

THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY



THE SOCIETY FOR THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY DIVISION 24 OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2015 PRESIDENTIAL NEWSLETTER

Dear all,

First, a confession: In recent years, this newsletter has been titled the “Fall Newsletter.” Well, for reasons I’ll spare you from learning, this year’s it’s being called the “Winter Newsletter.” Better late than never.

The good news is, there’s a lot to write about. I’ll begin with the business part of things. As most of you know by now, Division 24’s Midwinter meeting will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from March 5-7, at the DoubleTree Suites hotel right downtown. Serving as our Planning Committee Co-Chairs are Mary Beth Morrissey and Chris Ramey, who have been doing outstanding work. Joining them on the Planning Committee are Gregg Henriques, Katie Howe, Jordan Hyde, Lisa Osbeck, Jeff Reber, and Brady Wiggins, so we’ve really got a terrific group.

This year’s meeting promises to be an excellent one as well as a bit different from previous ones, partly because we’ve “moved west” for the first time and have the opportunity to attract some newcomers to our work. In addition, we’re adding a new event to the meeting, in the form of a celebratory book session, which will bring together authors and editors of books published in 2014 or are about to be published in the coming year. Finally, this year’s meeting also promises to underscore some goals that I regard to be central to my work as President: building a more inclusive division; attracting more students and early career scholars; extending our reach to both

other divisions and other disciplines; and, perhaps most centrally, thinking together about the interrelationship of critique and creation—that is, identifying the discipline’s less-than-ideal features and, at the same time, re-imagining it, such that it might become more fully realized, more adequate to the human condition, *better*.

In service of the first of these goals, I especially want to call attention to the Midwinter plenary session titled “The Female Voice in Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology: An Interactive Symposium.” And in service of the last goal, there will be another plenary session, titled “Critique and Creation: Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology’s Role in Understanding and Transforming Culture.” I am also pleased to note that a good number of students and early career scholars will be participating in the meeting. Many of them are also involved in supporting the Division’s efforts in important ways. Here, I want to call special attention to the good work being done Snjezana Huerta and Tyler Lefevor, our Student Committee Co-Chairs.

Plans are also well underway for the upcoming APA meeting in Toronto this summer. In this context, special thanks go to this year’s Program Chair, Sunil Bhatia, who has been working extremely hard in this important role. I’ve had the good fortune of working alongside him for much of this work, and it’s truly been a pleasure. We’ve had some significant challenges, foremost among them being the fact that our programming hours were reduced from 21 to 14. We weren’t alone in this; a number of our neighbor divisions (e.g., 26, 32) were also reduced. I can’t say I fully understand how all this works. (There are aspects of APA process that remain pretty much inscrutable to me.) But that’s how it’s shaken out, and we’ve got to carry out our programming within these limits.

It’s probably not going to get much better either. According to one APA missive that was passed along this year (by the APA Convention Office), there is going to be a progressive reduction in divisional program hours for the next few years: “Using the 2012 convention attendance as a baseline,” we were told, “in 2014 no division’s hours will be reduced more than 30%, in 2015 no more than 35%, and 2016 no more than 40%.” This doesn’t bode well—for comparatively small divisions, like our own, especially. Truthfully, I’m not sure how to think about all this. We could do a membership drive and try to up our numbers—though it’s difficult to say how high they ought to go. We could protest the basic formula being used for its too-simple equating of membership numbers with hours-worthy significance. And, of course, we could just plead for more hours, by arguing that we’ve got more to say than 14 hours (and descending) could possibly permit. (It’s true.)

Here, though, I would ask: What exactly do we want as a Division? How important is the APA Convention? Indeed, I’m tempted to ask: How important is the APA for the likes of us? My own answer varies quite a bit (and dealing with APA bureaucracy this year hasn’t helped matters). But after all is said and done, I still think it’s important for us to be a part of the APA enterprise and to do what we can to help shape the kind of discipline we want—and ought—to have. Having said this, I still don’t know how to think about the reduction of programming hours and, more generally, the status of the APA Convention. With that, I’ll pose another question that I hope we can all think about together in the months ahead: How can we do our best work, as scholars and as teachers? What contexts will most support it? And how can we create more of these contexts?

Vexing issues aside for the time being, this year's divisional program promises to be another excellent one. Our theme this year, you may recall, is "Theory, Practice, and Identity in a Global and Culturally Diverse World." Sunil, I, and others—especially those members of the Division who generously agreed to review proposals—have done our best to ensure that this theme remains focal at the convention. Fortunately, so did many of those who submitted these proposals. We will therefore have symposia such as, "Theorizing Diversity, Diversifying Theory," "Minimizing Harm in Psychotherapy: Critical Examinations of Multicultural and Humanistic Discourses," and "Toward a Diversity of Worldviews in Psychological Science," along with a wide range of papers and posters exploring these and related issues. We will have a hospitality suite program as well and, along with Division 26, with whom we'll be sharing the suite, are just now in the process of determining how best to use it. The process of bringing it all together is an extremely demanding one—more demanding than I knew. I'm quite sure Sunil would say the same. We take solace in the end result, though—which, thanks to many of you, is something we can all celebrate.

I want to return briefly to the themes mentioned above. Following that, I'll share a few additional words about the Division and its future.

As noted already on several occasions, I would like us to work toward building a more inclusive division. I mean this not only in terms of important dimensions such as gender, race, and ethnicity but in terms of ideas, practices, and bodies of theory. There's so much going on in psychology. One of my hopes for the remainder of the year is that we can brainstorm a bit about what's happening (and not happening) in the discipline and that we can speak to some of those issues that have been less focal for us. I'm thinking of topics and issues ranging from the ascendancy of neuroscience to the pursuit of mindfulness and related practices all the way to the relationship between psychology and the arts. I am also thinking of areas of human need—that is, areas that call out for the kind of thinking we in the Division are prepared to do. There are, of course, many other possibilities, and I welcome your thoughts about how we might move ahead.

As I've also noted, I would also like to see us work together to bring more students and early career scholars into the Division. The numbers issue referred to earlier is one reason. The more substantive reason is that there's some excellent work being done out there, and these people are the future of the Division. We need to cultivate them and do what we can to help them find work that matches their passions and talents. We also need to encourage them to stand forth and be heard, to undertake initiatives of their own, and to see themselves as active and vitally important players in the life of the Division. I look forward to hearing your suggestions about this as well.

Third, I encourage us to reach out more both to other divisions and to other disciplines. Thanks especially to Sunil's excellent work, we've been having lots of productive contact with people in other divisions, including both more "familiar" ones (such as 1, 26, 32, and 39) and less familiar ones (such as 5, 12, 17, and 45). This doesn't mean that our aim is merely to extend our reach as far as possible. It means that there are things going on elsewhere that are pertinent to what we in 24 do and that can strengthen our collective work. I therefore look forward to learning about additional sites of collaboration and opportunities to reach beyond the confines of our division.

Fourth, I want to call attention once more to the relationship between critique and creation--that is, between offering commentary on what's problematic about the discipline and what might be done to craft a more ideal form of it. Along these lines, I encourage us to explore questions such as: What kinds of theorizing are most needed at this particular juncture in the discipline's history? What are some of the most promising sites for generating theory, and how can these be brought to bear upon—and reach—the wider discipline as well as the wider world? What would a more "mature" psychology look like? What kind of psychology—or psychologies—should we aspire toward? Some of this sort of work is going on in the Division right now. And, as noted earlier, we'll be exploring these and related questions at the Midwinter. My hope is that we can do more of it going forward and can thereby become a still more constructive force for meaningfully transforming the discipline.

This last issue also brings up the question of the Division's mission and identity. When I assumed the presidency of the Division back in August, I vowed to address this issue, not least because I wanted to learn more about the kinds of mission-related statements that had been made during the course of its history. I also wanted to reflect more, with others, about who and what we have been, who we currently are, and who we might become. My aim was not radical transformation; there's too much good going on in the Division for that. Rather, it was to gain some clarity about our own foundational principles. There have been times when we've assumed the role of critical "conscience" of the discipline. Other times, we've served as the source of new bodies of theory, ones more appropriate to the human condition. There have also been times when it's seemed that we essentially functioned as a kind of clearinghouse for any and all people committed to saying something new and interesting, whether due to disgruntlement with the status quo or excitement about uncharted intellectual territory. Are we more one of these than the others? Do we stand for anything in particular besides rigorous thought and scholarship in theoretical and philosophical psychology? Yes, of course: we want to be welcoming, diverse, truly hospitable to difference. How do we square this worthy commitment with a sense of shared purpose and direction?

I haven't done as much thinking about all this as I had intended. Here too, I'll spare you the (good, compelling) reasons; they're probably not much different than ones you sometimes offer. In any case, I am committed to spending a portion of my remaining time as President exploring these questions. I'll be doing so with the help of some extremely thoughtful and imaginative colleagues: Gregg Henriques, John Houser, Lisa Osbeck, Jeff Reber, Frank Richardson, and Brent Slife. Addressing issues of mission and identity may appear less urgent than addressing issues of programming hours, membership, and so on. But it's important in its own right, especially for our division, committed as we are to exploring theoretical and philosophical issues bearing upon the discipline of psychology.

It's been an honor and a privilege to serve the Division this year. Please know that I'll do my best to advance our shared goals and concerns in the months ahead.

All the best,

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