

Why Diversities?

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As the chair of the Department of Psychoanalytic Education (DPE) Diversities Section, I am often telling people: there are many *diversities*; it's not just the usual few. Here is a non-exhaustive list: race, ethnicity, class, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, gender conformity status, age status, physical ability status, religious orientation, nationality, political affiliation, employment status, fertility status, attractiveness status, learning ability status, chronic illness status, language fluency status, incarceration history status, sobriety status, immigration status, survivor status, marital/relationship status, and more.

The participants in the Diversities Section seek to encourage dialogue and reflection on which diversities are usefully included in such diversities lists that individuals or organizations might generate because what is included has implications for how we psychoanalysts think and how we participate in the clinical process. And, of course, this all has implications for training.

To which diversities should we psychoanalysts (and psychoanalytic psychotherapists) regularly attend, and which, if any, should be prioritized? We want to encourage reflection on the impact of casting a widening net versus perpetuating a more limited one when it comes to covering the diversities in psychoanalytic curricula.

Indisputably, race and racism in America (and, unfortunately, in most other parts of the world too) loom large, and the history of formerly enslaved people, living under the implicit and explicit conditions of white supremacy, must be a highest priority. Yet race is not the only dimension of diversity that matters. In training the next generations of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists, we need to be thinking not just about paying attention to the diversities, but also about the impact of attending to some diversities more than others. We would do well to think about whether or not promoting expansive attention to multiple diversities is a good idea. Yes, there are multiple diversities that can be identified, and attention to each of them is interesting. But when we expand our perspective in this manner, is there a risk of paying insufficient attention to the matters of oppression that are most pressing?

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (e.g., Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013) powerful and influential concept of *intersectionality* shows us how each diversity must be viewed in the context of its intersection with other diversities. Looking at the intersection between diversities enables us to see entirely different categories of experience than we would be able to see if we were looking at the individual diversities by themselves. It is different to be a white "she" than to be a white "he" than to be a white "they." Each of these simple categories, in and of themselves, can make for profound differences in the experience of being a human being. And so, considering the categories of experience of being raced and being gendered represents an important, rudimentary foundation for psychoanalytic inquiry. But things become different in new ways when we add, for example, socioeconomic status, age difference, or religious orientation into the mix. Each of these latter diversities express themselves differently when they intersect with the race and gender categories that began this example. Consideration of the diversities requires a nimbleness of mind, a flexibility in how we see, think, speak, and act. We have to get used to relinquishing our attachment to

mental and linguistic binaries and other complexity-resistant dissociative traditions if we are to raise our psychoanalytic participation to the level that is necessary to meet our patients' experiences.

A simple example: I need to get over the feeling that the word "they," a traditionally plural word, doesn't sound right to me when referring to a single individual. Part of the process of my doing so will likely involve encountering and reflecting upon the unconscious anxieties I may harbor about the concept of gender becoming less dichotomous and more continuous and fluid than the construction of gender that my own gender identity and my own desires seem to depend upon. Similarly, I have the ongoing aspiration toward recognizing that differences of experience *within* racial groups can be as far apart as differences of experience *between* racial groups. I aspire toward this recognition, even as I am wary of moving in any direction that would involve losing sight of the distinct plight of people of color in a world dominated by whiteness.

Becoming more mindful of the multiplicity of diversities is a starting point, rather than an ending one; the goal, as I see it, is to become more fluent in the different diversities, more curious about each of them, more perceptive of their nuances and intersections, all of which is in the service of more fully beholding (and relating with) the new, particular person sitting across from me. In our expanding awareness of the general diversities categories we strengthen our capacity for what Edgar Levenson (1991) has called the "pursuit of the particular," a pursuit universal to all psychoanalytic approaches, including those emphasizing Harry Stack Sullivan's "detailed inquiry" and those emphasizing the making of interpretations.

Psychoanalysts sometimes feel there is a burdensome aspect of introducing attention to the diversities into our psychoanalytic thinking. Each of the diversities has a "social" component, and it can seem, at times, that attending to various diversities, many of which are constituted primarily in the social domain (such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious orientation, or political orientation) risks going external and taking us away from the "depth" focus that is often seen as residing at the center of psychoanalysis. How, some psychoanalysts may wonder, can we help our patients to look *into* themselves if the pressures and conflicts of the external, social world force their way into the consulting room in the form of a demand that the diversities be attended to? Aren't we supposed to keep the "noise" from outside out of the psychoanalytic consulting room? Is it not the psychoanalyst's role to stem the tide of this or that form of current social discourse so we may enable the patient to penetrate the surface of conscious experience such that inner, personal truths may be uncovered?

Retaining Depth Alongside Breadth

Engaging in the study of the diversities while holding a psychoanalytic perspective reveals some possible limitations of the "depth metaphor." In our psychoanalytic way of speaking, depth is often equated with unconscious truth; that which is deeper is conceived of as hidden "within." But various aspects of human beings' experience of race, sexual identity, and sexual orientation as examples, are indeed quite unconscious, and are constituted relationally, not just "inside" a person's separate, individual mind. The literature on implicit bias amply demonstrates the social and relational constitution of many aspects of unconscious mental life (e.g., Brian Nosek, et al., 2007), as does the study of privilege (e.g., Michael Kimmel, 2017), as do writings on the social construction of gender and sexuality (e.g., Judith Butler, 1995). The realization that the complexity and elusiveness of human experience as both vertical (intrapsychic) and horizontal (relational) dimensions, opens us up to recognizing engagement with the diversities as a truly psychoanalytic project, rather than it being an add-on that is incorporated because this is the right thing to do. A more complete, holistic, psychoanalytic approach to the mind asks us to consider both the vertical and horizontal axes of human experience, and how they intersect with each other.

Unconscious features and determinants of mental life can be found not just in the category of the "within," but also in the "in between." Unconsciousness is to be found not just in fantasy and dream material, but also in our selective inattentions, coparticipation, and enactment with others, in dyads and in groups of various sizes. These are areas of attention and exploration to be embraced not only by "relationalists" but by all psychoanalysts. These days, many analysts find themselves gravitating toward

psychoanalytic accounts of mental experience that are *rich* rather than those that are just deep. Psychoanalytic engagement with the diversities pushes us to retain the sense of “within-ness” while simultaneously embracing “between-ness,” and to look at how within-ness and between-ness intersect. Rather than diluting the incisive, revealing powers of psychoanalysis, attention to the diversities stands to make our psychoanalytic vision richer. The complexity of psychoanalytic thought matches well with the consideration of the multiple diversities and their intersection. Surely, there is enough room in our minds—there again the depth metaphor, even as I try to transcend it—to consider all things psychoanalytic and the diversities as a part of this.

Thinking about and engaging with the diversities does, usually, bring up anxiety, even as we are sure it is a good thing to do. I think such anxiety often comes down to the fear of loss. As Hans-Georg Gadamer, the hermeneutic philosopher, has argued, when we truly encounter and open ourselves up to an *other*, and for Gadamer that opening is always in some form of engagement in dialogue, *losing* is inevitably part of the experience. We must lose our “foreknowledge” if we are to really meet who is there across from us. And we are well aware as psychoanalysts that people are very, very attached to their foreknowledge, the already known, because it serves as a protection from the vulnerability of not knowing. In this sense, the psychoanalytic process is really all about enabling people to let go of their tight grip on what they think they know already, in order that they might live with more of a sense of discovery and inventiveness.

Fear and trauma experience make people less willing to be curious and to engage in a process of discovery. Sometimes this plays out in different groups’ attachment to their own defining traumas and anxieties and their insistence that their concerns are *the* concerns. In my doing psychoanalysis and in working with groups, there often emerge themes of competition for recognition—battles, of sorts, between the diversities—to the extent that many of the diversity categories (such as non-cisgendered, African-American, Jewish, refugee) may be associated with and organized in relation to category-based trauma. Those who have been traumatized may validly seek recognition and affirmation of what has happened to them as part of their process of commemorating and surmounting their trauma. But the anxieties, derived, in part, from the earliest experiences within the family as to whether or not there will be sufficient recognition and affirmation of such trauma available for all often lead to inter-group conflict between oppressed or persecuted groups. It bears mention, of course, that there are likely to be substantial, reality-based reasons for those who are or have been oppressed or victimized to have doubts about the willingness of those involved or complicit in their trauma to subsequently be willing to validate it.

As psychoanalysts, we may proceed on the premise that healing recognition, paralleling love, and nurturance in a family, might usefully be seen as inherently limitless in the sense that their heartfelt giving does not deplete their reserves. In expansively incorporating attention to multiple diversities in our work, we attempt to transcend the notion there is only so much diversities-related attention, recognition, understanding, and *psychoanalytic love* to go around.

In this manner, opening ourselves up to paying attention to the diversities initiates a generative process of expansion rather than one leading to depletion or exhaustion. In our openness to the ways other people are different, we unlock our capacity to imagine and feel being different than who we think we are. And, in the process, we may become more aware of the ways we, ourselves are always “other” to others too. And, of course, such expanding awareness is self-perpetuating. Recognition engenders recognition in return, thus perpetuating a rather desirable, arguably inherently psychoanalytic, cycle.

The DPE Diversities Section

The DPE Diversities Section, with the help of graduate student assistants, has been working on building a web-based database of materials such as books, articles, videos, and syllabi related to the *intersection* between psychoanalysis and the diversities, and to the intersectionalities of the diversities themselves. We hope to make this resource widely available to APsaA members and others, as the DPE and other branches of APsaA are able to acquire space on a new and improved organization-wide website. In the meantime, interested training centers and individuals may request a “Beta” version of our in-progress Diversities Section Resources Webpage by contacting me at antonhartphd@gmail.com.

We invite one and all to join the limitlessly complex, ongoing conversation about the relationship between psychoanalysis and the diversities, so we can all be thinking about the best ways to train diverse and resourceful psychoanalysts and enrich the discipline of psychoanalysis so it may become as complex as the diverse human beings it aspires to understand and heal.

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