

Is Diversity A Real Issue In Psychology?

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Political correctness is defined as the standards developed by leaders in a group that are applied to language, ideas, policies, or behaviors and are designed to minimize any suggestion of offense to one's gender, race, physical disability, ethnicity, age or other identity factor. The term "politically incorrect" is defined as someone who does not meet a specified standard of political correctness. Now, clearly, there is a difference between being insensitive, mean, and moronic and behavior that addresses stupidity. We should all strive to be kind and nice to others as much as we can. However, we should never be deterred from speaking out about various issues that clearly are ridiculous and do affect our profession and practice. Being labeled can sometimes also be a badge of honor.

Diversity As Diversion

With respect to race, gender, and sexual orientation, the quest for diversity by psychology as a profession has occupied APA leadership for many years. Actually, many decades. Attempts to attract minority groups into psychology began in the early 1970s and continues until now. A noble goal. Like any treatment plan, however, at what point do we look at the data and decide what we accomplished and where do we go from that point forward. I think that psychology's diversity programs have become a diversion. Identity politics expends too many resources and time while challenging credulity. The worse part about APA's approach is that it has fostered divisiveness. Why do I say this? Even a cursory look at APA statistics clearly show that psychology has achieved and exceeded diversity on every level. Thus, it is time to move on. At this point, there is a strong argument, supported by the data, that we have entered into outright discrimination, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a high level of both subterfuge and comedy.

Let's look at the facts. APA policy mandates and provides special consideration to members who are female, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and racial and ethnic minorities. The APA membership comprises 54% female and 48% male. About 0.2 % are Native American, some 2% are Latinos, 2% Asian, and about 2% African American. In the Council of Representatives and other APA governance bodies, the percentages of the above groups are approximately twice their number in the membership. I'm not sure what the correct percentage of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transsexuals are because, I suspect that no matter how open APA may appear, there are members who keep their identities to themselves. The APA Board of Directors, staff members and elected members comprise about 50% of members from the target groups. It would appear from these numbers that diversity has not only been achieved but surpassed.

So why the continued emphasis on more diversity? Some in APA say that we need to continue with these programs until psychology mirrors the general population. Given this logic, which really is ridiculous, psychology will never achieve diversity. Why? Well, for one thing, the general population is always changing. Immigration, differential birth and death rates, and out migration are just some of the variables that change the profile of the general population. In fact, the "general" population is only a snapshot in time. Populations are dynamic and not static. APA would like to keep everyone busy thinking

that year after year the population profile remains constant. If not, what would they do with all the sensitivity training and other silly programs that take money away from practice issues and practitioners? And, why should they stop now? This is another part of the diversion. It's a shell game by APA executives who use diversity to supply the rationale for high salaries. In fact, the CEO of APA receives a higher salary than Barack Obama does as president of the United States. There are staff members in APA whose salaries exceed \$200,000. This does not mean that these people were chosen simply for their identity. Nevertheless, APA uses diversity and statistics to show that this was a significant factor.

Trying to achieve the elusive population equity ratio in psychology has no merit whatsoever because individuals decide what they want to study and what profession they want to enter. What arrogance for psychology to decide that African American students need to become psychologists instead of physicians, lawyers, engineers, or whatever. If any group is under represented in any profession is it because of discrimination or choice? If it's discrimination there are laws to protect against it and those laws should be prosecuted. Does anyone really believe that African Americans, Latinos, women, lesbians and others are not entering psychology because they are being prevented? If there is proof that these target groups are being excluded from graduate programs, then APA should expose and simply "decertify" those programs. Nevertheless, the only discrimination that I can see is against intelligence. When one looks at APA membership, all of the diversity groups either mirror or exceed their numbers in psychology. I applaud APA for reaching these goals. Now, however, it's time to declare victory and move on. To continue to focus on this issue simply takes psychology away from more crucial issues.

So Why Does This Matter?

Generally, I really don't care what goes on in APA. I care about NAPPP. But APA does have influence on the public and with Boards of Psychology. Much of what they do filters down to practitioners. For example, almost every board requires practitioners to have diversity training through CEs. There is an insinuation that practitioners, unless sensitized and trained, cannot treat patients who happen to be in some group or other. Practitioners can also be disciplined for not exhibiting APA style sensitivity. And, some of the things that APA does is outright embarrassing to psychologists and psychology. NAPPP does care about this.

For example, I recently read several posts from APA leaders and representatives that are astounding in their honesty. One representative wrote:

"Ethnic minority Council of Representatives members have all Council related expenses paid to attend Council meetings (travel, lodging, meals, etc.). Other Council members must have their division or state association pay a large portion of the expenses or the Council member, who is not a member of an ethnic minority, must pay the portion not covered by APA out of his/her own pocket. This was passed by Council, and renewed by Council, to provide incentives to divisions and states to select ethnic minorities."

The problem with this is that there is no diversity issue at the Council level and the practice is outright discrimination. Is there any data that shows ethnic minority members are getting paid less than other members and can't afford being on Council? So, here again, money is being misspent that could go to practice. It's embarrassing to see the practice of discrimination within APA.

In another post, a different council representative reported the wacky things that really go on in council. Note: I am producing the post verbatim. I did, however, edit out extraneous comments that have nothing to do with the issue.

"Our national organization is hemorrhaging rational thought and behavior - the result of a kind of an institutional thrombopsychopenia, by my way of thinking. We have lost the self-righting, homeostatic capacity necessary for survival as an entity that can remain viable in the world outside, and have bled out any semblance of who we really are (or, more accurately, who we used to be). One could probably sit through an entire Council meeting and mistakenly assume that you are in a '60s era campus sit in, complete, at various times, with songs, chanting and loud, repetitive proclamations of one's primary identity really adds any credibility to one's point from a rational perspective. Identity politics has completely taken over APA."

"Case in point - the second of the two day COR meeting in Boston occurred on Sunday after the convention itself. The major event that Sunday morning was our biannual "diversity training." We were asked to pair off and discuss what we had done to increase diversity in our individual corners of the world while the diversity mentors walked around and listened in. (Before proceeding, I should confess that I hadn't done a damn thing. My life, from sun up to very late, is consumed with seeing patients, lots and lots of patients - you wouldn't believe how many - and doing my best to treat them. Truth is, by all accounts, I do a pretty decent job. My patients' demographics reflect those of my community - about 60% are white, 35% black, 5% other; approximately 55% female, 45% male, ages 18 to 96, mostly middle and lower SES, etc. I've somehow apparently managed to take care of my patients reasonably well without "diversity training" for the past 29+ years of full-time practice. Just blind luck, I suppose.) Anyway, we were suddenly interrupted by one of our diversity mentors who breathlessly announced the exciting news that X university, as a result of the actions of one of our COR members, had agreed to set aside one restroom in each campus building as a "unisex" restroom. Tears, hugs, applause and a general sense of euphoria enveloped our meeting room. Don't get me wrong, I don't have anything against "unisex" restrooms - I just don't think that the major thrust of our organization should revolve around the relative availability of toilets. I'm sure that there are multiple politico-social entities that devote a considerable amount of time and money to such initiatives, I just don't think APA needs to be so completely absorbed with such matters."

This council representative concludes the post by saying:

"I bet you didn't realize that your dues are being spent for us to sit in meetings focusing on this kind of stuff, now did you. You probably thought that we were focused entirely on the broad interests of psychology, both science and practice. If you did, you're generally wrong. Hold us accountable - it seems we can't manage to do it ourselves."

The World of psychology is not APA

Yes, I am politically incorrect because I do not want to be associated with an organization that waves the victory flag for unisex toilets, which I admit I have several in my house. My wish is to have thousands of psychologists kick the APA habit and also become politically incorrect. NAPPP's position on diversity is that we are a voluntary practice organization. We do not practice, promote, or accept purposeful insensitivity or discrimination that we can do something about. We want everyone to be respectful to each other. We expect that educated professionals are above these mal-behaviors. We believe that practice issues are similar for every practitioner. Once licensed and in practice, we do not see that any member of any particular group has it more difficult or easier than any other member of an identity group. We all are in the same boat.

Consistent with this policy, we solicit and accept membership from any psychologist who qualifies for membership. We do not ask or care about your gender, sexual orientation, color, or ethnicity. We do not keep statistics on any of this. We do not care what type of restroom you inhabit. If you do not know where to go by now, we don't think guidelines from us will help. We don't embarrass our members and we don't want to be embarrassed. In essence, we focus on advocacy for practice issues, free CE education for members, and healthcare. We do not utilize or subscribe to social engineering and we welcome members from every legitimate political perspective.

APA policies are leading this profession to some real contradictions. For example, as women comprise a greater proportion in psychology, will APA start a diversity program to attract more males until we have number equality? Should they provide disincentives to females so male membership will increase? If gays and lesbians exceed their numbers in the membership, will APA seek to exclude them until heterosexuals come up in numbers? And, what about racial and ethnic minorities. Will APA stop encouraging programs to solicit and give tuition help until Caucasians increase in numbers? This is precisely the type of stupidity that has engulfed APA and, by extension, our profession. We need to get back to practice issues. If anything, APA needs a diversity program for practitioners. So the questions that need to be asked are: Does APA really deserve to be rewarded with your dues? Should time be devoted to programs that have little justification? Should any psychology organization pay a CEO a higher salary than the president of the United States? Do unisex restrooms matter? Should your dues continue to perpetuate discrimination against one group of members to advance another that already has achieved or exceeded parity?

