

The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality

In American Psychoanalysis



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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 American psychoanalysis. The Commission's work product will be based on the study of American psychoanalytic institutes, training centers and societies within and across different organizational auspices.

A Message from The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis

January 3, 2024

Dear Psychoanalytic Colleagues,

The Holmes Commission (HC) welcomes this opportunity to be in contact with a wide-ranging psychoanalytic community across multiple governing bodies including The Psychoanalytic Consortium (The American Academy of Psychodynamic Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, the Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies, and the Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychodynamic Psychology/Division 39 of the American Psychological Association), Black Psychoanalysts Speak, and the International Psychoanalytic Association. Over the six months since the release of our Final Report on Juneteenth, we have observed and processed a large variety of responses to the Commission's work. Clearly, the work has been evocative and engaging for most who have posted on the listservs or have contacted the Commission directly. We continue to appreciate and reflect on these reactions.

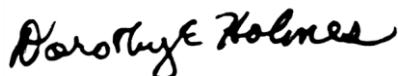
We write to you currently for three reasons:

1. We invite you to submit in writing your experiences in reflecting on and employing the work of The Holmes Commission for the Commission's use in an additional evaluative study we may do on the challenges faced in efforts to reduce systemic racism in psychoanalysis. We would like to be able to use the **essence** of what you have to say, **not** your name nor any other personal identifier. We think such a study will provide further guidance to individuals and institutions that are engaged in the work to achieve intersectional equality in psychoanalysis. **If you submit your experiences, please indicate that we may use your responses in the additional evaluative study without using your name or any personal identifiers. Please send your responses to our new dedicated email address: contact@holmescommission.org**
2. The following Methodology Statement explaining how we constructed the HC study is intended to be responsive to your curiosity, valued questions, and some concerns about and possibly some misunderstandings about the design of the HC study. We hope this statement is clarifying and facilitates any additional responses you have about the knowledge generated by the study.

3. On Friday, February 9, 2024, The Holmes Commission will present a forum at the APsA meetings from 4:30pm to 6:30 pm. Please come and share how you have used the HC's work individually and institutionally, whether it has helped, what challenges within psychoanalysis remain regarding systemic racism, and how we can work together to move forward.

We invite you to review the following Methodology Statement and hope that you will send us your experiences for our new evaluative study. We look forward to seeing you in February at our APsA forum.

Cordially, with best wishes to all in this season of multicultural celebrations of light, love, and hope,



Dorothy E. Holmes, PhD

Chair, The Holmes Commission

Co-Chairs: Anton Hart, PhD, Dionne R. Powell, MD, and Beverly J. Stoute, MD

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Enclosed:

1. **Final Report of The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis January 2, 2023**
Methodology Statement: Michael Russell, Ph.D.

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

January 2, 2023

Methodology Statement

Michael Russell, PhD¹

There have been queries about the methodology and methods used to collect and analyze data for The Holmes Commission Report. As the Commission Methodologist, I have prepared this statement in hopes of clarifying the report’s methodologies and methods and minimizing confusion and misunderstanding.

As I explore in my most recent book, *Systemic Racism and Educational Measurement* (2023), racialized ideology, which sociologist Joe Feagin (2020) terms the “white racial frame,” continues to influence social science in multiple ways. Paul Feyerabend, philosopher of science, and Theodore Porter, historian of science, document that one such influence uses methodology and methods as tools to control what qualifies as legitimate knowledge and what does not. In their historical analysis of the evolution of the concept of objectivity, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison similarly unveil ways in which the embrace of a limited set of methods has functioned to define what type of knowledge generation qualifies as objective and what does not. Newly generated knowledge that challenges the status quo is called into question through critique of the methodology and methods employed to generate that new knowledge, rather than through direct contestation of that knowledge. In effect, the focus on methodology and methods shifts conversation away from the new knowledge itself and instead directs attention to procedures and

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questions the legitimacy of the individuals who generated that new knowledge. While I am concerned about aiding this shift from the knowledge itself to the methodology and methods employed to generate that knowledge, given the volume of commentary and what I view as misunderstandings conveyed through that commentary, I feel it is important to respond.

In what follows, I respond to four themes I have observed in recent listserv posts. These include: distinguishing between methodology and methods, and the importance of designing a study based on the research/evaluative questions; the value of being transparent about assumptions, prior understandings, and working definitions; a dated conception of content validity; and the evaluative nature of the study and the importance of transparency given the challenging topic of the study.

The Difference between Methodology and Methods

Although the terms methodology and methods are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. Methodology focuses on schools of thought about how knowledge and understanding are generated and the assumptions associated with each such school of thought. Methods are the specific tools, instruments, and techniques employed within a given methodology. For example, surveying is a methodology that understands that inferences/statements/knowledge about a population can be made based on the collection of information from a sample that is used to represent that population. In survey methodology, different methods for sampling members of a population, different methods of collecting information from that sample, and different methods of analyzing the resulting data can be employed. For example, a variety of methods can be used to collect information such as interviews, focus groups, records, questionnaires, cognitive tests, psychological scales, and other forms of data collection instruments. Another type of methodology is experimental design that recognizes that controlled

manipulation of a variable or set of variables of interest provides knowledge about the effect/impact/influence the variable(s) has on an outcome of interest. As part of an experimental design, many of the same methods of data collection employed for a survey study could be used to collect information about an outcome of interest. For example, a cognitive test might measure mathematics knowledge or skills, a psychological scale might be used to measure levels of depression, or a questionnaire could be used to collect information about attitudes or beliefs.

Although some researchers strongly embrace a given methodology, it is more important that the methodology adopted for a given study is driven by the research questions of interest rather than one's attraction to the methodology itself. Similarly, the methods employed for the study must be informed by the research questions, the methodology adopted to explore those questions, and other factors such as available resources, time available to conduct the study, the burden that a given method presents for participants, and, in some cases, the concerns, considerations, or preferences of institutional research boards or funders.

The Holmes Commission study began with the Commissioners generating a variety of questions related to the various ways in which systemic racism may influence practices within training institutions and the field of psychoanalysis more broadly, and how these influences may be experienced by various members of the psychoanalytic community. In this way, the study was intended to be evaluative in nature, with the primary aim of providing institutes and other members of the psychoanalytic community with information specific to these questions, which could then be used to deepen understanding of these various influences and experiences in hopes of reflecting on current practices and identifying opportunities to strengthen training programs and the field of psychoanalysis. The methods employed to gather information included: a set of questionnaires administered to select sub-groups who were members of the psychoanalytic

community or who were positioned to become members; follow-up small group interviews with a sub-set of respondents to the questionnaires; documents and other materials; data from the field, which was a variety of information provided through personal experiences of the Commissioners, communications on listservs, professional publications, and conference presentations; and the Commission process itself. It should be noted that the study design, recruiting materials, and instruments used in The Holmes Commission's study were submitted to and approved by the Boston College Institutional Review Board. These sources of information were analyzed using a variety of methods to identify key patterns, findings, and illustrative examples intended to provide information that institutes and members of the psychoanalytic community could reflect upon and use to inform actions aimed at further strengthening training programs and the field of psychoanalysis.

It is important to note that experimental design methodology is used to establish causal relationships between variables. The study of systemic racism, however, does not fall into that category for the simple reason that systemic racism cannot be manipulated in an experimental manner. Given the purpose of The Holmes Commission's study – to provide information for training programs and the field of psychoanalysis to reflect upon and to inform potential actions – an experimental design methodology was not appropriate for the research questions posed.

The Ordinarity of Systemic Racism

Given the fraught topics of race and systemic racism that were the focus of the evaluative study, and given various understandings of both race and systemic racism that operate in society today, The Holmes Commission began its work by defining how race and systemic racism were understood for this study. Through its definition of systemic racism, The Holmes Commission made clear its understanding that systemic racism was ordinary in the regions (the United States

and Canada) that provided the context for data collection. Systemic racism exists and is in operation at all times in ways that are both visible and invisible. In addition, systemic racism operates in a complex manner that involves individuals, institutions, and structural elements of our society. The Holmes Commission was also clear in its understanding of race as a social construct that was developed and continues to evolve in response to the corporeal and cultural characteristics of the people who are oppressed. As I explore in my book, oppression of a group of people precedes the identification of corporeal and cultural markers that are then used to differentiate the oppressed group from those who benefit from that oppression.

Whether one agrees with these conceptions of race and systemic racism is not of direct import; rather what is valuable is the Commission's clarity regarding its definition of these terms and its assumptions regarding the ordinary nature of racism. Although much of social science fails to provide definitions of these terms or to be clear about its operational assumptions, The Holmes Commission felt it was important to do so. By doing so, The Holmes Commission made clear that the purpose of the study was not to demonstrate or "prove" that racism exists. Just as an aeronautical scientist operates with an assumption that gravity exists and thus does not begin an aeronautical study by proving the existence of gravity, The Holmes Commission acknowledged its understanding that systemic racism was ordinary. The Holmes Commission could then begin its study by focusing on the various ways systemic racism may impact training programs and the experiences of various current and potential members of the psychoanalytic community.

The Concept of Validity

The concept of validity has evolved considerably since it was first introduced a century ago. Initially, validity focused on the degree to which an instrument "measured" what it

purported to measure. Soon thereafter correlation analyses were used to examine the degree to which information provided by an instrument was consistent with other information about what the instrument purported to measure, which is called concurrent validity. As cognitive test instruments were increasingly used in K-12 schools in the 1930s to measure student achievement, the idea of content validity was introduced and focused on the degree to which the content of a test represented the content of what was taught or was supposed to be taught. Approximately twenty years later, the concept of construct validity was introduced. Initially, construct validity focused both on the degree to which evidence supported the existence of a given construct and on the extent to which evidence supported that a given instrument provided a measure of that construct. Over time, however, the field of psychological and educational measurement limited application of construct validity to the degree to which an instrument measured a targeted psychological or cognitive trait(s)/construct.

For several decades, the field of psychological and educational measurement operated with multiple types of validity, content validity being one type that focused on the degree to which the content of an instrument was representative of a domain of interest. In the 1980s, Samuel Messick, a psychometrician at the Educational Testing Service, introduced the notion of a unified concept of validity. In effect, Messick's concept recognized that there were multiple sources of validity evidence that should be collected based on the purpose for developing the instrument, the inferences intended to be made based on information provided by the instrument, and the intended uses of those inferences. Shortly thereafter, the body that develops and maintains the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, a collaboration of the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council for Measurement in Education, modified its definition of validity to focus not

on types of validity, but instead on sources of evidence. Content is one source of evidence recognized by the current standards. As such, evidence specific to content continues to emphasize the degree to which the content represented by the items/questions forming an instrument reflects and is representative of the domains targeted by the instrument.

Initially, The Holmes Commission study devoted approximately three months to identifying and clarifying the domains of interest that were to be targeted by the survey instrument. Approximately five months were then spent generating items/questions for each targeted domain to reflect various ways in which systemic racism might be at play within each domain. When generating these items/questions, care was taken to minimize jargon or technical terms that could be understood in different ways by participants. For example, The Holmes Commission opted to remove the term “microaggression” from all but two items/questions due to differences in the technical meaning of this term versus its common understanding. Chester Pierce, the first Black psychiatrist on the faculty of Harvard Medical School invented the term “microaggression” (*Offensive Mechanisms*, 1970) to refer to the “subtle and stunning” single offenses of anti-Black racism, while today the term is more commonly applied to any comment that can be interpreted as offensive by a given person or group of people. In the Commission’s two items /questions where “microaggressions” was employed, the phrasing “racial microaggressions and other discriminatory practices” was used for clarity.

The Holmes Commission questionnaire was piloted with members of the psychoanalytic field who were not involved in its development, who provided critical feedback on the clarity of questions. This feedback was then used to modify items/questions prior to a second round of pilot testing. In these ways, the content of the questionnaire was developed to be representative of the targeted domains, limit use of terminology that may be interpreted in different ways by

participants, and use phrasing that was clear to participants – practices that are aligned with a modern conception of content related evidence of validity.

Transparency

As noted earlier, the study was evaluative in nature and sharply focused on ways in which systemic racism may impact training programs, participants in those programs, and the field of psychoanalysis more generally. As such, it was essential to hear from those whose experiences have been influenced by various forms of racism and to elevate their voices/experiences. But it was also important to hear from people who do not feel racism affected either training programs or the field of psychoanalysis. Although many of the items on the questionnaire focused on various forms and potential influences of systemic racism (again, given The Holmes Commission’s understanding that systemic racism is ordinary), response options were provided that allowed participants to offer counter perspectives. In addition, a substantial number of open-ended response items were employed that allowed participants to share any information or perspectives they felt were important for The Holmes Commission to hear. When selecting participants for the group interviews, invitations were sent to all participants who volunteered to be interviewed and who indicated that racism was not impactful/present/problematic. Every such invited participant who agreed to be interviewed was included in the group interview process. Because people who do not identify as white are negatively affected by various forms of racism, all those in that category who volunteered to be interviewed were sent invitations for participate. Due to budget constraints, the remaining participants who volunteered to be interviewed were randomly selected until the maximum number of interviewees the budget allowed had agreed to be interviewed. In this way, the methods used to collect information from respondents and to select participants for the group interviews allowed participants to express diverse views.

Given the evaluative nature of the study, transparency with respect to the questions asked and the responses received was essential to aid interpretation by the Commissioners and by the readers of the final report. To this end, the appendix included all selected-response items/questions asked on the survey instrument, summary statistics including the number of respondents for all items, and the demographic composition of the participants, as well as the statistical results for all analyses in which responses between specific sub-groups of participants yielded a statistically significant difference. In addition, the full summary report generated based on the group interviews was included as an appendix in the report. In this way, the study was far more transparent than the vast majority of publicly-released evaluative studies.

I acknowledge that the above points do not address the full set of issues raised regarding methodology and methods. I do not dismiss the value of thoughtful, critical perspectives on the choice of methodology and methods when made within the context of the questions a study sets out to address. If I were to critically review the statistical methods used to compare patterns of responses between select sub-groups, one issue I would raise focuses on multiplicity and the absence of adjustments to tests of statistical significance to control for Type I error (that is falsely rejecting the null hypothesis when it is in fact correct, otherwise known as falsely concluding there is a difference when there is not). Multiplicity occurs when the same set of participants is used to conduct multiple tests of statistical significance – in this case, making numerous separate comparisons of item responses between the same sub-groups. If such a criticism were raised, I would acknowledge it as a legitimate concern while also recalling the primary purpose of the study – to provide information to encourage reflection and action. From my perspective, it seems more useful to encourage more reflection by being liberal in identifying potential ways in which views and experiences differ between groups than to miss a potential real difference. That is, in

an evaluative study, I would rather accept a Type I error than a Type II error (rejecting a true difference).

Focus on Newly Generated Knowledge

This response is not intended to suggest that criticism of methodology and methods is not valuable. Rather, this statement is intended to encourage such criticism to focus on methodological and technical issues directly relevant to the purpose and questions the study was designed to address. Readers of the report are encouraged to be aware of the pull to focus on spurious critiques of methodology and methods rather than having a conversation about newly generated knowledge that challenges existing practices and paradigms.