

The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis A Bulletin of Preliminary Findings

Overview

The American Psychoanalytic Association responded to current and chronic racial injustice by establishing The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality (CO-REAP) in American Psychoanalysis on August 21, 2020. The mission was to investigate systemic racism and its underlying determinants, and to offer remedies for all aspects of identified racism in the field of psychoanalysis. The scope of the inquiry included assessment of national and local psychoanalytic organizations with varied governance structures, and the educational standards and practices within institutes and other psychoanalytically identified groups.

The Commission's Work

The Commission set out to achieve a comprehensive psychoanalytic understanding of how systemic racism and its impacts play out within North American psychoanalysis. The Commission enlisted an expert methodologist to develop a research design to conduct an empirically based analysis of how racism manifested in psychoanalytic institutes. The Commission met frequently in think tank sessions, conducted the study surveys and semi-structured interviews and engaged in integrative smaller work groups to analyze the data and produce a final report of the findings. This Bulletin provides the Commission's preliminary findings. A comprehensive, full report of the Commission's findings and recommendations will be released by the Spring of 2023. The recommendations will include prescriptions for organizational structures, some of which are already in the process of being implemented, and some of which represent proposals for the future, for the purpose of identifying methods to address and significantly reduce systemic racism in the field.

Methodology

Casting a wide net, our data were drawn from four sources: survey instruments, semi-structured interviews, field data (i.e., information provided through diverse, personal experiences of the Commissioners, communications on listservs, professional publications, and conference presentations), and collective self-study of the Commission's group process. Using a mixed method design including quantitative components (i.e., the Surveys) and qualitative components (i.e., open-ended responses in the Surveys and the semi-structured Interviews), data were collected from three groups of participants: a) psychoanalytic faculty, staff, and administrators, b) candidates affiliated with training institutes, and c) professionals who were positioned to enter the psychoanalytic field but had not yet done so or who had chosen to develop expertise as psychoanalytically-oriented clinicians outside the formal training system of Institutes. Across these groups, survey responses were received from 2,259 participants and

group interviews were conducted with 80 faculty members, 70 candidates, and 20 people who were potential applicants for training were invited to participate. A uniform training procedure for all interviewers for the semi-structured interviews was developed to provide consistency in the data collection. To obtain a diverse range of views, when selecting participants, first priority was given to people who identified as Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), second priority was given to people who indicated on the survey that they did not believe racism was an issue in their institute, and third priority was given to people who identified as White and indicated some level of concern about racism.

Apropos of our fourth source of data (i.e., the Holmes Commission's working group process), racial enactments emerged in the group process among commissioners as they did their work. Even in the collaborative work of the commissioners, all committed to the work of investigating racism within the field of psychoanalysis and whose life works included emphasis on race and/or other aspects of intersectionality, racism and/or other manifestations of hierarchical dynamics, authoritarian functioning still became evident. The Commission found that processing these enactments was essential and crucial to our collective understanding of the challenges that enactments present in developing interventions within institutional structures. This Bulletin has focused on data collected and analyzed from surveys and semi-structured interviews. A report of the Commission's own work on its own group process will appear in the January issue of *The American Psychoanalyst (TAP)*.

Conceptualizations of Racism used for the Commission Study

What conceptualizations of racism guided our methodology and framed our findings? The Commission's work recognized four views regarding race: 1. Racialism which references exposure for all members of a society to ideas and narratives that influence one's thoughts and perceptions about members of racialized groups; 2. Racist acts which are performed by individuals or small groups that reflect prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, particularly a minoritized or otherwise marginalized group; 3. Racial enactments which included how ideas around race and racism unconsciously play out in group processes and interpersonal processes; 4. Systemic racism as a system that produces advantage for some people in a dominant racial group through the oppression of people in a non-dominant racial group. Structural elements of the system are so embedded in individual psyches and institutional practices that they can be considered to be ubiquitous and to operate outside of the conscious awareness of the individual or institution carrying or practicing them.

Findings

Understanding and Addressing Racism. We found that how racism itself is experienced in psychoanalytic contexts was determined, in large part, by: a) whether one is white or BIPOC, and b) whether one is a faculty member or trainee. While most faculty and candidates indicated that race and racism were neglected topics, the impact of that neglect is experienced more fully by candidates (be they white or BIPOC) and BIPOC faculty than by white faculty. This had impact on how candidates, both current and prospective, experienced psychoanalytic training. Both white and BIPOC candidates felt that these topics were not covered enough or at all, but BIPOC candidates were 2-4 times more likely to feel this way than white candidates. There was a paucity of attention to race and racism in supervision. To wit, the majority of BIPOC candidates compared to half of all white candidates indicated that they never or only once or twice discussed race with their supervisor.

Psychoanalytic Curriculum and Supervision Through the Lens of Race and Racism. Racial issues and people of racially minoritized status were marginalized across all levels of psychoanalytic education. Both candidates and faculty agreed that the current curricula offered in psychoanalytic training did not adequately address matters of race and racism. A majority of faculty and candidates agreed that people of color were underrepresented as both authors and subjects in required reading. Similarly, both groups agreed that the field of psychoanalysis needs to increase focus on race, racism, and white supremacy. Faculty tended to see themselves as prepared and comfortable discussing the topic of race or racism with candidates, although candidates, in their educational experiences, were less likely to see the faculty as prepared in those discussions.

Candidates and faculty of color were more likely to raise issues of race and racism than their white counterparts, despite being less comfortable doing so and less satisfied with the results of such efforts. Similarly, faculty of color were less comfortable raising such issues with leadership but more likely to have done so, nonetheless. Faculty of color were also less likely than their white counterparts to feel satisfied with the response of leadership. Despite all the dangers associated with racial backlash, BIPOC people were more likely than their white counterparts to risk the losses that might be associated with initiating such dialogue.

Policies and Procedures: Toward Racial Equity (or not). Racial identity and social positioning impacted on several levels the recognition and experience of racism in institute life. White Faculty as a group, in contrast to BIPOC Faculty, and white and BIPOC Candidates, were least likely to see the negative impact of racism. However, white faculty and administrators and white candidates underestimated the traumatic impact of racial incidents and did not recognize racial incidents as a significant reason for BIPOC candidates feeling forced to leave training programs. Recruitment that occurred primarily through existing social networks rather than through broader outreach methods increased the likelihood that the current demographic distribution within institutes would reproduce itself. There were multiple barriers to accessing

and completing analytic training, including but not limited to financial resources, conflicting demands of family responsibilities, workload, and access to an institute nearby. A notable barrier was found to be that Institutes do not have any official procedures or personnel (e.g., independent committee or ombudsperson) in place to address incidents of racism. Another barrier to choosing or staying in analytic training had to do with the perception that there is a lack of attention to issues of diversity, race, gender, social class, and intersectionality in typical institute training curricula. Many *potential* BIPOC candidates reported not pursuing psychoanalytic training because of this lack of attention. Additionally, BIPOC and white study participants reported significantly different experiences of psychoanalytic training and institute life. White faculty differed from candidates and BIPOC-identified faculty in recognizing issues of privilege and disadvantage for historically marginalized groups.

Comparing candidate responses to faculty responses, the following differences became apparent: A significant number of candidates compared to faculty reported that a person who identifies as white is advantaged in admissions. More candidates compared to faculty reported that a person of color was disadvantaged in admissions. More candidates reported believing, when compared to faculty, that people of color were *unintentionally* disadvantaged in evaluation and progression procedures. Interestingly, in this connection, candidate responses, regardless of racial identity, were in line with the responses of BIPOC faculty who endorsed the same belief. On the other hand, it is the white faculty who, as a group, were less likely to observe greater advantages afforded to male applicants in the evaluation and progression procedures. Similarly, a smaller percentage of white faculty, when compared to candidates and BIPOC-identified faculty, believed that applicants and candidates who identified as people of color experienced greater disadvantage. Although financial burden was the most frequently identified barrier to completing training, white faculty were less likely than BIPOC faculty and candidates to indicate that applicants from higher socio-economic backgrounds would be advantaged in admissions and that candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds would be disadvantaged in progression in their programs.

Racial Enactments. Systemic racism is enacted in public in psychoanalytic institutions, but enactments were not publicly processed leading to the formation of toxic factions instead of generative enclaves within Institute communities. Racist actions and racial enactments were a significant part of the life of psychoanalytic organizations. Because racial enactments are inevitable, they constitute a significant part of the life of psychoanalytic organizations, and the data bears this out. About two thirds of both faculty and candidates have observed, experienced, or heard about an action that was racist. About half of these (roughly a third of both faculty and candidate responders) had the conviction that the racist enactment they observed, experienced, or heard about had caused racial trauma.

Despite the fact that a significant majority of respondents were aware of actions they considered racist, there was a general feeling that these matters were not dealt with fully or

sufficiently, as evidenced by the finding that three quarters of respondents reported that responses were insufficient. More concerning was the finding that approximately a quarter of respondents felt that they themselves were unsupported and/or alienated when such incidents occur or that the issues were largely ignored altogether. These data suggested that since racialized enactments were not adequately processed and worked through, they were inevitably doomed to being repeated. While study participants reported that there was relatively greater comfort in addressing and processing racial incidents in private, we do not have data on the extent or efficacy of that processing.

The data revealed conclusively that public enactments persist in the following ways: The vast majority of racial enactments described by respondents in the study occurred in what we are calling “public” spaces (classrooms, online forums, community events, committee hearings). A large majority of candidates and faculty report racial enactments in these public spaces as compared to the “private” spaces of individual analysis and supervision. When candidates discussed racism, they appeared to be most comfortable in addressing the subject in the following arenas: most comfortable with their analyst, followed by their supervisor, and finally with fellow candidates (less than half). Candidates appeared to be much less comfortable addressing racialized material with instructors and leaders. This is of interest because both candidates and instructors reported that racist acts were most frequently witnessed in the classroom.

Both candidates and faculty felt that when racial enactments occur, they were not dealt with in a satisfactory manner, were often dismissively brushed under the rug, or superficially attended to but in a manner that was incomplete, did not close the loop, failed to be sufficiently transparent, and that failed to address the structural problems laid bare by the enactments. A significant finding was that a climate of fear, typically of retaliation, impeded needed change even though the desire for change was evident across racial lines. Both BIPOC faculty and candidates were wary about bringing racial issues to the fore. Meanwhile, white faculty and white candidates were fearful of making “mistakes,” or speaking in ways that might be regarded as offensive or racist.

Experience of Race and Racism in Training/Personal Analysis. Statistically significant differences between BIPOC and white candidates were found in several domains.

BIPOC candidates felt less free than white candidates to: choose their analyst, discuss sexual orientation, discuss religion, to discuss race and ethnicity, and to discuss language differences. More BIPOC candidates than white candidates reported an “uncomfortable” relationship between themselves and their analyst in their personal/training analysis. Although the numbers for BIPOC candidates were small in this study, a reflection of the low numbers in the field at large, this finding coincides with historical reports of BIPOC clinicians who reported similar experiences-- an example being the famous analyst/analyst dyad of Ellis Toney and his

analyst Ralph Greenson. The impact of candidates feeling “uncomfortable” secondarily influences the cohort experience and impacts recruitment of potential applicants. Last, BIPOC Candidates, who usually had non-BIPOC analysts, were also less likely than white candidates to regard their analyses as the most important aspect of their psychoanalytic training.

The above findings drew our attention to the effects of not having a diverse faculty including and especially in the training/personal analysis situation that is an aspect of vulnerability and intimacy, with vastly different positions of power between the training/personal analyst and the candidate analysand. Across interview topics, the negative impacts of differential power were raised multiple times by many respondents regardless of racial identity and these findings will be elaborated in detail in the full report.

Conclusions

This Bulletin represents a preliminary reporting of the findings of the Holmes Commission’s research to date; the full, comprehensive report of the Commission’s findings is expected to be released in the early spring of 2023. That report will include a more detailed rendering of the findings, a discussion of them, along with the Commission’s recommendations for change.

In the intervening time, the Leadership Team of the Holmes Commission invites comments, questions, and responses to be directed to the Commission’s email address: holmescommission@apsa.org.

The Holmes Commission Leadership Team:

Dorothy E. Holmes, PhD, Chair

Anton Hart, PhD, Co-Chair

Dionne R. Powell, MD, Co-Chair

Beverly J. Stoute, MD, Co-Chair

The Holmes Commission Commissioners:

Nancy J. Chodorow, PhD, M Fakhry Davids, MSc, Ebony Dennis, PsyD, William C. Glover, PhD (Immediate Past President, American Psychoanalytic Association), Francisco J. Gonzalez, MD, Forrest Hamer, PhD, Rafael Art Javier, PhD, ABPP, Maureen Katz, MD, Kimberlyn Leary, PhD (Distinguished Consultant), Rachel D. Maree, MD, Teresa Mendez, MSW, Michael Moskowitz, PhD, Donald Moss, MD, Kerry Sulkowicz, MD, *ex officio* (President, American Psychoanalytic Association), Usha Tummala-Narra, PhD, Jasmine Ueng-McHale, PhD, Kirkland Vaughans, PhD

The Holmes Commission Methodologist:

Michael Russell, PhD

Bulletin Release Date: January, 2023