

What can we do about increasing polarisation?

Marian Liebmann

All over the world we are experiencing increased polarisation. Neighbours versus neighbours, left versus right, country versus country, climate change activists versus deniers, Covid medics versus anti-vaxers. New international conflicts are breaking out almost every day – Syria, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Niger, Colombia, India, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nagorno-Karabakh, Israel/ Palestine, to name but a few.

In the current post-Covid era, people seem much more intransigent than before. They readily see others as less than human. In my voluntary work as a mediator for neighbour conflicts, people now are rarely willing to meet. Increasingly we have to work with neighbours separately.

Social media, a boon during Covid, has its down sides. It is geared to making profits by enhancing extreme views and feeding people's existing prejudices. It encourages disharmony and antagonism and fosters conflict (Rahman 2018).

What can we do?

We can try to create a space in which dialogue can take place. The arts may be able to offer an avenue which is more powerful than words.

This workshop will ask people to share some of the polarised conflicts they are involved in, or aware of, and use their imaginations to create pictures in terms of shapes and colours, and to share these with a partner. Then, together, they can search for 'common ground' and create a new picture for each situation. Finally, they will be asked to reflect on how far the new pictures can create a basis for dialogue in the chosen context.

References

Rahman, T. (2018). Extreme overvalued beliefs: how violent extremist beliefs become 'normalised'. Behavioural Sciences (Basel). Published online 12 January 2018. doi: 10.3390/bs8010010

Biography

Marian Liebmann qualified as an art therapist in 1979, and worked in art therapy with offenders, women's groups and community groups. For 19 years Marian was part of the Inner City Mental Health Team in Bristol, UK, where she developed work on anger. She has also worked with asylum seekers and refugees. She has lectured on art therapy at universities in the UK, Ireland, Israel, Eastern Europe and Baltic countries. She also works in restorative justice, mediation and conflict resolution, and has run Art, Conflict and Anger workshops in many countries. She has written/edited 14 books, including *Art therapy and anger*, and most recently *Arts therapies and sex offending* (2021). In 2010 she was awarded her PhD by publications from Bristol University. In 2013 she was awarded OBE for contributions to art therapy and mediation. She currently works privately supervising art therapists and running art therapy workshops for various organizations including refugees.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Liebmann, M. (2022). **Art tables at drop-in centres for asylum seekers and refugees**, *Perspectives in Public Health* (online journal), March 2022, Vol 142 No.2, Sage Journals.

Liebmann, M. (2022). **Art tables at refugee drop-in centres: from exclusion to belonging**, *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, Vol 14, Number 1, 2023, Intellect Books.

Liebmann, M. (2022). Presentation: **When does a memory start or finish? Looking at context and transgenerational trauma**. ECArTE, conference, September 2022, Vilnius.

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Liebmann, M. (2023). **Art tables – building community and belonging** at Innovation in the Arts in Therapy Special Issue of the Journal of Applied arts and Health CPD event, 22 July 2023.