private practices and diverse institutions and programs, it feels good to know that we're in this together! A theme that ran through the sessions I attended was around using our own reactions when conducting group sessions. This was an excellent fit with the focus of the Institute and it was a unifying experience for me to be able to draw a thread through the marathon experience of the conference. Summarizing it so well in the Louis R. Ormont lecture, Dr. Elliot Zeisel stated that our effectiveness as leaders is in direct proportion to our emotional availability and expressiveness. Working with this theme in a variety of workshops and sessions highlighted for me value of the Institutes and of the experiential components of so many of the sessions at AGPA.

One way in which I was energized regarding group therapy does not, in fact, pertain directly to clinical practice. It does, however, pertain to helping people outside of our group therapy community understand more about what we do, and about the unique contributions offered by group therapy. At a time when our health care systems are seeking reform and efficiency, having had expert guidance from Dr. Judith Cochè around disseminating this type of information was indeed timely.

A final, and very important way in which the AGPA conference rejuvenated me was that it reminded me that what we frequently refer to as resistance is the reason that we do groups, the reason our clients agree to participate in groups, the vehicle for understanding our clients, and the provider of material to work through in groups. AGPA helped me reconnect with compassion for individuals enacting their resistances, including both my clients and myself.

Over the course of the five days, I made lasting connections with colleagues, and felt like I became a member of a large, culturally diverse family. I simply cannot recommend it enough!!!