

January 31, 2023

Dear Professional Psychology Students of George Washington University (GWU),

We, [*Psychologists Against Antisemitism*](#), are an independent organization with over 300 members within the field of psychology, including clinicians, academics, and trainees. *Psychologists Against Antisemitism* is not a politically oriented group; in fact our membership represents the full political spectrum. What our members share in common is a mutual desire to promote human rights and bring attention to the violation of people's rights.

As educators and clinicians, we are concerned with the equitable and fair treatment of all students, the creation of an inclusive classroom environment, and ethical psychological training. Students have a legal right to learn in a hostile-free environment and to receive clinical training that prepares them for work with diverse people. All students—including Jewish and Israeli students, deserve this as part of an accredited program preparing them for licensure as psychologists.

We are deeply troubled by the erasure of your voices and the intransigent position held by some of our psychology colleagues that your experiences in a classroom and the professional psychology program at GWU, as outlined by [StandWithUS](#), were fabrications.

Although several letters have been disseminated in support of your instructor Dr. Lara Sheehi, we have not seen any support for the voiceless students. Many of our psychology colleagues have chosen to label your experiences as “specious,” without any evidence or knowledge of what really happened, thereby delegitimizing the entire complaint filed with the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education. In essence, they have chosen to politicize this case and attack the media outlets and others who have given voice to your experiences, portraying them as right-wing and conspiratorial (an old antisemitic trope). For example, the statement from the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 39 (Society of Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology) to their membership in support of their president Dr. Lara Sheehi makes it very clear that the actual circumstances of the complaint are completely ignored.

Rather than demonstrate any interest in what you students, our future psychologists, have said about your experience of being treated differently because of your Jewish identity, Dr. Sheehi is portrayed and labeled as the victim. While Dr. Sheehi is a woman of color, she is also a full-time professor; author; on the editorial board of *Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society*; on the advisory board to the USA-Palestine Mental Health Network; and President of APA's Division 39. In short, Dr. Sheehi has a lot of resources to support her relative to students.

Our colleagues have misdirected the conversation by arguing about political ideology and academic freedom. As attorney Mark Goldfeder has detailed in a Newsweek article, there are, in fact, legal limits to academic freedom. Academic freedom does not allow for intimidation, indoctrination, disrespect, and biased falsehoods.

It is most unfortunate that psychologists and academics—those who are trained to value multiculturalism and diversity, while supporting marginalized populations, have taken a clear stance against these students without acknowledging their experiences within the classroom setting. Rather than waiting until the conclusion of the investigation, these professionals have swiftly voiced their stance denouncing any question of antisemitism or harm toward you, the students, in an effort to protect their President—a personal friend and colleague. These individuals have failed to consider how that may, and has, impacted students—students who may have been in Dr. Sheehi’s classroom, students who may be members of APA Division 39, and students across other divisions of the APA who are watching the silencing of their peers—particularly Jewish and Israeli students.

We, *Psychologists Against Antisemitism*, call for due process of any complaints and deliberative inquiry. We understand the psychological and emotional toll this has taken on you and your families. Unfortunately, such acts are not new to the Jewish community, nor to Jewish colleagues within higher education and the field of psychology. We express our support for giving voice to the most vulnerable in this situation; that of the GWU Jewish and Israeli students.

Psychologists Against Antisemitism