

## **VAPS Matters**

### **From the President**

**Barbara Richmond, MA**

It was a brilliant moment, minutes before the lunch hour during our annual Scientific Meeting, when I had the privilege as morning chair to announce that the election for the U.S. Presidency had been decided. The sun was shining brightly. We were in our respective homes listening to Dr. Norka Malberg, who had just delivered her morning paper, "Attachment, Play and Sexuality: What does playing look like?" Her colleague and partner, Dr. Mark Dangerfield, had discussed this paper, presenting from their home in Barcelona. Our presenters were the only people at the conference in a room together. The rest of us were in our individual Zoom boxes. Technology, however, was all that separated us. We were thinking together. And then right before our lunch break, we were experiencing an important historical moment together.

I felt much hope, enthusiasm and connection. And really, I had not known what to expect that day. It was our first conference through an online platform. We have had many years of coming together in person, most recently at the UVM Alumni House. The annual Scientific Meeting has been a gathering place for more than twenty years to see colleagues, learn from speakers from around the world, eat good food and most importantly feel a sense of ourselves as a learning community. So meeting via Zoom made me wonder how the Scientific Meeting would fare. Would members feel that sense of community and ability to think and learn as a group? While meeting in person would have been preferable of course, the feedback from the evaluations showed that we were successful in our efforts to create a cohesive and fun learning environment.

I believe that the key to the success of this online conference was a true partnership between the executive committee and the education committee. Our president, Devon Jersild, who had invited Dr. Malberg to speak, developed a partnership with Scientific Meeting chair Georgia DeGangi and education committee member and past president, Gerri Oppedisano. It was a productive triangle in which all three members were able to work as individuals, pairs and as a threesome to navigate the uncertainties and technological challenges of producing a conference online during a pandemic. There is a history of partnership within the VAPS community. Certainly, this

organization would never have been birthed and developed without partnership.

I want to keep the idea of partnership in mind as I move forward as president. And not only am I thinking about partnership, but also play. Whether we are in person or online, this community's *playing* together seems so important during these difficult times. Dr. Malberg's topic aided by her lively demeanor lent an air of playfulness to the conference. At times it felt much like a big squiggle game, as Dr. Malberg's case material elicited so many thoughts and feelings. D.W. Winnicott, in his 1971 paper "Playing and Reality," wrote,

*"In my mind to play is to create in tandem with another in a way in which imagination sparks new ideas."*

"Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together." And likewise, the health of our community has to do with our ability to *play* with each other.

In my mind to play is to create in tandem with another in a way in which imagination sparks new ideas. I believe that this is the foundation of our interplay on the executive committee and perhaps within all of our committees. The more we can play, the more we can think and grow as an organization. Nathan Haskell, in his work on the website committee, developed and implemented a listserv for VAPS, a perfect platform for play. It is a place where we can readily communicate our ideas and helpful information to the community at large. I

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personally have already benefitted from the VAPS listserv by learning about a conference in Lisbon in which the presenter was Howard Levine, our 2019 scientific meeting presenter. I also learned about Zoom's decision to provide the Business Associate Agreement necessary for HIPAA compliance through a posting on the VAPS listserv. I am very enthusiastic about the listserv and encourage members to use it as a vehicle for communicating with each other.

In the spirit of play and education, the Applied Psychoanalysis committee recently presented an interactive workshop on Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels. And coming up on May 22, Anton Hart, Ph.D., whom some of you may remember from the film *Black Analysts Speak*, which was shown and discussed at a VAPS business meeting a few years ago, will be our distinguished speaker for the Biennial Ethics Conference. Dr. Hart will be speaking on the topic of radical openness, otherness, and ethical considerations in the co-

participatory process of psychoanalysis. Stella Marrie will be chairing this conference. Stella is our new chair of the education committee, a committee that she has served on for many years, bringing much experience and insight. I am so pleased that Stella will be stepping into this new role. Stella was also elected to be our next president at the annual business meeting in February. At that meeting Aleta Vail, who has been holding the hats of secretary and treasurer this past year, was elected to continue on as secretary. And Katherine Schlageter was elected as our new treasurer. Phoebe Lewis, our new newsletter editor, attended the meeting. It was a pleasure for many of us to meet Phoebe, as well as Logan Hegg, our new member-at-large.

There are so many rich opportunities to learn, celebrate and play together within VAPS. I am grateful to VAPS for the privilege of being your president for the next two years. I hope that I can do justice to this role, which was so effectively and gracefully performed by Devon Jersild.

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## An Interview with Anton Hart, PhD, VAPS 2021 Ethics Conference Speaker

Alice Silverman, MD

*Dr. Anton Hart will be the VAPS ethics conference speaker May 22, 2021. Dr. Hart is a Training and Supervising Analyst and Faculty of the William Alanson White Institute and a supervisor at several psychoanalytic institutes and at Adelphi University. He is a member of the Editorial Boards of Psychoanalytic Psychology and Contemporary Psychoanalysis and has published papers and book chapters on a variety of subjects*



*including psychoanalytic safety and mutuality, issues of racial, sexual and other diversities, and psychoanalytic pedagogy. He is associate co-producer for the film Black Psychoanalysts Speak and serves as Co-Chair of the Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in the American Psychoanalytic Association.*

*At our biennial ethics conference, Dr. Hart will present his work on "radical openness," particularly as it applies to matters of difference in the clinical setting.*

*The following interview is not a verbatim transcript.*

***Please tell us about "radical openness" and how you became interested in this concept and its connection to diversity and ethics.***

Radical openness is a concept that I've been working on for a number of years now that pertains to how the analyst or psychoanalytic psychotherapist listens to the patient. People sometimes make the mistake of thinking that radical openness refers to extreme self-disclosure but it really has nothing to do with that. Radical openness pertains to

how the analyst listens to the patient and how the analyst tries to receive, with openness and seriousness, that which the analyst is hearing, including things that sound strange or foreign. We often label these as transference or refer to them as projections. Instead of going down that path that I would argue is a self-protective attribution, I offer radical openness as a means to listen to what the patient is saying; to listen for its likely contained truth, particularly when it's foreign or when it's negative about the analyst or the analytic process. The goal is to try to listen not as if it is projection, but instead as something true that the analyst might not be aware or conscious of and to not try to make a determination. Rather than, "Yes I identify that" or "No I don't", to aim for a more enduring lingering receptivity. This may have an impact on the analyst over time and is not to be determined by the analyst in the immediate moment, or really at all in the treatment.

In this way, radical openness differs from—and I'll be getting into this in my talk—Jessica Benjamin's notion of the importance of the analyst providing recognition to the patient. I challenge the notion of recognition as something that the analyst could or should be doing. If we are aware of the ubiquity of unconsciousness, then we have to be aware that we are unconscious to ourselves, no matter how much analysis we've had, and that there are always things about our experience that we don't know that our patients can see. We would be in a good position if we could try to be as receptive as possible to the information that our patients might convey to us about what's going on in the analysis, including what's going on with us that we might not be consciously aware of. Radical openness is that kind of receptivity that asks us to listen to our

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patients as if, in some respects, they were our own analysts making analytic contributions to us.

***Can you tell us how you apply the concept of radical openness to ethics and diversity?***

My work on radical openness started in the work I've been doing on psychoanalytic ethics. I am currently completing a book on relational psychoanalytic ethics and I start with the question of how we can get analysts to be as ethical as possible and to conduct treatments as ethically as possible. Going by rules, codes, oaths, or other external forms of guidance are insufficient guarantees of ethical practice, as analysts fail rather regularly to live up to the ethical commitments to which they aspire.

In my book I propose a notion of radical openness as a key to ethical practice. If the analyst can be as receptive as possible to information about how they are practicing, and particularly about any negative impact that the analyst may be having and problems with the analyst's own character or personality that may be manifesting in the treatment; if the analysts can be open to the patient speaking up about this type of thing, then that's the best help we have toward ethical psychoanalytic practice. If we have patients who are willing to speak up more and more about what they're experiencing rather than protecting their analysts, and if we have analysts who are willing to listen to what our patients say, then we're more likely to be course-corrected when necessary. We're more likely to be changed, to move and to grow on the basis of the analytic process. I do firmly believe that in any analytic process, both people have to grow and not just one.

***The concept of radical openness and deep listening are meaningful ways of cultivating a psychoanalytic attitude, but they convey to me something of a spiritual feel. Did that play a role in the development of your ideas?***

I have gotten some responses from people who identify with particular spiritual traditions and what I'm saying resonates with them, particularly Buddhist traditions, but that was not part of my journey. I grew up in a family where, in many respects, religion was anathema. My grandparents on my mother's side were ardent communists from Russia and Poland and religion was the opiate of the masses. My Jewish traditions were quite atheistic. We did have Seders regularly, but it was more of a kind of family tradition. On my father's side, there was investment in the Christian tradition, the Methodist Church in particular. But my parents weren't particularly religious and that didn't make its way into any teachings that I had to endure.

I just realized that there was a second part to your question that I neglected to give and that had to do with diversity issues.

***Yes, please do.***

In my work in the diversity domain I am interested in race and racism and also multiple diversities including gender, sexuality, class, physical ability status, education status and religious orientation. A diversity issue that I've lately been interested in pertains to attractiveness status. I've been interested in looking at this as a diversity and all of the privileges that people who are treated as attractive or seen as attractive enjoy compared to those who are not identified in that way. And it's a major life altering form of diversity which I think is neglected. It's just idealized, but there.

The main point is that there are many diversities and, as psychoanalysts, we need to have our eyes and ears open to as many as we can. We understand through intersectionality theory that no single diversity is ever the same. In any individual all ways that these intersect and manifest themselves in that particular person must be taken into consideration. Psychoanalysis is poised to be thoughtful about those kinds of things and take multiple contextual factors into account. So,

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## **Save the Date!**

### **VAPS EVENTS**

**Saturday, May 22, 2021**

***VAPS Biennial Ethics Conference by Zoom  
with Anton Hart, PhD***

**“Radical Openness, Otherness, and  
Ethical Considerations in the  
Coparticipatory Process of Psychoanalysis”**

**9:00am to 4:30pm**

Dr. Anton Hart will present on his concept of “radical openness” – an ethical stance based on receptivity and inquiry into experiences of otherness. Following a conceptual and clinical presentation, registrants will have an experiential opportunity to explore radical openness.

Dr. Hart serves as Training and Supervising Analyst and Faculty of the William Alanson White Institute and teaches at other notable programs.

Further details and registration will be available online at: [www.vapsvt.org](http://www.vapsvt.org).

**Saturday, November 6, 2021**

***VAPS Annual Scientific Meeting  
with Nancy McWilliams, PhD***

**“Addressing Psychological Vital Signs in  
Treatment and the Therapist's Unique  
Personality as it Affects their Work”**

**9:00am to 5:00pm**

We are pleased to announce our distinguished presenter from Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology. Dr. McWilliams will speak about psychological vital signs in treatment and how to evaluate meaningful progress. She will discuss the supervisory dyad and how therapists' unique personalities affect their work or relate to the supervision process.

Details to come.

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when you have conversations about charged diversity issues, racial issues and racism for example, the biggest problem is being able to listen. Being able to listen to things that you don't want to hear about yourself, things that you don't want exposed, things that you feel ashamed of. People talk at each other when the tensions rise, and I have been working in the diversity domain to encourage people to approach race dialogues with radical openness rather than in a way that says, this is the right way to think about it, or this is the wrong way to think about it, or here's what you need to learn so that you are culturally competent. I feel very critical of that emphasis, even though it's the pervasive one in mental health professions. I'm interested in encouraging people not to be taught to become competent or to become educated so that they acquire knowledge about people who are different from them. Instead, I suggest we aspire toward openness, to what we might hear from the other. In that way we try to set ourselves up to lose our preconceptions, to lose the things that we think we already

know, rather than gain knowledge and mastery. At its worst that kind of diversity training perpetuates stereotyping. At its best, it's boring. Knowing about people before you meet them is not a very interesting way of engaging with other people.

***I so appreciate your ability to address this issue in a different and useful way. It is so needed at this moment, in so many difficult conversations. Is there anything else you would like to share with our community?***

Yes, my hope is that the workshop will be interactive and include the possibility of doing some role playing that will be meaningful and engaging and that attendees will have the opportunity to try out some of these ideas, not just listen to them.

*To find out more details, and to register for the conference, please visit the VAPS Events Page.*

*Alice Silverman, MD is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who maintains a private practice in Montpelier and serves on the VAPS education committee. She is on the faculty of the Vermont Institute for the Psychotherapies.*

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## A Training Opportunity that Just Might Help You Save a Life

**Debra Lopez, MD**

The loss of a patient to suicide can be one of the most disturbing and painful experiences therapists may encounter during their practice lives. Some consider the risk so anxiety-provoking as to assert that they “don't take suicidal patients” into their practices. Of course, these therapists are likely to learn unexpectedly, when treating a client for another condition, that their client has been seriously contemplating suicide for some time. If you were to find yourself in a situation like this, here are some questions you might want to ask yourself:

- Do you consider yourself prepared to ask a well-studied series of questions that will help you understand the drivers, and other important aspects of your client's suicidality?
- Are you prepared, with an evidence-based structure, to assess their suicide risk?
- Are you prepared to orient the treatment focus to specifically address the drivers of the clients suicidality—and understand why it's important to do so?
- Have you been trained to conduct a Safety Plan or Crisis Response Plan in collaboration with your client? (This along can help suicidal individuals survive periods of overwhelming pain and hopelessness that can lead to impulsive suicides.)
- Do you have a systematic practice for documenting the approach you take in your treatment records, and to thereby reduce your risk of liability?

Most therapists would have to answer “No” to these questions. But not any longer.

The Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care (VPQHC) is sponsoring a high-quality training opportunity this spring and fall in the **Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality** (CAMS) approach. CAMS is internationally

recognized as a top-tier, evidence-based therapeutic framework, designed for the assessment and treatment of suicidality. I've written about some of the clinical features of the CAMS approach in a prior VAPS newsletter (see my “Letter on Suicidality” in Newsletter, Vol. XXI, Spring 2020). Here are some key features of the training:

- **Online format** allows for flexibility, to fit your schedule.
- Grant supported training make it **affordable**.
- The **Foundation Training** is assessed through the CAMS-Care website and costs \$36.00 for 3 hours of CEU (savings of \$99)
- **Online role-play training** is available at various times in 2021 and helps participants build confidence in their skills.
- **8 one-hour live Consultation Calls** are offered over the course of two months at no additional cost. Held on Fridays at noon (in the spring) and Mondays at noon (in the fall), they allow participants to ask questions and discuss cases with national CAMS experts.

The group of Vermont clinicians who completed the training this past fall—including several members of VAPS—found it highly relevant and worthwhile.

If you have any questions, or would like to learn more, contact Mary McQuiggan at VPQHC: marym@vpqhc.org/ 802-262-1303.

*Debra Lopez, M.D. is a former president of VAPS (2009-2011). She trained in Contemporary Psychoanalysis at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies (2004) and is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the UVM Department of Psychiatry. She provides clinical consultation regionally and is engaged in suicide prevention efforts locally and nationally. Debra can be reached at: [debralopezmd@gmail.com](mailto:debralopezmd@gmail.com).*

# A Confluence of Psychoanalysis and Art: History of the VAPS Applied Psychoanalysis Committee

**Mina Levinsky-Wohl, MD, LCMHC**

and

**Elizabeth Goldstein, PhD**

The VAPS Applied Psychoanalysis Committee was founded by Mina Levinsky-Wohl during her VAPS presidency in 2007. The mission of the Committee is to promote a psychoanalytic understanding of the arts - music, literature, drawing, painting, sculpture, prose, poetry, film, and theater - which includes collaborative work with other disciplines such as philosophy, neuroscience, anthropology, and others. The goal of the Committee is to promote opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue through the exploration and application of psychoanalysis to art, and to facilitate opportunities for members of VAPS to share their experience with creative expression as it relates to psychoanalytic ideas in their clinical and professional work. Overall, an infusion of creativity, imagination, and play expands feelings of satisfaction and delight in our professional lives.

Kate Longmaid, Psychologist and Artist, was the first Committee Chair, appointed by Mina Levinsky-Wohl in 2007. Jean Pieniadz, David Van Buskirk and Johanna Boyce were also on the original Committee. The first organizational meeting was held over breakfast at Magnolias Restaurant in Burlington, Vermont.

The Applied Psychoanalysis Committee has organized many enjoyable events over the years, beginning with the Annual Business Meeting held at the Richmond Library in February 2008. The topic was "Fascination with the Image: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Visual Art" with Dr. Harvey Giesbrecht, a psychoanalyst and art historian from Montreal. Dr. Giesbrecht talked about psychoanalytic contributions to understanding visual arts. The event concluded with the first VAPS Art Exhibit, presenting artistic creations (paintings, crafts, pottery, poetry, and photography) from some of our VAPS members.

The relationship between Committee members and Dr. Giesbrecht continued beyond that first event. In June 2008, VAPS Applied Committee members traveled to Montreal to meet with him and continue the dialogue about applying psychoanalytic ideas to the visual arts. In addition to visiting galleries, committee members viewed the contemporary art exhibit entitled, "Nothing is Lost, Nothing is Created, Everything is Transformed: the Quebec Triennial" at the Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal. Members encountered images evoking alienation, fragmentation, and loss of the object. They also had an opportunity to interview Dr. Giesbrecht about his responses to the exhibit. To this day, the phrase, "nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed" remains in the minds of the committee.

In early 2009, the Applied Committee and the Forum for Movies and the Mind co-sponsored a viewing of Bergman's last film, *Saraband*, along with presentations and discussion by Bruce Sklarew, MD. The event highlighted connections between viewing film and the dream experience, as well as transforming childhood trauma.

In 2012, Dr. Giesbrecht returned, this time with Charles

Levin, PhD, for the Applied Committee's third sponsored conference and members' art exhibition, titled, "Reflections on the Relationship between Art and Psychoanalysis." The presentation was centered around their recently published book, *Art in the Offertorium: Narcissism, Psychoanalysis, and Cultural Metaphysics* (2012), and offered some of their



reflections on the relationship between Art and Psychoanalysis. Brian Ashley wrote a thoughtful piece on the event for the VAPS Newsletter. VAPS members and artists again exhibited paintings, sculpture, pottery, and photography during the event.

Also in 2012, Teresa Canal Meyer and Gerri Oppedisano joined the Committee, with Mina Levinsky-Wohl and David Van Buskirk as co-chairs until 2014. John Meyer became the Applied Committee chair at the end of 2014, and the focus of the Committee shifted from the visual arts to local community outreach in the form of using film and film panels to study and discuss applied psychoanalysis. Starting in 2015, Teresa and John Meyer co-led the Applied Committee and presented multiple films in conjunction with the Champlain College Psychology club, including *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Doubt*, *Ida*, *The Boy with a Bike*, and *Short Term 12*. Each event involved watching a film followed by a panel discussion with Applied Committee members. Kate Longmaid stepped down from the committee in the fall of 2015.

In 2016, the Applied Committee worked with Professor Chris Keathley of the Middlebury College Film and Media Department to begin a biannual event with the Middlebury Hirschfield Film Series to view films and discuss underlying psychoanalytic principles. One of the first films viewed by the Committee was *Wild Tales*, an Argentinean/Spanish film, which was followed by a stimulating dinner discussion at The Swift House Inn. Ene Piirak, PhD wrote a wonderful piece for the Newsletter about the event, reflecting on themes of real or imagined personal injustice. In 2017, the group viewed and discussed *A Quiet Passion*, a 2016 British biographical film directed and written by Terence Davies about the life of American poet Emily Dickinson.

In May 2016, in honor of Freud's birthdate, May 6, 1856, the Applied Committee sponsored the first annual "Freudian

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Sips” social event. In 2017, the event became “Cinco de Mayo Meets Freudian Sips,” which featured trivia, music, dancing, a Freud documentary, and good food and sips at Hotel Vermont. In May 2018, the theme was again “Cinco de Mayo meets Freudian Sips” and featured a video presentation, “What would Freud think of Trump?” Attendees danced to tunes from the Happy Spangler Band with VAPS member bassist Barbara Richmond.

In 2017, Mina Levinsky-Wohl built a partnership with the Vermont Stage Company. Christina Alicea, Artistic Director, invited members of the Committee to participate in “talk-back panels,” discussions about theater productions occurring after a show. In the spring of 2018, the Committee facilitated Talkback Thursdays for the play “*Tigers Be Still*,” which included themes of strength and resilience. Committee members Jean Pieniadz, Mina Levinsky-Wohl, and Gerri Oppedisano, along with VAPS members Elizabeth Goldstein and Aleta Vail, participated in the panel discussion. Teresa Canal Meyer wrote an insightful dramaturgy for the play, which appeared in the playbill and was reprinted for the VAPS newsletter. Teresa and John Meyer stepped down from the Committee shortly after the event.

In 2018, Mina Levinsky-Wohl and Jean Pieniadz became Committee co-chairs, Elizabeth Goldstein joined the Committee, and Kate Longmaid came back for a time, until she left to focus on her artwork.

In February 2018, the Committee continued their collaboration with the Middlebury College Hirschfield Film Series, viewing the Romanian film, *Graduation*, followed by dinner and thought-provoking discussion around themes of father/daughter relationships, best-laid plans, and the destruction caused by sexual assault. In October, the Committee hosted a viewing of the Romanian film *Lemonade*, directed by Ioana Uricaru. An engaging dinner discussion followed, including topics of motherhood, belonging, displacement, adaptation, and social change, at Tourterelle Restaurant with Chris Keathley, Ioana Uricaru, and Malina Manovici (lead actress in the film).

At the beginning of 2019, the Committee hosted the 4th VAPS Member Art Exhibition during the VAPS business meeting, along with an educational event after the meeting. Committee member Elizabeth Goldstein and VAPS member Lisa Meyers facilitated a provocative screening and discussion of the film *Nocturnal Animals*, directed by Tom Ford, which evoked themes of containment of human suffering, cruelty, and beauty. In the fall of 2019, Mina and Jean stepped down as Co-Chairs and Elizabeth Goldstein became Applied Committee Chair. Then on November 4, 2019, the Committee lost a beloved member, Dave VanBuskirk, who is remembered for his contributions to the psychoanalytic community as well as his beautiful photographs.

The Committee continued to participate in the Hirschfield International film series at Middlebury College, and in

November of 2019 viewed the film *Waves*, followed by a lively discussion about the capacity for compassion and growth in the universal experience of heartbreak and dark times with Chilean filmmaker and Assistant Professor of Film and Media Culture at Middlebury College David Miranda-Hardy over dinner at Tourterelle.

Needless to say, 2020 had a few curveballs. The 5th annual Freudian Sips was canceled. Instead, to honor Freud’s

164th birthday, a slideshow was presented on the Applied Committee web page. The Committee found creative ways to facilitate connection during the pandemic. In September 2020, Jean Pieniadz hosted the first book discussion on the Neapolitan Quartet by Elena Ferrante. The discussion groups are leading up to a daylong online workshop sponsored by the VAPS Applied Psychoanalysis Committee in April 2021, titled, *Listening to Ferrante’s Women: A Psychoanalytic Engagement with the Neapolitan Novels*, presented by Christine Maksimowicz, PhD

and Stacey Novack, PsyD. The presentation will include themes of identity, enigma, and object usage. Earlier in 2021, the Committee sponsored a lively event after the Business Meeting, viewing the short films *Two Strangers Who Meet Five Times* by Marcus Markou and *The Neighbors’ Window* by Marshall Curry, with panel discussants Gerri Oppedisano, Mina Levinsky-Wohl, Jean Pieniadz, and Elizabeth Goldstein discussing themes of subject-object alternation.

In these times of social distancing, connections are maintained by our shared affinity for art. The Applied Committee is looking forward to sponsoring future events, both online and in person. Here’s to the next time Freudian Sips will be in person!



*Mina Levinsky-Wohl, M.D., LCMHC, is a psychoanalyst in Burlington, Co-Training Director of VPSG (IPA-Vermont Psychoanalytic Group) and founder of the VAPS Applied Psychoanalysis Committee.*

*Elizabeth Goldstein, Ph.D., is a psychologist in private practice in Burlington and Chair of the VAPS Applied Psychoanalysis Committee.*

# VAPS Members Reflect on Fall Scientific Meeting with Norka Malberg and Mark Dangerfield

*Our recent 2020 Scientific Meeting held on November 7, 2020, "Through the child analytic lens: Application of attachment theory to psychoanalytic practice" featured Norka Malberg, Psy.D., a child and adult psychoanalyst, in discussion with analyst Mark Dangerfield, Ph.D. Drs. Malberg and Dangerfield also offered a pre-conference workshop on Mentalization on November 6th.*

## Reflections On Our VAPS 2020 Scientific Meeting On Mentalization Georgia DeGangi, PhD

Mentalization is a cornerstone of emotional development that begins to develop early in life as the infant interacts with her caregiver. As Norka Malberg and Mark Dangerfield so eloquently described in our recent VAPS Scientific Meeting, mentalization occurs in a relational dance that is co-constructed between caregiver and baby, characterized by marked mirroring, ruptures and repairs in the interactive sequence, playfulness and mutual connection. Using this as a foundation for developmentally based psychoanalysis, Dr. Malberg presented mentalization-based treatment (MBT) that focuses on a two-person approach where perspectives are explored.

Dr. Malberg's case presentation and Dr. Dangerfield's discussion in the morning session highlighted one of the major obstacles in the development of mentalization— when a client is unable to modulate their own internal distress and becomes emotionally flooded, then disengages from others in the moment, unable to process their thoughts and feelings, let alone those of another person. This experienced high level of emotional distress completely derails the person's capacity to form an organized attachment, to engage in reciprocal meaningful interactions with others, or to share and understand the thoughts and feelings of themselves or others.

Dr. Malberg presented a developmentally-based model that informs us about how we can intervene when a client experiences this type of emotional distress. She stressed the importance of scaffolding, beginning with validating the client's experience, modeling curiosity, and creating a space for mutual engagement. When a client is highly dysregulated, one needs to step back to help them self-regulate on multiple levels - to modulate sensory reactivity, states of arousal, and the capacity for attachment and reciprocal interactions.

Many adults with mood dysregulation, including borderline personality disorder, ADHD, and those who have suffered from abuse, neglect, or trauma in childhood, often do not develop the capacity for interactive signaling, reciprocity, and the ability to integrate thoughts and feelings for themselves or others. Disorders in the capacity to mentalize

can lead to the person remaining concrete with fragmented relationship patterns. They may be impulsive or withdrawn and lack any understanding of the impact their behavior has on others. In order to develop the capacity to create mental images from actions, events, and to internally manipulate them into symbolization through thoughts, communications, and emotional ideas, the person needs to understand and differentiate their own feeling states.

So, how does one intervene with individuals who have challenges in these developmental stages of emotional development? Using a developmentally-based approach, Dr. Malberg uses play as a medium to create a secure base of attachment, connectivity, and containment of affects. Pretend play provides the person with a medium to enact simple and complex dramas that reflect everyday reality and to explore the impact one has on others. Through interactive exchanges, the client learns to organize and communicate emotions such as assertiveness, anger, dependency, pleasure and excitement. Children and adolescents are easily accessible through interactive play, but as the person grows into adulthood, the therapist needs to conceptualize play in more expanded ways. These mediums may include use of sense of humor, visual imagery, art, dream work, story telling, and sand tray to create a space for developmental work needed for mentalization.

One of my most memorable cases was a forty-year-old woman who appeared at her first session telling me, "*I chose you to be my therapist because you work with children. Talking therapy doesn't work for me. I did it for seven years. What I need to do is play.*" Isabel had overwhelming bouts of deep depression and high anxiety causing her to feel paralyzed and unable to tolerate or understand the emotions of herself or others. I wondered what Isabel needed from play therapy. Was it to be observed and admired? To be mirrored? To show herself to another and become understood? What she needed most was to have me follow her lead, joining her in play in a non-judgmental way, and help her to process her emotional states. We did it through movement, puppet play, visualizations, working with clay, games, and music. As the process unfolded, we came to understand how emotionally flooded she became with interactions, and gradually an early trauma was uncovered related to disturbing interactions with her mother early in life. After several years of therapy, Isabel arrived at a point where she could express her intense feelings and not feel destroyed by them.

As we ended our therapy, she said to me, "I learned that things in my life could change. I am more flexible and can tolerate change. But most of all, I have insight into who I am and I feel connected to the people in my life now." Developmentally-based psychoanalytic therapy was essential in my treatment with Isabel and many other clients like her who suffer from emotional dysregulation. As she left

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my office for the last time, I felt that she had the tools to form secure and lasting attachments with others in her life, to regulate her internal emotional distress, and to use her newfound skills to mentalize thoughts and feelings.

*Georgia DeGangi, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist who has specialized in developmentally-based psychotherapy and treatment of children, adolescents, and adults with emotional dysregulation.*

## **Reflections on the Pre-Conference Workshop**

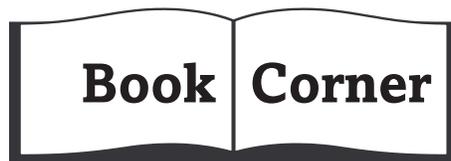
**Claire Dumas, PsyD**

On Friday November 6, 2020, during the Pre-Conference Workshop, Mark Dangerfield presented a case. I remember reading the presentation on the screen. I see the words clearly and am immediately taken in. He reads them aloud. He's present in his provocative language from the start, present with his patient, Andrew: "Let's get the fuck out of here." He is trying to keep Andrew safe. His response resonates with Andrew. Mark speaks his language. He continues to stay close to the bone of what Andrew says, meeting his level of intensity as it rises and falls. Eventually Andrew speaks of his friend Kate whom he is trying to protect from being hurt by some undesirable guy. Andrew is doing for her what Mark has done for him. So moving!

Immediately after this seminar has ended I go into a session with my patient L. It turns out to be a remarkable session in the sense that I am able to stay with her, to listen to her in such a way that she feels heard. It feels like a first for us. I usually end up feeling like I'm talking her out of something she's thinking or feeling. In this session, as usual, she is very disorganized, jumping from one thing to another and I jump with her and can imagine, recognize and acknowledge her distress, her anxiety, her sadness, her loss, her fear, her disarray. At the end of the session, I feel full, present with her and with myself. It's as though Mark's holding of Andrew has also held me. This sense of being recognized and acknowledged has rubbed off on me so that I in turn can do the same for L., my patient.

Jessica Benjamin said in a recent IARPP colloquia (Nov. 11-22, 2020), "What the person now needs is the recognizing parent to be reconstituted through the analyst and new experience." So with my patient L., I am recognizing her dysregulation and disarray. We are looking at it together and in so doing she is becoming self-regulated, a point Norka and Mark made explicit in the Friday pre-conference seminar. To have this point played out in my session so quickly immediately following their explanation felt like a bonus gift imparted to me. Thank you Mark, and thank you Norka, for your exquisite teaching and quality presentation.

*Claire Dumas, Psy.D., is a psychoanalyst and psychologist in private practice in Montpelier, VT.*



## **The New Analyst's Guide to the Galaxy**

**Reviewed by Michele Reed, MSW**

The 2017 book, *The New Analyst's Guide to the Galaxy*, is a gem. Authored by two Italian psychoanalysts, Antonino Ferro and Luca Nicoli, the book uses a question/answer format, with Luca Nicoli interviewing the senior analyst. A few years ago I heard Ferro present his work and discuss cases at the International Psychotherapy Institute. Reading this book has reinforced my sense of his wisdom, warmth and creativity. Using his fondness for metaphors and stories, Ferro speaks and writes in a genuine, down to earth way, rendering concepts exceptionally accessible.

Why the galaxy? Because Ferro is a bit of an innovator, trailblazer, cowboy or space sailor! He thinks we should not settle for what we already know, and he promotes instead the need to focus on finding new ideas and methods. Pointing out what he sees as the downside of traditional injunctions about how one should interpret, he suggests instead, "We should find out each day what would be most

useful to do with that patient at that time, depending on how he is and how we are."

The reader can see how Ferro practices this, when he describes a three-year process with a patient who was anxious about using the couch. They began face to face, then Ferro moved to sitting with his back to her, later the patient moved to sitting in Ferro's chair, prompting him to lie on the couch, which eventually led to the patient choosing the couch! Ferro believes knowing "how to play" is key, no matter the patient's age. He makes things seem effortless, partly because he's playful and creative, but also because he's an expert. Amidst the playfulness, Ferro's analytic views and clinical choices are informed by many years of serious reading, thinking and grappling with analytic concepts.

In line with Bion's thinking, but not fused to it, Ferro

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urges us to work with an adventurous desire for, and engagement with, the unknown—to work in the dark. As I read the book, I was reminded of the first stanza of John O’Donohue’s poem entitled “For Light,” which beautifully speaks to Ferro’s aversion to light and preference for darkness:

Light cannot see inside things.  
That is what dark is for  
Minding the interior,  
Nurturing the draw of growth  
Through places where death  
In its own way turn into life.

Ferro’s analytic attitude is both serious and playful, much as I imagine Ferro’s sessions to be. In fact, to the question regarding the substantial commitment of time for an analysis during a week, and over years, he notes that, “Analysis should be something nice, analysis should be something fun, analysis should be something that looks like a game.” He acknowledges the pain patients feel, but says, “...we can play with pain, with suffering” and “...affect a transformation in drama, a transformation in tragedy...”

Ferro emphasizes the importance of consistency regarding his preferred frequency of 3 or 4 sessions a week, and he points to how this helps to create the “rhythm,” which is related to the non-verbal aspects of the relationship, and crucial to the process. Ferro urges clinicians to “travel light”—to discard an overabundance of rigid rules and theories that he sees as no longer helpful, because they make for stilted engagement, and inhibit both play and what he calls “the dreaming ensemble” (dreaming the session together). He thinks having video sessions are fine, which fits with his view that there is an unchanging part of the analytic setting, but also a “culturally variable part.” (Certainly, the pandemic would fall into the latter!) Regarding boundaries, Ferro recommends: “Maximum freedom for the

patient; minimum freedom for the analyst,” while still using “good manners and common sense.”

Although some might disagree, Ferro favors having less focus on many of Freud’s concepts, except basic ones, including the setting, the unconscious and the centrality of dreams. It is Freud’s method that Ferro values—that Freud “dared to change all the time.” Perhaps the book’s title was chosen not just to represent the vast unknown, but also the idea of a galaxy’s ability to change! Nicoli and Ferro discuss changes in psychoanalytic theory and how Bion shifted the importance of interpretation to an emphasis on developing a different metapsychology, focused on transformation, which called for a different technique.

Ferro is fierce in his desire for psychoanalysis to embrace change its theories and techniques. The book describes Ferro’s contributions to the concept of “the field,” in which he describes how, when a patient communicates thoughts or feelings, new “characters” enter the field. In the transitional space in which he and the patient work, those internal objects meet up with the analyst’s internal characters, which is where transformation takes place. That being said, any supervisees of Ferro’s will rarely hear any formal terms, but they will pick up Ferro’s way of thinking, by listening to how he speaks about the patient, and what is happening between the two people in the session being presented.

There is so much in this small book! You’ll also enjoy a discussion about the differences between psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, how Ferro understands the “curative element”, his views on the conventional preference of many analysts for being quiet in sessions, as well as his description of Bion’s concept of O. Here’s to serious thought, playful imagination and psychic transformation. I hope you enjoy your galactic journey!

*Michele Reed is a clinical social worker and psychoanalyst whose private practice is in Waterbury, Vt.*

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## **VAPS 2020 Annual Business Reports**

### **Report of the President**

***-submitted by Devon Jersild, Ph.D.***

I began my second year as VAPS President with the happy understanding that its committees work organically and in season, with precedents to guide us when questions arise. Because of Covid and broader challenges in the culture, we were faced with the need to create some new (if temporary) structures and of-the-moment offerings. After a head-spinning period of learning, I found that I could trust VAPS members and committees to rise to each new challenge with warmth, grit, and creative solutions.

I am in awe of the amount of work that has been accomplished or begun this year. We have offered online discussion groups and a summer conference addressing racism (the latter of which attracted dozens of attendees that were new to VAPS, who are now on our mailing list). Our Education Committee translated our Annual Scientific Meeting to a Zoom venue while retaining a feeling of community and warmth. At last year’s Annual Business Meeting, our Research Chair presented on psychotherapy research, and as we go to press, the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee is about to host a conference both literary

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and psychoanalytic, including a writing component. Our members are actively supporting each other and promoting psychoanalytic causes in the newsletter and on our newly launched listserv, the latter of which has also provided our secretary another venue for communication, along with her finely-tuned emails. We are developing options for website upgrades and figuring out how to optimize use of our new social media presence. Our finances are in excellent shape, helped along by high attendance not only at our Scientific Meeting, but also at a Pre-Conference Workshop. Our newest Executive Committee members bring us energy and perspective (see our SPPP Representative Alicia Wein-Senghas's illuminating report), and all but one of our open positions on the EC have been filled: Katherine Schlageter has been elected Treasurer, and Stella Marrie is our new President-Elect; Logan Hegg will be our newest Member-at-Large, and Phoebe Lewis our Newsletter Editor. Meanwhile plans for our Biennial Ethics Conference and next fall's Scientific Meeting are well underway. Read the details of all these happenings in the pages below!

Our Executive Committee meets quarterly. With so many new initiatives and challenges, it became difficult at times to accomplish all that was needed during our three-hour meetings. With the approval of the Executive Committee, I appointed a temporary ad hoc committee of just the elected officers to make decisions about lesser expenses and time-sensitive choices. This seems to have worked well and is a model that could be revisited if needed.

I feel so privileged to have served as VAPS President and to have played a part in this evolving, energetic organization. I'm especially grateful to Gerri Oppedisano who as Past President served as a generous mentor, and who stepped in wherever she was needed (as chair of two committees, and a member of the education committee), with a depth and breadth of invaluable knowledge about VAPS; and also Aleta Vail, who kept a calm eye on the bigger picture and, as both treasurer and secretary, dug into the actual work. At the business meeting I thanked many people by name. Here, I will say only that and I have enjoyed and felt supported by each and every Executive Committee member—including our members-at-large Irene Sharp and Stephanie Haney Rose, who haven't written a report but have contributed each in their way, and our Scientific Meeting Chair Georgia DeGangi, whose ongoing work is invaluable. It has been a good ride! I look forward to the year ahead and am grateful, both personally and on behalf of VAPS, for the leadership of Barbara Richmond as our new President.

## **Report of the Past President**

***~submitted by Gerri Oppedisano, Ph.D.***

I have to say, what a year we have just had, and having it as my last year as Past President has been quite the eventful close out! As is a theme I continue to return to with regard to VAPS, I marvel at the amazingly adaptable nature and

life of our committees and organization as a whole. We are, regardless of what is happening, remarkably consistent as an allied group in terms of dedication to mission and a stably engaged, interested community. That is heartwarming, and I'm proud to have been part of it for so long.

This past year, I served in many roles participating in an amalgam of overlapping and new tasks arising in large part from the circumstances of the pandemic. In the ventures into social media and zoom presence, which involved membership and website, I consulted with an adhoc subgroup of the Executive Committee to touch base on direction and decisions along the way. I am grateful for the thoughts and support of Devon, Barbara, Elizabeth Goldstein, Irene Sharp and Stephanie Rose in these discussions that helped guide and contain some of the social media efforts. In addition to this and as part of the Zoom and online presence roll out, I've been actively involved on the Education Committee and worked to arrange the online functioning of the Scientific Meeting. This involved my interviewing, hiring and meeting multiple times with Evan Martin who was our very gracious and helpful technical support at the Scientific Meeting. My meetings with Evan discussed a plan for how to run the meeting, the elements involved in the look and feel of that, enlisting him to construct a cheat sheet for participants and coordinating a connections between Evan and key organizers of the day's events (mainly Scientific Chair, Georgia DiGangi, Barbara Richmond, and Devon Jersild). We also arranged for practice meetings with Evan to run through the events and technical feel of that with the Education Committee, the speakers and the Scientific Meeting small group leaders ahead of that event and the workshop with it.

After the Scientific Meeting and upon reflection of the span of the new efforts involving social media, zoom conferences and technical coordination of website with both of these, Devon and I discussed my recommendation to subsume these efforts under the Website Committee. Elizabeth Goldstein has agreed to join me on the Website Committee to help lead and update social media announcements. I hope to focus more of my attention to continuing this effort in the next year as I step down from my role as Membership Committee Chair and end my term as Past President.

I continued to participate actively this past year as well on the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee, which has involved regular meetings and the planning of many fun events! Included in the rich events conceived and sponsored by the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee is the educational portion of our Business Meeting this year. Being on Zoom and having limited time, we have selected two short films to view and discuss. Themes of these films are relevant to our present times and are also timeless.

In closing, I'd like to thank the many people I have worked so closely with this past year as Past President and serving on the Executive and other committees. There isn't a single person I have not learned and grown from or who I haven't enjoyed collaborating with. I'm grateful to have been

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entrusted with the roles I was given and look forward to narrowing my focus as I continue to be involved with VAPS. I want to especially thank and acknowledge Devon Jersild who will be transitioning out of her role as President and into Past President, which she will undoubtedly do justice to. What has been most remarkable about Devon in my experience of her has been her ability to hold so many efforts in detail in her head while at the same time maintaining clarity of vision as well as broad scope. I have truly admired these characteristics in her and have appreciated her as a colleague and friend. I look forward to the year ahead with an outstanding trio of Barbara Richmond as our President, Devon Jersild as Past President and Stella Marrie as our President-Elect. We are in great hands.

## **Report of the Secretary** **~submitted by Aleta Vail, Ph.D.**

It seems like the primary mission of the Secretary for 2020 was to support my fellow VAPS committee members as they made major adjustments to their efforts to plan events to serve the professional community.

There are three primary forms of communication:

- Communication within our organization and the community has primarily been via email. VAPS email announcements are sent through our website platform. We hope to make improvements in this platform in the near future.
- To expand our ability to communicate, Nathan Haskell launched and continues to moderate our new listserv. The listserv is an additional mode for making official VAPS announcements, but it is also a means by which members can directly communicate within the member community.
- Keeping accurate minutes of quarterly Executive Committee meetings helps keep track of the decisions and action items, as well as record these for future reference, as needed.

I have enjoyed serving as VAPS Secretary for the past few years and look forward to my next two-year term.

## **Report of the Treasurer** **~submitted by Aleta Vail, Ph.D.**

In February 2020, I took over the position of Treasurer as an interim, between our long-time Treasurer, Brian Ashley, leaving and finding a new VAPS Treasurer. Brian's dedication to becoming financially solvent during times of reduced membership and attendance to events left VAPS in a good position heading into 2020. I was able, as Treasurer, to witness and participate in an amazing year in the life of VAPS. Kathy Schlageter has kindly agreed to take on the Treasurer position, starting in 2021.

In 2020, as we all suddenly made major adjustments in our professional and personal lives, VAPS also had to make

major adjustments. As it became evident that the pandemic would continue for an unknown time, VAPS shifted from planning our usual in-person Scientific Meeting to a virtual Zoom meeting. Because the virtual presentation costs were less than in-person meetings, and because we added a pre-conference seminar, and both of these meetings were well-attended, the Scientific Meeting was surprisingly financially successful.

Some of the new expenses we decided to take on were for a social media consultant to help with design projects for our Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn pages, as well as our website. We also realized our need for Zoom hosts/consultants to be sure our first efforts at virtual presentations went well. Both expenses were fruitful and rewarding.

Also, with a mission to be responsive to the heightened awareness of systemic racism, we invited Dr. Dhvani Shah to speak about racism arising in the consulting room. For VAPS members and non-members, we also offered small group, facilitated conversations about personal and professional experiences regarding racism. We were able to offer these events for free.

As we move into the future of a possible mix of in-person and virtual events, from a financial standpoint, VAPS is well positioned to meet the challenges, as we learned a lot in 2020.

## **Report of the Representative to the Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology** **~submitted by Alicia Wein-Senghas, MS, LCMHC**

At the close of January last year, I was making travel plans to attend the 40th Annual Spring Meeting in New York City, "20/20: Reckoning and Foresight." Sound familiar? Its déjà vu as conference emails arrive for Spring of 2021, and yet there is a difference. There is no rush to book flights, make hotel reservations, or plan routes to navigate between presentations ensuring sweaters and coffee cups are in hand. Along with the rest of the world, SPPP has needed to adapt to and embrace a virtual platform. As the pause button is released, last year's Spring Meeting comes back into play – just this time around it will be from our offices, living rooms, and dining room tables. The format has been adjusted in an attempt to mitigate virtual-meeting-room exhaustion by extending the conference over six days. As this edition of the Newsletter goes to print, the Spring Meeting will be underway, and I look forward to sharing the tenor and points of interest with all of you in the Fall 2021 edition of the Newsletter.

While the Spring Meeting is one of the most visible contributions of SPPP to its membership and the broader clinical community, it is only one of many ways it endeavors to increase awareness and access to psychoanalytic theory,

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practice, and training. For one, all the Chapters across the U.S., including VAPS, are supported by the infrastructure of SPPP. Chapter representatives, such as myself, convene annually to learn from each other, problem solve, and brainstorm ways to offer valuable psychoanalytic education opportunities for our membership and provide chances for non-members to be exposed to the richness and value of psychoanalytic theory and practice.

SPPP additionally represents and strengthens the voice of psychoanalysis within APA and the broader community. In the 2020 December President's Message, Barry Dauphin Ph.D., shared some ways in which SPPP members have been involved and contributed within APA. In summary, several members are active in positions of leadership in the Divisions for Social Justice; others contributed to APA programming including two topics submitted for the 2021 APA convention; and SPPP collaborated with two other divisions to establish the COVID-19 Task Force and staff it with representatives from twelve divisions. SPPP also addressed a significant misrepresentation of psychoanalysis by a major provider of mental health care benefits for employers. This occurred when Lyra Health placed psychoanalysis on its list of iatrogenic treatments. Two communications were sent by SPPP leadership to the CEO of Lyra Health with the successful outcome of removal of psychoanalysis from that list. Actions such as this help to ensure that psychoanalysis is recognized as the effective and meaningful treatment we know it to be.

At an organizational level, SPPP is taking formal action to represent the values many of us share regarding racial justice, discrimination, and harm done to minorities under the umbrella of psychology, including psychoanalysis. Last spring, the SPPP board voted unanimously for a task force to draft an apology letter to the LGBTQ+ community acknowledging psychoanalysis' long history of embracing theory and implementing practices that have discriminated against this population and caused harm. This letter has been completed and distributed electronically to the membership. It will also be placed on SPPP's website and in an upcoming issue of SPPP's electronic publication, *InSight*. Additionally, recognition of the need for consultative support regarding promotion of racial justice and inclusion within SPPP was met with action. The SPPP Executive Committee issued a statement in the August publication of *InSight* formally recognizing that black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have suffered harm due to racism within organized psychoanalysis and within SPPP specifically at individual, organizational, and structural levels. Several meetings between an organizational consultant and SPPP leadership resulted in a plan of action and the new SPPP President, Joe Schaller, will be appointing a task force to further this necessary pursuit.

For many of you who are SPPP members already, this report reflects communications you have received from SPPP over the year. For others, I hope it clarifies VAPS

relationship with SPPP and sparks your interest in the ways SPPP members can participate in construction of inclusive psychoanalytic theory and practice and bring the valuable lens of psychoanalysis to various APA task forces, work groups, and committees.

## **Report of the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee**

**~submitted by Elizabeth Goldstein, Ph.D.**

The Applied Committee consists of Elizabeth Goldstein (Chair), Mina Levinsky-Wohl, Jean Pieniadz, and Gerri Oppedisano. We continue to have space for new members.

The committee cancelled Freudian Sips due to Covid, and marked the date with a slideshow on the VAPS website. Also due to Covid, we did not pursue our annual film meet-up and dinner discussion in Middlebury. We do hope to continue both in the future as we are able, though likely not in 2021.

We switched to a Zoom platform for the workshop analyzing Elena Ferrante's Italian fiction by experts Christine Maksimovic and Stacey Novack on March 6, 2021. Registration fees were less than originally planned due to not serving lunch and a decrease in the number of CEUs. This event is forthcoming as the newsletter goes to press.

Leading up to the event, we offered a series of book discussion group for the four novels in the Neapolitan Quartet, all held via Zoom, with 2 CEUs offered. The first discussion group for the first novel had 12 attendees and received positive feedback. The second discussion group, around the holidays had few registrants so was cancelled, and thus the second and third books were discussed together at a second discussion group on Jan. 8. There were 3 attendees. The final discussion group happened on Feb. 26.

The Applied Committee helped Past President Gerri Oppedisano put together the educational event after the Annual Business Meeting: two short films, *Two Strangers Who Meet Five Times* and *The Neighbor's Window*, along with discussion hosted by the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee members.

The committee postponed updating the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee Chair Responsibilities, but will revisit this task in 2021, and will send along a draft for discussion with the Executive Committee when finished. Similarly, the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee website page (within the VAPS website) will be updated late spring 2021.

Mina and Elizabeth completed a history of the Applied Psychoanalysis Committee, published in this Newsletter.

## **Report of the Education Committee**

**~submitted by Barbara Richmond, M.A.**

It has been a challenging, collaborative, expansive and inspiring year all around. The social distancing and quarantining required for ending the COVID-19 pandemic caused

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the committee to rethink and reformulate how we organize and present conferences. The education committee worked with the executive committee to make the Fall Scientific Meeting a success.

We were joined this year by three new members: Gerri Oppedisano, Tamara Bisbee, and Alice Silverman. Georgia DeGangi assumed her new role as Scientific Meeting Chair. Stella Marrie, who is assuming the role of education committee chair, and Claire Dumas, our past scientific meeting chair, comprised the rest of the committee, along with myself as chair. Mika Barker-Hart, after serving more than 10 years on the education committee, decided to step down from the committee and serve as a consultant regarding speaker choices, as Mika's knowledge of psychoanalytic thinkers has been invaluable to our decision-making process.

Devon Jersild, VAPS president, suggested that the education committee invite Norka Malberg, Psy.D., to present at the Scientific Meeting. Devon had seen Dr. Malberg speak and was impressed with her work as well as her warmth and wit. The education committee enthusiastically embraced this suggestion and Devon invited Dr. Malberg to present. Dr. Malberg is a certified child and adult psychoanalyst who trained at the Anna Freud Centre in London. Dr. Malberg was a good choice for many reasons, most notably that in this year of the pandemic we would need a speaker with the ability to reach people without being in their physical presence.

The committee asked Mark Dangerfield, Ph.D., who is an associate of Dr. Malberg's, to be a discussant to bring more liveliness to the screen. Dr. Dangerfield is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst who has worked for over 25 years in pediatric hospitals and mental health services in Barcelona, Spain specializing in treating adolescents and adults. Dr. Malberg and Dr. Dangerfield presented together from their home in Barcelona.

Gerri Oppedisano worked closely with Evan Martin, a computer technology specialist, to make sure there would be no glitches on the day of the conference. Gerri's work with Evan as well as Evan's expertise helped generate a smooth presentation. Georgia worked diligently with Gerri and Evan to develop the online program for the day. Georgia, who comes to VAPS with much experience planning conferences in the DC area, was embarking on new territory in terms of weaving the clinical material and activities of the day with an online format. Other members of the committee worked hard to shape the day with support, critical thinking and organizing. Stella assumed her role as registrar and Claire organized the small groups and small group leaders. Tamara and Alice were instrumental throughout this process.

The education committee felt very supported by the executive committee in this endeavor. Elizabeth Goldstein, chair of the applied committee, helped us find Evan Martin. Devon worked alongside Georgia in her communication with Dr. Malberg as well as the development of the program of the day. Other members of the EC also served as

guideposts in this new realm. It may be cliché to say it takes a village. But it does. And it did! I am sure there are people I have left out of this report or failed to mention all of their contributions. There were so many. And as chair, I was thankful to be part of this collaborative group.

Dr. Malberg presented on two separate days. On Friday November 6 she presented an afternoon pre-conference online workshop on theoretical aspects of mentalization, and how it develops and is addressed clinically. On Saturday, November 7, Dr. Malberg presented two papers at the Scientific Meeting. In the morning she presented a paper entitled "Attachment, Play and Sexuality: What does playing look like?" In the afternoon she presented "Working online with children, adolescents and adults: Reflections from a developmental psychoanalytic perspective" with clinical illustrations. Dr. Mark Dangerfield was the discussant for both papers. All events were well-attended, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

This coming May Anton Hart, Ph.D., will be the presenter at our Biennial Ethics conference. Dr. Hart is a training and supervising analyst of the William Alanson White Institute. He is the associate co-producer for the film *Black Psychoanalysts Speak*. He presents and consults nationally and internationally on issues of diversity. He is in private practice in New York City. The ethics conference will be held on May 22nd and will be presented via Zoom due to pandemic restrictions. We do not yet have the title of Dr. Hart's presentation.

And finally, Nancy McWilliams, Ph.D., will be the presenter at our 2021 Annual Scientific Meeting on Saturday, November 6. She will speak about how to evaluate meaningful progress. We are planning to hold this conference on November 6. We are looking for a new venue as the UVM Alumni House in Burlington, where we have held this event the last few years, is unavailable. We are hoping that pandemic restrictions will ease, and it will be safe to meet in person.

## **Report of the Membership and Outreach Committee** **~submitted by Gerri Oppedisano, Ph.D.**

Last year I stepped in as Membership Chair to help shoulder this role while we had a vacancy and potentially to sponsor some fun VAPS social events. The year that followed turned all images of "social" on its head and thus necessitated new forms of connection and outreach. As such I focused attention on sponsoring a few informal zoom events to invite engagement despite our shared circumstances of physical distancing in all aspects of our lives. Part of this effort involved the creation and coordination of our Zoom Portal – a VAPS dedicated Zoom account and a VAPS Support private email account connected to it (support@vapsvt.org). Through coordination with the website emails and registration for Zoom events flowed from Website to Zoom. Once Zoom was working from a

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dedicated portal I invited engagement through zoom on the topic of racism, given the current state of civil rights movement uprising in our country. I hosted and co-sponsored a few informal Zoom discussion groups with VAPS member Lauren Berrizbeitia on the topic of the impact of the present and ongoing racial injustice and civil rights movement on us, our clients and our work. We had two such informal discussion groups entitled “Racism and Our Times.” During the same time frame our president, Devon, invited a wonderful speaker, Dr. Dhvani Shah, to present more formally on “racist moments” in our work. Dr. Shah’s presentation was entitled “Dangerous Territory: Racist Moments in the Psychoanalytic Space” and this event was very well attended and appreciated. These initial zoom events served as a conduit for our continued connection and discussion, engaging members and interested non-members at a time of easy overwhelm and potential disconnect. I was pleased we had interest and heart-warmed participation and discussions in these events. I was also pleased to get our feet wet and more comfortable with an online platform given the indefinite nature of the circumstances COVID had presented us.

In the interest also of new outreach I interviewed and worked closely with a digital designer who worked to establish a VAPS presence on social media. In doing so, I held a few meetings of an adhoc committee of select board members to discuss needs and direction for this effort. Prior to our Scientific Meeting our facebook page was set up and announcements for the Scientific Meeting and workshop were posted there as well as on our website and in email outreach. This is a new effort and will be ongoing in its development.

Despite the unusualness of the past year due, we were pleased to welcome new members to our community and to have engaged past members return. We presently have seventy-four members that are current, meaning status is updated and membership dues paid. Due to our website sign up for mailing list we have a very healthy and large mailing list of 1018 members! This means our general and conference announcements reach many people, and interested non-members are receiving our mailings. This is a good sign and keeps our organization thriving.

Despite my enjoyment of chairing the membership committee and the stimulation of thinking of fun activities to engage members, I will unfortunately be stepping down as chair of this committee. I hope to focus efforts on our website and other VAPS committees.

## **Report of the Newsletter Committee**

**~submitted by Devon Jersild, Ph.D.**

I’m happy to announce that Phoebe Lewis, a Psy.D. student at Antioch and contributor to the newsletter, has stepped up as our new Editor and Chair. Thank you, and welcome,

Phoebe! In her work as a consultant to film impact campaigns, and previously with a film foundation and nonprofits, Phoebe is familiar with the tasks of soliciting and editing.

I very much enjoyed the opportunity to return to my old role on the Newsletter Committee for 2020, working with Erin Roland who continues to do a wonderful job of soliciting and editing material for “Save the Date for VAPS Events” and our community calendar postings. This year we also profited from editorial help from Stephanie Haney Rose (thank you, Stephanie). In 2021 I will continue as a member of the committee.

Our committee’s biggest gratitude goes to the numerous contributors, new and old, who during this time of Covid have caused the pages of our newsletter to explode with their articles, interviews, letters, and essays about ideas, VAPS events, books, opportunities, and personal experiences. In particular we appreciated the heartfelt letter from Debra Lopez (Spring, 2020) about the need for psychoanalytic psychotherapists to learn more about managing suicidal risk. (Debra has followed up in the current newsletter with an article about a learning opportunity.) Members are invited to respond to any of our offerings with letters, and to contribute to the “Book Corner” (initiated by Rachel Jadcowski), and to consider if there is someone they might wish to interview for the “Spotlight on VAPS Members” column. We are committed to a newsletter that continues to be a place for members to engage in discussion of psychoanalytic ideas and to get to know each other too.

We continue our productive relationship with Minuteman Press and to commit to a paper version of the newsletter in addition to its posting on our website, archival issues being available to members only.

## **Report of the Research Committee** **~submitted by Jake Rusczek, Ph.D.**

On February 23, 2020, I presented for three hours to a group of more than thirty VAPS members following the Annual Business Meeting. The presentation, “Psychotherapy Research, Evidence-Based Practice, Psychoanalysis and You,” considered the history of psychotherapy research, the shortcomings of randomized controlled trials as they are typically conducted, the findings of such research, and the APA’s conflicting positions of these findings. Robust participation from the audience made for a lively and stimulating event--thank you to all who attended and helped facilitate! Since then, the research committee has rested on its laurels and unhurriedly considered how it might otherwise disseminate the knowledge amassed for the presentation.

## **Report of the Website Committee** **~submitted by Gerri Oppedisano, Ph.D.**

This past year I transitioned from committee Co-chair to Chair, and in this role I’ve fielded problems, questions and upgrades as and when needed. As mentioned in my

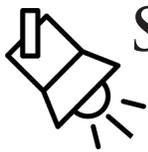
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report on the Membership and Outreach Committee, our transition to an online platform for events and offerings took some thinking and coordination through our existing website registration and email functions. This mainly involved thinking through how to use the current back-end structure and function of our website to dovetail well with Zoom on announcements, event email invites and event registrations on both platforms. Thankfully this has ultimately been successful and largely run smoothly! We discovered some areas of challenge which led to considering a rework of some pieces of the back-end functions (such as email capacities). This process is ongoing.

In the meantime, as I had been working with a digital designer, Lorenne Gavish, on social media presence we have worked also on designs for cohesive look and feel of our presence online and in paper mailings. This included detailed designs for a new look of our website which will

ultimately mimic the design elements present on social media and which you saw hint of in last postcard announcements sent for the Scientific Meeting. We took care to discuss a design that would not be too far flung from the modest natural Vermont green images we have always had. That said, implementing a full upgrade to the new designs will require a good amount of work on the part of our web developer and we elected to wait on that upgrade until after the Scientific Meeting. This also brings me to the next challenge, which is that our current website developer, who is willing and able to tweak and maintain our current website, would also like to step down from further development. In light of that I have been interviewing a couple of people for website development. Once I have a couple of clear good choices I will present a proposal of costs and timelines to the Executive Committee for approval and guidance. Adam will graciously remain a support until whenever we find a comfortable replacement and will onboard that person as needed.



## SPOTLIGHT ON VAPS MEMBERS

### Interview with Logan Heff, PsyD

With Phoebe Lewis

*Logan Heff, PsyD practices with UVM Children's Hospital's Pediatric Primary Care and is part of the UVMHC Department of Psychiatry's Psychological Services group. We are pleased to welcome Dr. Heff to the VAPS Executive Committee as our newest Member-At-Large!*

**How do you bring your psychoanalytic sensibility to your work at UVMHC?**

I should note that although psychoanalytic and psychodynamic practice and thinking are central to my approach to clinical care, I am not a psychoanalyst. I was pretty close to pursuing analytic training, but that was just before the pandemic essentially locked down our communities – I realized that for myself, my family, my professional practice, the time simply wasn't right.

That said, what I love and appreciate about psychoanalytic thinking and practice is its inherent playfulness. In treatment, in teaching, in making systems work better, I find it invaluable to approach the work with an openness and curiosity that allows unthinkable thoughts to come forward, unanswerable questions to lead to surprising outcomes. It can be uncomfortable, but that's life. Sometimes a project or interpretation or intervention doesn't work out, and that's ok – growth emerges through rupture and repair cycles.

**Recently you've taken on a new challenge at UVMHC. Could you tell us more about it?**

Yes, the project! First though, a bit of back story: in grad school, there were two books which altered my trajectory as a psychologist (and, perhaps, as a human): Mike Eigen's *The Psychotic Core*, and Lew Aron & Karen Starr's *A Psychotherapy for the People: Toward a Progressive Psychoanalysis*. The latter book was perhaps the more pertinent to this question, as Aron & Starr's work discusses Freud's original vision of psychoanalysis as a treatment for all folks, but one which was built within a culture that was distinctly not for all people. I firmly believe that psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic thinking (a) is effective at reducing human suffering, and (b) should be accessible in all ways – financially, geographically, linguistically, etc.--to all folks when clinically indicated, as part of the full repertoire of effective treatments.

Now then, to the project: I have the great honor of practicing within Pediatric Primary Care at the University of Vermont Children's Hospital, through my position with the Psychological Services group in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Vermont Medical Center. Over the past five years, my pediatric medical home colleagues, psychologist colleagues, psychology trainees, and I have built a primary care mental



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health model that prioritizes access to care and removes traditional friction points for kids, parents/caregivers, and families to accessing mental health services. It's pretty neat, seems to be sustainable, and is thoroughly rewarding.

Mental health concerns take an immense toll on our patients, our providers, and our system. When our neighbors cannot access care, everyone suffers. When folks go to the emergency department as a last-ditch effort to access care for their mental health struggles, everyone suffers. When primary care clinicians feel burnt out and overwhelmed with the mental health needs in their clinics, everyone suffers. Our partners in these agencies do excellent work, but the two main institutions in our state that have longitudinal relationships with folks are schools and primary care clinics. With this in mind, the University of Vermont Health Network partners determined that it is in the best interests of our patients, providers, and communities to enhance access to and capacity for mental health care from within primary care medical homes.

Over the past couple years now, we have been developing a model for delivering mental health in primary care settings across the lifespan (pediatrics, family medicine, adult internal medicine), with the goal of rolling it out across all thirty-seven primary care sites in our health network over the next five-ish years. With a foundation in the collaborative care model developed at the University of Washington AIMS Center, our plan involves integrating, not embedding or co-locating, a staffing complement that includes psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. But this isn't plopping a model of care from Seattle into Berlin or Middlebury. No, we're building a model that reflects and respects the geography and resources in our region. We even gave it a Vermont-y name: Mental health Access and Practice Level Enhancements (MAPLE)!

How does this relate to VAPS and psychoanalysis? A few different ways. In the first, and I own my bias about this, but psychoanalytic thinking and case formulation are all the more necessary when working with primary care patients who are leery of mental health care and the usual generic recommendations like encouragement to get more exercise. If you treat the symptoms of somatic stress but miss the underlying existential anxiety and the defenses that maintain those "symptoms," then you'll never move the needle and support long-term changes in suffering and functioning. Sure, some folks will respond quite well to short-term problem-focused interventions – and we offer that, too. But having a keen analytic ear and open heart to a patient's history and presentation, something that analytic or dynamic practice encourages, will ultimately lead to better pathways to the cessation of suffering.

Are we planning on doing wild analysis on exam tables? No! But my hope is that the mental health clinicians who will be staffing our primary care clinics will have a broad training and skill set that enables comprehensive assessment

and appropriate treatment recommendations: CBT, TFP, RFP-C, ACT, psychoanalysis, etcetera.

Which brings me back to the other relationship between this project and VAPS: we will need to strengthen connections between primary care and community mental health clinicians. My sense is that relationships are very, very important here, in a different way than they were in NYC. If you vouch for a plow guy or plumber, I'm going with your recommendation over the Yelp reviews. We know that "warm handoffs" are a critical aspect of integrated care, and our hope is to be able to provide an analogous connection or treatment recommendation from the PCP's office to a community provider or practice.

Even as I write this, I can hear some folks wondering if this is truly possible in a primary care exam room, or within an integrated primary care behavioral health program that "should" be focused on brief, problem-focused, SBIRT-style interventions. The answer, I believe, is yes. The bridge idea involves a shift from the frame being one clinician, one office, one dedicated time each week for a standard therapeutic hour, to the frame as defined and contextualized by the institutional transference between the patient and the medical home team & routines. It's far more complicated and subject to the interpersonal strengths and challenges that come with any human system (family, office, etc.), but we've made it work fairly well, and look forward to seeing how this works with our partner clinics.

***You describe your philosophy of care as, in part, an appreciation of people as more than just a diagnosis. Can you expand on that, and how this approach has developed through your work?***

Humans are complicated creatures, many of whom over-simplify as a defense against their own complexity! A single medical model diagnosis simply cannot capture the totality of a person's suffering. I think that psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic thinking are uniquely able to capture the tensions, the strengths, and the opportunities in a person's life. In my view of the practice world, being a strong diagnostician is a primary task, but with the understanding that diagnostic assessment is not limited to the DSM-5 definitions of psychopathology. In my work and teaching, we strive to understand diagnostic systems and nomenclature in the service of developing a shared language to consider aspects of suffering, not oversimplifying a person's experience with an ICD-10 code. And so a routine part of my interviews and consultations involves asking what makes you joyful, curious, distracted, soothed. What do you listen to, watch, read? With what fellow humans or ideas or artistic expressions do you find solace, resonance? If our language is a set of symbols for representing concepts and constructs, how else do you communicate or feel heard in ways that don't involve words?

*Phoebe Lewis is a PsyD student at Antioch University and lives in Burlington, VT.*

# Community Postings

## Allied Groups

### Psychoanalytic Education in Vermont

Friday, April 16, 2021

*The Bruce A. Gibbard Memorial Lectureship Series*

Salman Akhtar, MD will present

Psychiatry Grand Rounds Morning Program: 10:30am – 11:45am  
“*Fear, Phobia, and Cowardice: Social and Clinical Reflections*” (via Zoom)

Afternoon Program: 1:00pm – 3:00pm  
“*Four Types of Psychoanalytic Listening*” (also via Zoom)

Dr. Akhtar is Professor of Psychiatry at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, PA, and Training and Supervising Analyst, Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia.

Questions? Please contact Jean Pieniadz, PhD, UVM Gibbard Committee Co-Chair, at 802-651-7506.

### *The Vermont Institute for the Psychotherapies (VIP)*

is pleased to announce the upcoming graduation of our most recent group who will be completing a two-year post-graduate program in the psychoanalytic psychotherapies this June 2021. We will be accepting applications starting January 2022 for our next class which will begin in the Fall 2022. To apply or for more information please visit our website, [www.vipvt.org](http://www.vipvt.org) or contact Alice Silverman via email at [alicehersheysilverman@gmail.com](mailto:alicehersheysilverman@gmail.com).

## National and International Events

**6 Sessions: Wednesdays, April 14, 21, 28, 2021;  
May 5, 12, 26, 2021**

“*Phenomenology and Intersubjectivity: An Introduction to the Philosophy that Grounds a New Paradigm in Psychoanalysis*” (via Zoom)

7:30pm - 9:00pm  
[connect.bpsi.org/product/EXPL-PI-20-21/phenomenology-and-intersubjectivity-an-introduction-to-the-philosophy-that-grounds-a-new-paradigm-in-psychoanalysis](http://connect.bpsi.org/product/EXPL-PI-20-21/phenomenology-and-intersubjectivity-an-introduction-to-the-philosophy-that-grounds-a-new-paradigm-in-psychoanalysis)

**April 9-10, 2021**

*APsaA/IPA co-sponsored meeting*

“**The Intersection of Gender, Sexuality and Our Current Crises: The Psychological Impact of Race, Politics, Economics, and COVID**”

Offered as a live, online zoom video conference  
[contemporaryfreudiansociety.org/professional-education/washington-dc/washington-calendar/](http://contemporaryfreudiansociety.org/professional-education/washington-dc/washington-calendar/)

**April 9-11, 2021**

*International Psychotherapy Institute Weekend Conference*

“**How the Light Gets In: Contemporary Understanding and Treatment of Trauma**”

Dominique Scarfone, MD

Offered as a live, online zoom video conference  
[www.theipi.org/clinical-training/weekend-conferences/](http://www.theipi.org/clinical-training/weekend-conferences/)

**Saturday, April 10, 2021**

*Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute – North (BPSI North)*

“*Reworking Gender: Trans, Nonbinary and Gender-Expansive Experiences in Theory and Practice*” (via Zoom)

10:00am – 12:00pm  
[connect.bpsi.org/PROG-2021-04-10-GEN](http://connect.bpsi.org/PROG-2021-04-10-GEN)

**May 14-15, 2021**

*The Lawrence E. Lifson, MD Psychotherapy Conference: Psychodynamic Psychotherapy 2021*

“**Pathological Versions of Narcissism: Clinical, Interpersonal, and Social Implications**”

Nancy McWilliams, PhD, ABPP

Presented as a live, interactive streaming program  
[www.psychotherapyupdate.org](http://www.psychotherapyupdate.org)

**July 21-25 and July 29-August 1, 2021**

*International Psychoanalytical Association 52nd Congress*

“**The Infantile: Its Multiple Dimensions**”

Online presentations  
[www.ipa.world](http://www.ipa.world)

**October 20-23, 2022**

*43rd International Association for Psychoanalytic Self Psychology (IAPSP) Annual International Conference*

“**Freedom and Transformation: Opportunities and Challenges**”

Washington, DC  
[www.iapsp.org/conference/](http://www.iapsp.org/conference/)