

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

Fall 2010 Presidential Newsletter



From John Christopher

As I begin my term as President, I would like to share my thoughts about the current status of our Society and how this relates to some of the initiatives I will be working on and the theme for the 2011 convention.

Dare I say it... theoretical and philosophical psychology has become boring. I'm sorry to say this and I don't mean to step on any toes or disparage anyone's work. It seems to me that in the last 18 years since I've been involved with the Division, we've lost some of our esprit d'elan. What initially drew me to the Division was the sense that the kind of theoretical work being done could help to bring about social change - to illuminate the root sources of the shortcomings within psychology and also with our society and planet. There seemed to be more fervor, more passion, more excitement, more optimism, and even more outrage...and a lot more people coming to our Division programming.

So what's happened? Why have our membership numbers dwindled from 714 in 1993 to 330 in 2009? Why has the size of the audiences in our presentations shrunk? Obviously, we're not going to have the kind of numbers of some of the larger divisions, but shouldn't the size of our membership and audience at least remain steady? And clearly neither the field of psychology nor the status of our planet have made such dramatic improvements over the past two decades that we've worked ourselves out of a job. I'd like to suggest that what we're doing is not being seen as relevant or useful. Rome is burning and I for one don't want to be like Nero fiddling on the wall.

I think the intellectual resources we have developed in the division are exactly what is needed by psychology and by the world. Our critiques of individualism and dualistic thought are devastatingly accurate and the alternative metatheories and frameworks that we've been working on are better than sliced bread. But it seems to me that too often theory is becoming an end in itself in our Society. And as a result I think we're largely just talking to ourselves—or maybe worse, talking at ourselves.

So in response to this, the Theme for the 2010 Convention in Washington, D.C. is *Making Theory Count: Reconnecting the Theoretical, the Personal & the Practical*. I'm pleased that Steve Harrist has agreed to serve as the Program Chair. We will be giving priority to proposals that treat theory as a tool to accomplish certain aims. So we hope your proposals will link theory back to the various subdisciplines of psychology, psychotherapy, or to social and environmental issues—and a bias I have is that we can do this best if we reconnect with our personal history/story/motivations of what attracted us to theory in the first place. We'd also like to encourage submissions that are not sole authored. We'd especially like to invite senior members of the Society to invite graduate students and early career members to join them.

The call for programs is available at: <http://apacustomout.apa.org/ConvCall/default.aspx> Proposals must be submitted electronically via the APA website by Wednesday, December 1, 2010. Please extend this invitation to your students and be sure to inform them of the annual student paper competition, the winner of which is awarded a \$200 prize. Students are asked to indicate their status on their proposals so that they can be considered for the award.

If you are interested in volunteering as a reviewer or wish further information, please contact Steve Harrist (steve.harrist@okstate.edu).

PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES

Virtual Book Club: using free conference call technology, members of the Society will be asked to lead a conversation about an article or book chapter of their choosing (preferably this year reflecting the convention theme).

Frank Richardson has agreed to lead the inaugural session. Please join Frank at 12pm Central Daylight Time on Saturday October 23 to discuss his classic article:

Richardson, F. C. (1989). Freedom and commitment in modern psychotherapy.
Journal of Integrative & Eclectic Psychotherapy, 8, 303-319.

Please contact me if you do not have access to this article.

Kenneth Gergen has agreed to lead the second session. Please join Ken in discussing his recent book *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*. Ken's discussion will start at 9pm Eastern Standard Time on Tuesday, November 9.

I will send out details for how to logon to the conference call via the Division listserv.

Convention Banquet: I will be working to establish a Society banquet or dinner at the APA convention. We hope to find a restaurant that has a banquet or private room. We will be working out the details of this over the next year but I am hoping that the more established Society members can contribute towards the cost of the meal to help support student members.

Targeted Themes: I envision these as working groups that draw together scholars from within the Society with other experts outside to explore ways of applying the work in the division. In particular, I am thinking of ways of applying the kinds of relational, nondualistic, and process oriented ontologies that have been developed within the Society to a variety of areas in which they might enrich or deepen the conversation on standard ways of approaching the topic. I envision using the website to coordinate these activities. Some examples are of a few of the areas we might address are:

- 1) Connecting to Relevant Areas of Psychology
 - a. Affect Regulation
 - b. Attachment Theory
 - c. Implicit Cognitive Processing (automaticity, adaptive unconscious)
 - d. Positive Psychology & Well-Being
 - e. Neuropsychology
 - f. Mindfulness
 - g. Methodology—especially Qualitative Inquiry
- 2) Social Issues
 - a. Environment, Global warming, Energy consumption
 - b. Consumerism
 - c. Social Inequalities in Health
 - d. Income disparities

These working groups could be springboards to develop convention symposia, journal special issues, and edited books. Senior scholars are encouraged to work with and mentor early career psychologists and graduate students. Also inviting non-Society psychologists to collaborate with us is recommended.

Continue to develop the web site

- 1) Add content from audio and video recordings of talks and symposia from the APA conventions and the mid-Winter conferences and make these available online
- 2) Use the website to facilitate mentoring by matching established faculty with students and early career members
- 3) Post all historical materials for the division on the website
- 4) Use the web site to facilitate the Targeted Themes

Support Early Career Psychologists (ECP) through:

- 5) Reduced Fees
- 6) Creating a section on the website for ECPs to interface

Establish “Talking Points” (similar to what political operatives use) on the value of theoretical and philosophical work. Instead of reinventing the wheel each time one of us needs to justify our work, a committee could establish a list of talking points that could be posted on our web site.

DIVISION BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENTS

In keeping with the duties stipulated in the By-Laws, the executive must notify membership of changes to the By-Laws approved at the 2010 business meeting:

- The moniker of affiliates to the Society has been changed from “professional” to “scholarly” affiliate.
- Members of the Society also voted at the Business Meeting to approve electronic voting for Division matters.

NOMINATIONS FOR OFFICERS

We are inviting nominations and self-nominations for two new Executive Officers: President-Elect (to replace Jim Lamiel, who will become President in 2011) and Member-At-Large (to replace Angelica Trotter). Please email nominations to me at: jcc@montana.edu

NOMINATIONS FOR AWARDS

We also are accepting nominations for Division 24 Awards: *The Award for Distinguished Theoretical and Philosophical Contributions to Psychology*, *The Sigmund Koch Award for Early Career Contribution to Psychology*, *The Theodore Sarbin Award*, and *The Distinguished Service Award*. Details regarding awards and former recipients are available on the Division website: www.theoreticalpsychology.org
Please forward nominations to me (jcc@montana.edu)

In 2007, the **Joseph B. Gittler Award** was established through a bequest from Dr. Joseph Gittler. The award acknowledges scholarly contributions to the philosophical foundations of psychological knowledge. Self-nominations are welcome. Nomination materials may be submitted online at <http://forms.apa.org/apf/grants/>, or may be coordinated and collected by the nominator and sent to:

APF Joseph B. Gittler Award
American Psychological Foundation
750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242.

STUDENT PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FUND

The fund was established to help students with expenses related to attending the APA conventions. Frankly, we’ve done a terrible job of contributing to this fund. Please contribute. Mail donations to: Dr. Amy Fisher Smith, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology. Office: 105 Augustine Hall. Telephone: 972-265-5731. Her mailing address is: 1845 East Northgate Drive, Irving University of Dallas 1845 East Northgate Drive, Irving, TX 75062-4736.

APPORTIONMENT BALLOTS

In early November, you will receive an apportionment ballot from APA. This vote determines divisional representation at Council and is key in allotting convention programming time. As always, please consider allocating *all* your votes to Division 24.

In closing, I hope to see you in Washington next August, and I look forward to serving you as President of the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology for the 2010-2011 academic year. Please feel free to email me with comments or questions.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Christopher", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John Christopher, Ph.D.

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Hurt people, hurt people -- Palaun Folk Saying