

The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality

In the American Psychoanalytic Association



Dorothy E. Holmes, PhD, Chair
Co-Chairs
Anton Hart, PhD
Dionne R. Powell, MD
Beverly J. Stoute, MD
holmescommission@apsa.org



Nancy J Chodorow, PhD
M. Fakhry Davids, MSc
Ebony Dennis, PsyD
William C. Glover, PhD
Francisco J. Gonzalez, MD
Forrest Hamer, PhD
Rafael Art Javier, PhD
Maureen Katz, MD
Kimberlyn Leary, PhD
Rachel D. Maree, MD
Teresa Mendez, MSW
Michael Moskowitz, PhD
Donald Moss, MD
Usha Tummala-Narra, PhD
Jasmine Ueng-McHale, PhD
Kirkland Vaughans, PhD



The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality (CO-REAP) was established within the American Psychoanalytic Association on recommendation of the Black Psychoanalysts Speak national organization. CO-REAP's purpose is to identify and to find remedies for apparent and implicit manifestations of structural racism that may reside within psychoanalysis. The Commission's work product will be based on the study of psychoanalytic institutes, training centers and societies within and across different organizational auspices.

May 26, 2023

To: American Psychoanalytic Communities and
Other Distinguished Colleagues

RE: Executive Summary of the Report of The Holmes Commission on Racial
Equity in Psychoanalysis

Greetings from The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American
Psychoanalysis!

The Commission writes to you at this anxiety-laden time when our national psychoanalytic communities are roiled by experiences among us of race that many, but not all, consider to be painful illustrations of individual and systemic racism. Intense racial divisiveness threatens to devitalize and discredit psychoanalysis. Today, in this fraught environment, we are releasing the Executive Summary of The Holmes Commission's evaluative study of race. The full report will be released in mid-June once the editing process is complete, as immediately as possible after the Commission ratifies the full report in its June 17, 2023 meeting.

The Commission is providing the Executive Summary in advance of the Full Report as a road map of our comprehensive study. We hope that the Executive Summary encourages individual and collective reflection and then preparation for effective action. The Executive Summary speaks forcefully to the leadership that is needed in psychoanalysis currently and urgently to help our discipline move forward to achieve racial and other equities across the various dimensions of intersectionality. We ask you to absorb the Executive Summary as fully as you can in preparation for the detailed findings and comprehensive recommendations in the full report to come.

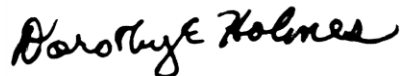
We ask for your help, immediately, with a three-pronged action step:

1. Please share the Executive Summary as widely as possible.
2. If you are an organization leader receiving this letter, please make sure each member of your organization receives the Executive Summary.
3. Send to the Commission any individual or organizational names, with full contact information, that you think we should include in our distribution. Our distribution list is extensive, but most probably is not exhaustive.

In addition to additional recipients you may identify, please feel free to share any reactions you have to the Executive Summary. Your responses will be much appreciated.

Please contact the Commission leadership team at: holmescommission@apsa.org.

Yours in hopefulness and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dorothy E. Holmes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dorothy E. Holmes, PhD, Chair
Anton Hart, PhD, Beverly J. Stoute, MD, and Dionne R. Powell, MD, Co-Chairs

Attachment:

- **Final Report of The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis (2023) – Executive Summary**

**Final Report of The Holmes Commission on
Racial Equality in
American Psychoanalysis
2023**

Executive Summary

*We've learned that quiet isn't always peace and the norms and notions of what is 'just' isn't always justice
Amanda Gorman, First National Youth Poet Laureate, Biden-Harris
Inauguration, 2021*

The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis 2023

Commission Members and Authors of The Holmes Commission Final Report

Dorothy E. Holmes, PhD (Chair)

Anton Hart, PhD, Dionne R. Powell, MD, Beverly J. Stoute, MD (Co-Chairs)

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, Maureen Katz, MD,
Kimberlyn Leary, PhD (Distinguished Consultant), Rachel D. Maree, MD, Teresa Mendez,
MSW, Michael Moskowitz, PhD, Donald Moss, MD, Kerry Sulkowicz, MD,¹ *ex officio*
(President, American Psychoanalytic Association), Usha Tummala-Narra, PhD, Jasmine Ueng-
McHale, PhD, Kirkland Vaughans, PhD

Methodologist and Author of The Holmes Commission Technical Report

Michael Russell, PhD

Support Personnel

Tina Faison, American Psychoanalytic Association, Executive Assistant to the Commission
Alice Rapkin, Commission Scribe

Distinguished Guest Editors for The Holmes Commission Final Report

Salman Akhtar, MD

Mark Blechner, PhD

Christopher Lovett, PhD

Susan McNamara, MD

Stephen Seligman, DMH

Donnel Stern, PhD

Editor-in-Chief

Susan McNamara, MD

¹ Kerry Sulkowicz was an active member of The Holmes Commission from its inception in August 2020 until September 2022 when he asked to become a non-voting, non-attending *ex officio* member. His *ex officio* membership ended upon his resignation from his office as the President of the American Psychoanalytic Association on April 7, 2023.

The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis 2023

Executive Summary

Opening Statement

The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis (the Commission) was formed in August 2020. The impetus for its formation came from several years of mounting demand that American psychoanalysis express itself on the importance of psychoanalytic understanding of race. The continuing racial atrocities occurring in the United States in 2020 became the immediate catalyst for the then leadership of the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsA) – William Glover, President, and Kerry Sulkowicz, President-Elect – to consult with the co-chairs of Black Psychoanalysts Speak (BPS), Craig Polite and Kathleen Pogue White, on how to address race within APsA. Their discussions led to APsA leadership accepting the BPS recommendation that a high-level body, a commission, be formed for the psychoanalytic study of systemic racism, and Dorothy E. Holmes be named its chair. Once formed, three co-chairs of the Commission were chosen by the chair in collaboration with APsA leadership: Anton Hart, Dionne R. Powell, and Beverly J. Stoute. The chair and co-chairs collaborated to select the full membership of the Commission and the Commission Methodologist, Michael Russell. Selection of Commissioners was made based on their extensive clinical and scholarly experience with and commitment to the understanding of race in psychoanalysis as well as representation of multiple diversities (levels of experience, races and

ethnicities other than African American, gender, and sexual orientation) in order that our study of race be informed by broad aspects of intersectionality.²

We held our first monthly meeting of the Commission on October 6, 2020, to establish operational guidelines. We decided that the entire Commission would meet monthly for two and a half hours, and the leadership team would meet weekly for a minimum of an hour, often with the methodologist. We developed the practice of beginning each Commission meeting with a roll call and inspirational music or text message. We discussed how we would engage each other and the range and scope of our work. We recognized the fruitfulness of conducting our meetings as think tanks in which we as Commissioners and consultants would find our way to purpose and methods by sharing our own personal and professional stories about systemic racism. The established meeting schedule and practices continued through June 2023 when the Commission adopted the final report.

Purpose

The purpose of the Commission was to appraise systemic racism in American psychoanalysis and where found, to offer recommendations and a path forward to reduce its pernicious effects. We studied how well racism is understood; whether, how, and to what degree systemic racism impacts the experience of considering and deciding whether to enter the field of psychoanalysis; how systemic racism affects experience across career development once one enters training; how systemic racism influences teaching and learning in the classroom and

² According to the American Psychological Association, intersectionality is the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups to produce and sustain complex inequities. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the theory of *intersectionality* in a paper for the *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (Crenshaw, 1989), the idea that when it comes to thinking about how inequalities persist, categories like gender, race, and class are best understood as overlapping and mutually constitutive rather than isolated and distinct (Grzanka et al., 2020).

supervision; to what extent systemic racism is enacted across all domains of psychoanalytic experience; when enacted, how it is processed and to what extent is it resolved; and how race is experienced on the couch.

It is to be noted that we first limited our focus to identifying influences of race within APsA. However, the Commission quickly recognized that our volunteer participants came from a wide array of institutions governed by various bodies, including but not limited to APsA. Thus, we shifted our focus and our title to The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis.

Conceptualizations of Race Used for the Commission Study

The Commission's work recognized several aspects of race. We considered "race" as a social construct invented and perpetuated to support systemic racism. We recognized "racialism" as the exposure of all members of a society to ideas and narratives that influence individual thoughts and perceptions about members of racialized groups. We defined "racist acts" as behaviors 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. We acknowledged "racial enactments" as how ideas around race and racism unconsciously play out in group processes and interpersonal processes. "Systemic racism" was the main interest of the study, which we understood to be a system that produces advantages for some people in a dominant racial group through the oppression of people in a non-dominant racial group. These structural elements of racism are embedded in individual psyches and institutional practices and can be ubiquitous, operating outside the conscious awareness of the individual or institution carrying or practicing systemic racism.

The Commission also recognized that how racialized groups are named is controversial and unresolved. Many fields struggle with this issue with the intent to adopt approaches that are not a capitulation to Euro-white normativity. The Commission adopted the convention of using upper case for African American and Black and lower case for white, while recognizing that “white” and “black” are labels for racialized groups. We understood that the matter of racial naming is evolving. In naming Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), we realized that BIPOC represents a very diverse group of people. However, given the relatively small representation of people of color in the field of psychoanalysis, we reluctantly opted to group all people who were not white into a single group, labeled BIPOC, for data analysis purposes.

Methods of Data Gathering and Analysis and Organization of the Final Report

The Commission’s project was an evaluative study to determine in what ways and to what degree systemic racism is manifest in psychoanalytic institutions and institutional practices, and to recommend ways to limit negative impact of systemic racism in psychoanalytic institutional practices. It was not a research study to prove or disprove systemic racism. A mixed methods design that employed survey instruments and interviews was used to collect data from three groups of participants: faculty, staff, and administrators; candidates associated with training institutes; and professionals who were positioned to enter the field but had not done so. The surveys were developed over an eight-month period using an iterative design process in which major themes to be explored were identified and items for the survey instruments were co-developed by the lead methodologist in collaboration with members of the Commission. Then, draft instruments were piloted with small sets of potential participants, and revisions were made to improve clarity. The final versions of the survey were administered on-line using Qualtrics survey software. Survey data was collected in four waves between September 17 and December

12, 2021. The surveys covered five themes: institutes' efforts to understand and address race and racism; issues with race from recruitment through mentoring after graduation, occurrence and response to racial enactments; curriculum, racism as an analytic lens, and supervision; and the experience of race on the couch.

Approximately 7,400 potential participants were invited to participate across the four waves. In total, 2,259 responses were received of which 1,990 were members of the groups of interest. The remaining 269 volunteers who were psychoanalytically identified and wanted to offer information on race but did not fall into one of the three participant groups were offered the opportunity to do so via a post-survey questionnaire, and thereby contributed to our field data noted below. Analyses of survey responses were conducted separately for each group of participants and were examined both collectively for all respondents and separately for people who identify as BIPOC or as white.

Small group interviews were conducted to probe more deeply into specific topics. All interviewers participated in a one-hour training and used a semi-structured protocol to guide interviews. The sample of interview participants was selected based first on a survey item that asked whether the respondent would be willing to participate in an interview. Of the approximately 600 people who expressed willingness to be interviewed, 80 faculty members, 70 candidates, and 20 people who were qualified to but had not entered the field were invited to participate, of which 53, 55, and 18, respectively, were interviewed. To obtain a diverse range of views, when selecting participants first priority was given to people who identified as 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. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and were

video recorded. Following the completion of the interviews, the interviewers used a report template to provide written summaries of each theme addressed in the interviews. Together, the summary reports and review of the recordings were used to inform a 29-page interview report which is included in the Evaluative Study Appendices of the Commission's Report.

Please note that in some items in the survey, participants were given space to express their views that racism did not exist within psychoanalysis or did not negatively influence psychoanalysis. We also specifically invited such participants to participate in the small group interviews in which they again were able to express and elaborate their views.

Data from the field was the third source of data. Data from the field included a variety of information provided through personal experiences of the Commissioners, communications on listservs, professional publications, and conference presentations.

A fourth source of data was the Commission process itself in which the Commission engaged for over two years, over which time the study was designed, conducted, analyzed, and reflected upon, including the Commission's own enactments, to inform the main findings and recommendations. Data from all four sources -- the survey, the small group interviews, reports from the field, and the Commission's own process -- comprised the key findings of the study.

Overview of Findings

The principal findings for each theme are given below.

1. Understanding and Addressing Racism

- Many faculty and candidates feel personally inadequate to address issues of race, racism, and white supremacy.

- Many psychoanalytic faculty and candidate members of psychoanalytic institutions experience an inadequate institutional response to issues of race, racism, and white supremacy when they arise. Candidates experience this lack more than faculty, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) members experience this paucity the most, including in supervision.
- BIPOC members of psychoanalytic institutions feel the most vulnerable about racial issues in their institutional lives, reporting that white members have advantages in institute life that they do not have and that these advantages are enhanced by higher degree status such as having a medical degree.
- BIPOC members experience little proactive effort by their institutions to address issues of race.

2. Recruitment through Mentoring in Psychoanalytic Training

- Currently, recruitment relies too heavily on word of mouth. The lack of vigorous and broad recruitment outreach favors the continuance of a predominantly white membership in psychoanalytic institutions.
- BIPOC applicants experience the processes of admission as significantly less welcoming than white applicants.
- Even when there are objective criteria and data for progression, those criteria are not reliably used. There is little recognition that subjective assessments are necessarily prejudiced by white supremacy.
- Significantly more white faculty and candidates than BIPOC faculty and candidates reported that their institutions offered mentorship, support, and opportunities for professional connection.

- White candidates and faculty compared to BIPOC candidates and faculty underestimated the negative impact of racial incidents and structural barriers (such as rigidities in curricula, financial costs, and accessibility to training sites) on whether BIPOC candidates will be able to complete their training.

3. Curriculum, Racism as an Analytic Lens, and Supervision in Psychoanalytic Education

- Faculty and candidates irrespective of their race agreed that psychoanalytic curricula do not adequately address race and racism, including that BIPOC subjects and authors are not adequately represented.
- Candidates are not adequately trained to apply racial awareness to analysis.
- Though freedom to choose supervisors was widely reported, it was acknowledged by a notable minority of candidates that race and ethnicity should be considered in selecting supervisors.
- A majority of candidates and faculty reported inadequate discussion of race and racism in supervision.
- Curricular representation of race is typically token, as in one course, a class, or an optional, secondary offering, creating undue and unmetabolized pressures, sometimes with explosive and destructive results for candidates and the instructors in those singular, isolated, and siloed offerings.
- Candidates perceive themselves to be more comfortable than instructors in discussing race. This perception is more pronounced among BIPOC candidates.
- Faculty in APsA institutes report being less comfortable in discussing race than faculty in independent institutes.

- BIPOC faculty and candidates are more likely to raise issues of race and racism, and with more understanding, than their white counterparts even when adverse reactions may occur such as unworked through enactments.

4. Enactments and Responses

- Racial enactments were reported to be ubiquitous.
- The vast majority of racial enactments happened in public –for example in classrooms, online forums, community events, and committees.
- Despite the thorniness of dealing with racial enactments, a strong desire for change was expressed.
- Fear of retaliation for addressing race is intense and widespread. Both BIPOC and white candidates were wary of being seduced into carrying the lion’s share of the work to be done on race, only to be too often tokenized, pathologized, or problematized in doing so, or conversely, dismissed or erased. White faculty and candidates were fearful of showing racism or ignorance. These strong subjective states among BIPOC and white faculty and candidates can lead to superficial and ineffectual engagement of race and racism, and even stasis.
- The Commission itself experienced, recognized, and processed its own enactments.
- The Commission enactments were inevitable given that all of the Commissioners were born into societies structured around racism, though in radically different and asymmetric ways.
- While carrying various affects and defenses about its enactments, including anger, disappointment, denial, and withdrawal, collectively over time and multiple

instances, the Commission embraced its own racial enactments as rich opportunities for working through by doing in-depth process work. In that work the Commission scattered and then reformed as a generative collective, enabling us to complete our work and to write about and publish a paper on the value of process work for the holding of and reduction in inevitable racial enactments, as reported in the Commission's article in *The American Psychoanalyst* (Winter/Spring 2023), which is included in the Appendices.

5. The Experience of Race on the Couch

Some of the findings in this section are more inferential and more speculative given the analytic dyad is a private space and because the survey of this study did not address this matter as fully as some other themes. However, what is reported is gathered from field data and clinical examples and reflections from both BPOC and white scholars on race.

- A majority of faculty (including but not limited to Training or Personal Analysts) reported that they had no preparation to apply racial awareness to psychoanalysis.
- Analysts may tend to reinterpret experiences with racism as something else (such as birth order).
- Some African American graduate analysts may feel that they are not considered by the powers that be to be suitable or desirable Training Analysts.
- There is a persistent view that BIPOC psychoanalytic patients don't exist, even in large racially diverse metropolitan areas.

- Those in powerful positions as psychoanalytic policy setters and educators are perceived as blocking inclusion of topics such as race, racism, and white supremacy in the core curriculum.
- BIPOC analysts sometimes search for similarity of racialized suffering when choosing an analyst, thinking this will facilitate analysis of race. The possibility that the selected analyst may not be prepared for such work based on denial of their own racial heritage was sometimes not recognized.
- Although some institutes reach out to supervisees and analysts in East Asia as a diversity effort, this belies their failure to recognize the centrality of systemic racism within American psychoanalytic institutions and the concurrent lack of American BIPOC candidates and faculty.

Recommendations

In general, American psychoanalysis lacks local or national leaders who acknowledge the presence and deleterious effects of systemic racism in psychoanalytic institutions or who allay the massive resistance to grasping and resolving systemic racism within psychoanalysis. To address these lacks, American psychoanalysis needs:

- Local and national leaders who strongly support meaningful initiatives to address and remediate systemic racism in psychoanalytic institutions.
- Leaders who develop meaningful and comprehensive strategies to combat systemic racism at multiple administrative levels including mission statements, value statements, and policies and procedures, with means for regular monitoring and remediation of expressions of systemic racism at all levels of institutional life. Monitoring should include but not be limited to classes, supervision, curriculum,

committees and boards, educational programming, publications, and the consultation room.

- Local and national leaders who will obtain regular consultation from experts in racial equity and other aspects of intersectionality to increase the likelihood of their success in their efforts to enhance racial and other equities and promote inclusion.
- Leaders who will form and join collective frameworks for support and to solidify their resolve to stay the long course required to achieve racial and other equities.

Finally, this Commission Report is being issued at a time of great upheaval within American psychoanalysis regarding acknowledgement and acceptance that the “social” is deeply embedded in and inseparable from the psyche and therefore, is an essential focus for psychoanalytic thought and practice. This broadened, more inclusive, and informed view on what is essentially psychoanalytic is being enthusiastically embraced by many, but also being met with fierce resistance. That resistance has been widely experienced as dismissive and contemptuous, leading to acts by leadership that have been experienced as authoritarian, exclusionary, and destructive.

The current tension about race in American psychoanalysis has important historical precedents. Freud “othered” and then extruded early psychoanalytic pioneers who differed from him. They were considered deviant. American psychoanalysis was built on exclusion by limiting training to physicians until the force of a lawsuit required unencumbered disciplinary inclusion. There was decades-long silence among psychoanalysts about the Holocaust. The persistent silence delayed for much too long exploration and understanding of the fact that the Nazis used racialization of and racism towards Jewish people to support and defend the Holocaust.

LGBTQIA+ people were unwelcome and considered unfit for psychoanalytic treatment or training as analysts. These sad facts of psychoanalytic history harmed many people and diminished the discipline of psychoanalysis. In each instance, positive changes have been made and are still being made.

Psychoanalysis can now make another positive change and embrace and build on the growing understanding of the essential importance of racial awareness in psychoanalysis. The Commission found that psychoanalysis is being devitalized by its wide-spread lack of racial awareness or racial inclusion. Will American psychoanalysis seize this moment to use The Holmes Commission findings and recommendations as scaffolding to do hard, long, and fruitful work on race and other aspects of intersectionality? Will American psychoanalysis choose leaders who will uplift and stand behind this work unequivocally to make American psychoanalysis more vital and credible in our increasingly diverse world?

In the United States, beginning in 1964, for the country's sake, a visionary leader rose to the country's need, a leader whose history was drenched in his own personal and systemic racism. Nevertheless, his actions turned the nation forcefully and fruitfully towards wholeness by promoting, encouraging, protecting, and then signing into legislation the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He withstood withering opposition and was undeterred. That leader was President Lyndon Baines Johnson. President Johnson accepted the wise counsel of Martin Luther King, Jr. who shared with Johnson his view that there were "new white elements," (King, 1998, pp. 242-243) including Johnson himself, whose love of country was stronger than the grip of racism. Will American psychoanalysis do the same on the race questions of today within psychoanalysis by heeding the wisdom of many among us who are eloquently and incisively calling for racial and other equities in psychoanalytic thought and

practice? The Holmes Commission hopes it will, so that American psychoanalysis can claim and celebrate its truer liberatory self.

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