

March 8, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to introduce myself to many as the current President of the Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology (2021-2022). I wanted to share a little about myself as well as some of the priorities which I see emerging within the Society.

My academic and clinical training and experience have included degrees from Georgetown University (A.B.); Westin Jesuit School of Theology (now part of Boston College) (M.Div., S.T.L); The University of Notre Dame (M.A.); Hahnemann University (now part of Drexel University) (M.F.T.) and Widener University (Psy.D.) I have done additional training in Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychology, and have received certification in Psychoanalysis through the Institute for Relational Psychoanalysis of Philadelphia. My career has focused on Clinical work through an Independent practice based in Philadelphia, and I have been part of the adjunct faculty for the Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology at Widener as well as IRPP. I'm the founder and co-director of the Philadelphia chapter of A Home Within, a national organization which links therapists willing to provide *pro bono* psychotherapy to those who are or have been involved in Foster Care. I have lived in Philadelphia with my husband Phillip for almost thirty years.

I first discovered Division 39 when I was a student at Widener, much to the credit of Dennis Debiak! I quickly found a home both in our local chapter, the Philadelphia Society for Psychoanalytic Psychology (PSPP) and Division 39. After serving on the board and as president for PSPP, I became more involved with Division 39 through Section IV (Local Chapters), becoming President of the Section and then Representative to the Division's Board of Directors. I was the co-chair of our 2019 Spring Meeting in Philadelphia (along with Dr. Matthew Whitehead) and served as Parliamentarian for the Board before becoming President-Elect last year.

All of us, I believe, are still reeling from what was unleashed by the COVID pandemic as well as the social and political upheaval in American Society during this past year. As many of you know, the most obvious impact of SPPP was in the cancellation of our annual Spring Meeting scheduled for New York last March. Although many people do not attend the Spring Meeting, it is at the heart of our identity and vitality as a Division. I write this letter on the eve of our current Spring Meeting, which has preserved the essence of what was slated for last year and transformed it into a virtual experience which will be available to a larger group of individuals than has ever been able to attend in the past. I want to acknowledge the astonishing work of the conference co-chairs: Drs. Leilani Salvo Crane, Nadine Obeid and Lara Sheehi, as well as Conference Coordinator Heather Kennedy, SPPP'S Program Director, Dr. Stephen Anen and our Division Administrator, Ruth Helein. Of course, many other contributed to this effort, including the Meeting Steering Committee and others involved in our various committees and Board positions. And I also want to acknowledge the leadership and thank our Past-President, Dr. Barry Dauphin who presided with grace and skill over the many dimensions--the *full catastrophe* (as *Zorba the Greek*, might say)--of our organizational challenges.

We have much to be proud of in the membership and effort of our Division. I'm thinking of the commitment of our Representatives to APA Council who have been at the forefront of challenging our parent organization in their ethical violation of principles related to Psychologists' involvement in government interrogation programs for detainees. Our Board has been deeply engaged in advocating for greater inclusion of and respect for psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychology in treatment guidelines and public presentations of the APA. I'm grateful for those who led the effort to change our Bylaws to be more inclusive of those who were not Psychologists or APA members, allowing full membership and voting privileges to a broader group. Then there is all the hard work throughout every year that supports our committees, publications and Spring Meetings. But over the years, I have also been made aware of many who have not felt included and supported, such as Research Psychologists, those concerned about the treatment of children, and those who have come to us representing a younger and more diverse representation of Psychologists and Social Workers, and other Mental Health Professionals.

I write this on the eve of our 2021 Spring Meeting. There is an amazing convergence of the theme of this meeting (*Reckoning/Foresight*) with issues facing our Division as well as our broader American society. I want to speak to one issue which will be at the heart of our efforts as a Board for the foreseeable future. For the past several years, I've been proud of the efforts made by the Division and various Spring Meeting committees to welcome a mainly younger cohort of more diverse persons, largely through the development of a strong Scholar's Program, which has also involved mentoring by many of our members of younger colleagues. Greater inclusion and participation has also come about through the efforts of our Graduate Student, Multicultural Concerns and Sexual and Gender Identities Committees.

Personally, I have always experienced Division 39 as a warm and welcoming place. Even as a gay man, I did not feel the discrimination or exclusion that many of my older colleagues have experienced in various professional organizations. I've only been helped to realize that my comfort level probably has a good deal to do with being a white cis-gendered male, who was also fortunate to make friends with a number of people who were already well established in the Division. It was easy to have pride and hold onto a limited perspective of how our Division was being experienced by others. In spite of the best of intentions, we have been confronted by the fact that many have not felt welcomed among us, and we continued to learn of others who feel excluded or otherwise injured.

A few years ago, Drs. Kori Bennett and Mamta Dadlani spearheaded an initiative called *Dialogues Across Differences* which sought to make many of us more aware of and comfortable with matters related to gender identification and diversity and how we can effectively communicate with one another in the face of different experiences and assumptions. I cite this project both as an indication of progress but also as a flash point for those who did not understand or accept the need for more careful attention to the concerns of so many of our members. One glaring example of how painful this all can get is the seeming perennial eruption of disagreement and disparagement which occurs on the Division 39 Forum listserve, in spite of many ideas and efforts to address the problems.

This past year, the death of George Floyd (among many other People of Color) and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement have galvanized a national reckoning with the forces of racism and white supremacy in American society. At the same time, our Board of Directors has had to face our own

reckoning, realizing that these racist elements exist within the structure of our own organization. It took me a long time to realize how this is so, and that process continues. I want to be clear that I do not see this as a mere reflection of dynamics in the United States and the world today, but rather a reality within the Division itself. Nor is this something that can be repaired by quick and superficial efforts.

The Board began a process last year of engaging with consultants to assist us in discovery, dialogue and change around matters related to diversity and racism. This year, we will begin a more focused stage of that process involving the Board and other constituents in our midst. I'll be sharing more details about that at a later time. As with the Letter of Apology to LGBTQ+ individuals, we realize that "consciousness raising" and apologies are not sufficient for repair and change, so we are seeking greater wisdom on how we can change for the sake of inclusion of all. I realize that these issues are complex and fraught with possibilities for misunderstanding, disagreement, anxiety, pain and even aggression, but I am actually excited to plunge into the process with good colleagues and the confidence that greater reconciliation is not only necessary but possible. I am mindful that promises of change can evoke feelings of optimism, but also skepticism and fear. As we know from our professional work, change can be difficult and also involve embracing loss as well as a creative spirit of hope.

Beyond everything else, it is clear to me that we need to continue to work to improve communication within the Society: to allow the Board of Directors to hear and understand the experience of our members, to help us be more aware of the work and concerns of our various committees, and most importantly, to continue to practice the art of difficult conversations where differences are real and power dynamics so easily intrude on the effort to come to greater mutuality and understanding.

I want to invite anyone who has comments, concerns or questions about what I have written to communicate with me directly ([drschaller@josephschaller.com](mailto:drschaller@josephschaller.com)).

I'll close with words from the song *Make our Garden Grow* from the musical *Candide*:

*We're neither pure, nor wise, nor good; We'll do the best we know.  
We'll build our house and chop our wood and make our garden grow...  
And make our garden grow!*

Actually, I believe we are all pretty good, and some among us are indeed wise. Let's continue to grow our garden!

Sincerely,  
Joe Schaller (he/him/his)  
President, SPPP