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# IARPP eNEWS

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International Association for Relational Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

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## Launching the IARPP e-Newsletter

*Lewis Aron, Ph.D.*

In the year 2000, I had the unique privilege of co-teaching an on-line seminar with Stephen Mitchell, the theme of which was Relational Psychoanalysis. The course began in January of 2000 and it was a heady time for us both. We were using a new book that we had just edited, ***Relational Psychoanalysis***; we were amazed by the new technology that we felt we were pioneering for psychoanalysis; we interviewed each

other and many other relational analysts and “uploaded” the interviews onto the internet; there were students participating with much enthusiasm from 14 countries around the world and from all over the United States; it was the beginning of a new millennium and a new era in psychoanalysis – all seemed so bright! By the end of the year Steve had tragically and unexpectedly died, and my world and the world of psychoanalysis seemed much dimmer.

I tell this story because it represents for me the personal origin of one of the primary motives for starting the IARPP. Steve and I enjoyed teaching these seminars, and we always learned a lot from each other and from the students. One

of our most significant realizations, however, was the observation that most of the participants seemed to be taking the course not only to read, exchange views, and learn with us, but primarily because they were looking for a way to be involved in a relational community. Both Steve and I were teaching numerous reading groups in New York City and as we talked about our teaching experience we clearly realized that for many people the principal motivation went beyond their educational needs; people were coming to study with us because they wanted personal contact, but even more, they wanted to be a part of a relational psychoanalytic community – they were looking for a means to

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exchange ideas with others as well as for personal, social, intellectual, and professional contact with like-minded colleagues. One of Steve's key contributions was to demonstrate that many contemporary schools of psychoanalysis were isolated from each other because they had their origins in different localities, each with unique historical circumstances. Analysts affiliated with these schools had come to speak with different terminologies, to

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publish in separate journals, to train candidates in their own institutes and to belong to independent professional associations. Steve showed that in spite of their differences that they had much common ground in their recognition of the fundamental importance of relational considerations. Some emphasized a focus on the self; some emphasized the role of the object or other; and some zeroed in on the interaction and transactions between self and other. While Steve never trivialized the significant differences and arguments among these schools, he believed that their common recognition of the centrality of relations was more significant than their differences.

Under the rubric of "relational," Steve found a way to bring together the many contemporary schools of psychoanalysis that had heretofore been so isolated and dissociated from each other. As I understood his vision, the purpose of the IARPP was to provide a forum, a social, psychological, intellectual, and professional space, an association

to heal the dissociation that had occurred among contemporary psychoanalysts. He wanted a different kind of psychoanalytic association, one that did not have disciplinary or guild issues as its major agenda, but rather that allowed the full diversity of contemporary psychoanalytic perspectives to come together and find a psychoanalytic home. Steve's vision inspired the creation of the IARPP. He personally organized the founding board of directors and upon his death, his wife, Margaret Black, found the courage, energy, and spirit to carry his dream forward. The world has changed dramatically in the very brief time since Steve planned this association. Steve could not have imagined how drastic an alteration would take place in just a year. Even in preliminary discussions among the IARPP Board and Advisory Council, it has become clear how differently each of us experiences the current state of the world in crisis. But if there was ever a time that we needed more international exchange, more dialogue, more widespread

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participation among all of our colleagues, clearly it is now.

Steve had little patience for hierarchy within our profession and he was fiercely anti-authoritarian. He was known always to be on the lookout for new, young talented writers, supervisors, and teachers. Steve knew that good ideas could come from anywhere and from anyone, not just from the better-known voices. The IARPP is committed to being a democratically run association, open to all, heterogeneous in points of view, institutional affiliation, and geographical locality. Our board of directors is a diverse group theoretically and geographically. Significantly, right at the outset of our formation, we established a Committee for an Inclusive Psychoanalysis to insure an ongoing commitment to pluralism and diversity and we initiated a committee on social issues to help keep us focused on social policy and broader concerns beyond the consulting room. We have already taken steps to work

out a membership dues structure that will make it more accessible to all in future years.

Our very first event was the conference held at the Waldorf in January 2002. This was an amazing psychoanalytic congress and I have heard from numerous participants that it was simply the best, most spirited, exciting and well-run conference that they had ever attended. The irony is that in spite of our best efforts and careful planning we lost a great deal of money on the conference. It was our first event, in our very first month as an association, and there were unexpected expenses and administrative difficulties. It is taking us some time to turn our attention back to the difficult business of running an international membership association. We appreciate the patience and commitment of our members during this start-up period.

In the months and years to come you will find lots of exciting offerings by the IARPP. This e-newsletter is among our first offerings, but soon there will be on-line

discussions, seminars and course offerings, newly planned conferences as well as smaller colloquia, writing workshops and mentoring programs, more journal and book discounts, and other offerings.

Right now, however, the association needs you. We need you to become active, to enthusiastically participate, to spread the word about our new world-wide community. Please encourage your colleagues to join with us and share in the building of a new spirit for psychoanalysis as part of our new international psychoanalytic movement. ❖

## ***A Note from the Editor***

*I wish to welcome readers to the first issue of **IARPP eNews**, a publication which will become a regular feature of the IARPP website. Members are encouraged to forward comments, short pieces of writing, responses, or other matters of importance to IARPP and its membership to: [seth.warren@verizon.net](mailto:seth.warren@verizon.net).  
--Seth Warren, Ph.D.*

# Why We Need the IARPP

by Jessica Benjamin, Ph.D.

Many times, in approaching people with an invitation to join this new organization, I was asked, Why do we need another professional organization?

The answer is, we don't.

But IARPP is not, in the usual sense, a professional organization. Rather, I see it as an attempt to give some coherence and form to an existing Movement or tendency in the psychoanalytic world that has had no formal expression, no location in which to gather its energies and sense of direction. Of course, the relational Movement - the many people who actively identify with relational ideas and the larger number of therapists who have been influenced by these ideas - can exist without such organization. But absent a formal organization, far fewer people will get to participate, energies will be dispersed rather than coalesce, and so the dialogue that produces differences and challenges us to face them will be much more

restricted. It is my sense, for instance, that the relational development would have been far more limited without the site of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* to propagate new ideas and bring in new psychoanalytic thinkers.

I think that IARPP will also decentralize the relational movement. It will reach outside those centers of large populations of relational analysts and invite others who identify with or are interested in this sea-change in psychoanalysis to join together in thinking and talking about how psychoanalysis is developing, what direction it should go in, based on our reflections on our own experiences and the common history as well as differences we share.

There are three reasons why I think forming an association could be valuable: to change the field of psychoanalysis; to create an institution open to everyone in which guild interests and hierarchies play no part; and to enable us to work

together internationally.

As to the first goal, an important aim in creating this association is to make psychoanalysis itself a more democratic and heterogeneous field, in which people of varied professional statuses and disciplines can exchange experiences and ideas. This reason, in turn, reflects the relational sensibility which has strived to break out of past associations dominated by hierarchy and orthodox thinking. If all goes as we hope, this association will allow us to structure our discipline in more democratic and pluralistic ways, instead of creating a new orthodoxy. Regarding openness, I suggest that because our association is open to everyone, it is designed to encourage interaction between people at many different levels regardless of their place in the order of professional life. This open design should free us to focus on ideas rather than on institutional concerns. Where

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professional associations have many “special interests,” such as promoting particular disciplines or protecting their members or legitimizing certain institutions and modes of training, our association can be relatively free of such considerations and allow people to meet around sharing experiences and debating ideas.

Finally, our third reason in founding an association is to provide opportunities for people in many different settings in North America and around the world to

engage and interact. I believe this is important in energizing our work. On the one hand, there are cities where small numbers of therapists who are interested in the relational perspective would like to be less isolated and share in something bigger. On the other, there are centers of relational thought that would tend toward becoming insular or self-satisfied without the challenge of people who come from different environments where these ideas are not taken for granted. For everyone, there is a sense of

excitement and support in our very difficult work, which comes with being part of something larger than oneself.

To sum up, there is a kind of dialectical process we hope to foster by opening up our field to new ideas and providing a less exclusionary environment that embraces our common experience as analysts and therapists as well as our differences and disagreements. In this sense, IARPP will give expression to our ideas and sensibilities as well as provide real opportunities for many more people to engage psychoanalysis in an enlivening way. ❖

## **Writers’ Development Project**

*Barbara Pizer, Ed.D., ABPP & Stuart A. Pizer, Ph.D., ABPP, Co-chairs*

We are launching a new project for the IARPP community. Our mission is to support, mentor, and cultivate writing by members of IARPP for publication or presentation. We have assembled a committee to join with us in developing the ideas, and the means of implementation, for this undertaking. These committee members are Hazel Ipp, Ph.D., Kimberlyn Leary, Ph.D., Doris Silverman, Ph.D., and Malcolm Slavin, Ph.D.

Our first task will be to identify members of IARPP experienced in writing and/or editing who will be willing to make their time available without fee to other IARPP members who are working on developing their writing craft. Each “writing mentor” would commit to taking on one person at a time and stay with that person’s process of developing and preparing a paper either for a journal or live presentation. That mentor would then become potentially available to work with another IARPP member on a writing project. While we have yet to contact potential writing mentors, we are hopeful

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that among our busy senior membership we will identify people who are willing to be generous with their time for this purpose. In the near future we will distribute to the IARPP membership a list of available writing coaches.

A second dimension of our Project is to facilitate the entry of new writers into full participation as contributors to discourse in our field. Of course, the acceptance of a paper for journal publication will remain the province of each journal's editorial review process. But we have conceived of a way that participation within

IARPP, at our biennial conferences, may be sponsored. Thus far, the panels at our conferences have been planned as assemblages of invited speakers—we can assume that this would mean senior contributors with wide name recognition. We have proposed, and found preliminary support for, the idea of reserving one seat on invited panels (either some or all of them) for a paper on the panel's theme that would be submitted to a refereed review process. This step of "quality assurance" would protect the level of our conference offerings. But an accepted paper would join with the others and the new author would be discussed as an equal with the more "luminary" members of the panel. Clearly, this aspect of our project will require close liaison with the program planners. We hope that, as we work out the details, we may thus create a means of access for new contributors within the IARPP community. We find this prospect particularly exciting as a potential benefit of IARPP membership.

Other aspects of our complex task remain to be developed, or even recognized. For example, we will need to explore the feasibility of learning in advance the themes of conference panels so that new writers may be in a position, if they desire, to choose an issue to tackle in writing enough in advance of a conference—and enough in advance for a review process, which is yet to be worked out. We also hope to create a workshop on writing, perhaps to include journal editors along with writing instructors, to be offered in various locations. And we would like to offer our list of mentors a free workshop, by an experienced writing teacher, on how to coach writers. But, these are all emergent ideas and, regrettably, the request for this article comes before we have had a chance to communicate among ourselves as a full committee. So, we offer these provisional ideas as a place-marker for the Writers' Development Project as it will now take shape over time. But we do hope we have whet your appetite to participate on either side of a mentoring relationship in the service of psychoanalytic writing. ❖

For information on discounts on a variety of psychoanalytic books and journals, go to our website [www.iarpp.org](http://www.iarpp.org) and click on *RESOURCES*. Information will be updated regularly.

# Relations: Introduction to the First IARPP Conference<sup>1</sup>

*by Emmanuel Ghent, M.D.*

It's a great joy to be welcoming you all to this celebration of Stephen Mitchell, to this conference, and to the inaugural meeting of the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. My only wish is that Stephen would be here among us today and standing right here in my place, welcoming you.

I'd like to say a few words about Steve's vision for this organization. Above all, his dream was of an association of psychoanalysts, wherein it would be possible for analysts of all persuasions to meet and share their experiences and ideas, a place where institutional and political concerns would survive only as a memory, a relic from former times. As Steve put it, "its ethos was to be a love of learning, not a consolidation of any particular discipline or any particular interest group." Why then call it "relational"? I hope

this will become clear as I go on.

The term, relational, was first applied to psychoanalysis by Greenberg and Mitchell back in 1983 when they abstracted the term from Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relations and Fairbairn's object relations theory. Common to these models of psychic development was the notion that psychic structure - at the very least, those aspects of psychic structure that were accessible to psychotherapeutic intervention - derived from the individual's relations with other people. This, of course, was intended as an alternative to the prevailing view that innately organized drives and their developmental vicissitudes were, at root, the basis of psychic structure.

There is no such thing as a relational theory, but there is such a thing as a relational point of view, a relational way of thinking, a

relational sensibility, and we believe that it is this broad outlook that underpins the sea change that many of us recognize as breathing fresh life into our field. Many of the people who will be speaking over the next two days will flesh out something of the range and scope of matters relational. And, as you will see, there are those who identify as Freudian, or Jungian, or intersubjectivists, or interpersonalists, or so called "relational analysts."

I see the Association as having three goals: first, a venue for open discussion of all species of psychoanalytic thinking; second, a forum wherein ideas that broadly fall under the rubric of a relational sensibility have a chance to be heard and to develop in the marketplace of ideas, and third, a place where the meaning and compass of the very term relational may be explored. I would like to enlarge on this briefly. In

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their original usage of the terms “interpersonal relations” and object relations,” both Sullivan and Fairbairn were focused on the role of human relations in development. They each, in their own way, forged theories of psychic development and the origination of motivational structures that were based essentially on the idea that structure formation arose out of the complexities of interhuman activities. From this point of view what has come to be called the intrapsychic was in fact a dynamic structuralization of the interpersonal. Loewald (1978), too, basically saw the intrapsychic as a condensation of the interpersonal as, for example, when he says, “Thus I conceive instincts . . . and the id as a psychic structure, as originating in interactions of the infantile organism and its human environment (mother). . . .” (p.†495), or again (1972), “Instincts, in other words, are to be seen as relational phenomena from the beginning and not as autochtho-

nous forces seeking discharge (p.†242). In this usage, the term relational was essentially conceptual in meaning, rather than descriptive. It referred insistently, although seldom explicitly, to a conception of psychic structure as being largely constructed - the resultant organization of experience, primarily interhuman experience. This conception allows room for both well integrated organization of experience as well as for non-integrated or poorly integrated organizations of experience some of which may be inaccessible to ordinary consciousness, as we see in the phenomena of dissociation. Notice again that we are here speaking of “relational” as a conceptual term that underpins a way of thinking about development, about psychic structure, about psychopathology, and ultimately, about psychotherapeutic interventions.

Unfortunately, and confusingly, a much more superficial usage of the term relational has cropped up and has all but coopted

its meaning. In its purely descriptive usage, relational has come to mean anything that refers to activities going on between people, mostly current activities. Thus we hear, “Mr. X has many relational difficulties,” meaning not much more than that Mr. X has personal difficulties in relating to other people. If one reads that “a patriarchal culture . . . lauds strict autonomy [and] denies relational needs,” or if one comes across phrases like “fantasy elements are often linked to real relational experiences,” it becomes clear that the term is being used to signify something like human contact or connection. What concerns me about this superficial usage is that it won’t be long before we hear patients saying “You’re not responding to my relational needs.” But much more important, it completely obscures the far more radical significance of the term, in which usage, for example, fantasy is relational; it is the outgrowth and condensation of relational experience of all

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sorts. I emphasize “all sorts” to remind you that relational is not confined to interhuman relations, although they play an enormously important part in matters having to do with psychotherapeusis. We must not neglect the role of emergent self-organization.

Also troubling to me is that in tending to limit the scope of the term relational, to relations between people, we exclude all manner of other relations from consideration. To my mind, relational psychoanalysis is almost ideally suited to make use of insights from the dynamic systems perspective that in the last decade or two has begun to radically change the way we think in science. PoincarÉ, the father of this outlook once said, “the aim of science is not things themselves, as the dogmatists in their simplicity assume, but the relations among things; outside these relations there is no reality knowable” (Kelso, 1997, p.97). Money, at one level, is merely a thing; at another level it is a complex

relational concept, at root an expression of claims on the labor of others. When with cash we buy food at the supermarket we are not aware that we are redeeming claims, sometimes highly exploitative claims, on the labor of many people all along the food chain, often on a global scale. Using the model of dynamic systems we come to appreciate the significance of history, context and ecology - all of which are expressive of relations, and relations among relations - at all levels from the cellular, to the level of organs, to perception, action, cognition and memory, to the interhuman, and on to the level of societal relations, not to mention the highly complex relations that exist between these different levels. Psychoanalysis until recently has confined itself to the narrow band of the psychopathological, where interhuman relations play an enormous role. In recent years interest has spread down one level to study the relation between brain and mind and up one level to the societal, al-

though we have not yet seriously engaged a concept of a social unconscious.

I do hope that by Sunday evening you will have a new appreciation for the complexity and compass of the relational and by th vistas it offers.

And now to begin . . . .

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> New York, January 18, 2001