

A Look Within

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The mission of CPA's CARE committee is to raise awareness about the importance of self-care and provide education and resources for the psychological community. We recognize that self-care takes many forms and for many psychologists of color, there are additional stresses and challenges that require different kinds of support and methods of self-preservation. In order to be attuned to the needs of our colleagues of color, and for us to deepen our empathy for the challenges that are experienced by many, we feel it is important to look within our organizations for sources of stress and of support.

CPA provided a heartfelt statement to their membership following the brutal murder of George Floyd. There was recognition and acknowledgement that it is not enough to speak to issues of race, often yielding only lip service. We also need to make anti-racist action steps.

CPA stands against racism in all its forms, and as members of the psychology community we stand in solidarity with those impacted by marginalization and systemic oppression. We must work to change the national narrative. We will take steps as your professional organization, and we ask our members to commit to just one step you can take in working with others in the community to combat racism and protect vulnerable populations.

We as psychologists and mental health professionals, have made a lot more efforts to learn about how to help our clients who come from different walks of life, but have not always paid attention to the needs of our colleagues who belong to marginalized groups. We are generally more willing to acknowledge the pandemic of racism in the larger culture than we are to look within our professional organizations for the same. We tend to have blind spots about ways we, as an organization and profession, are similar to the population at large. Now may be a good time to look inward into our own community and examine the possible systemic roadblocks faced by our African American colleagues and those colleagues who identify as being part of a minority group. Using the metaphor of "roadblocks" (macroaggressions), perhaps we also need to be aware of the potholes (microaggressions) along the way.



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The mission of CARE (Colleague Awareness Resources and Education) is to support the wellness and resilience of California's diverse professional psychology community.

In our work, we have found that we learn to deepen our understanding of each other through stories and narratives. As members of the CARE committee, we felt that one way we could look within our organizations to hear from our colleagues who have experiences that can shed light on this subject. We took on the responsibility of reaching out to our colleagues to understand their experiences as psychologists of color.

We interviewed Drs. Erica Holmes, Kim Finney, and Ron Durán for this article. We spoke to them about their personal experiences as psychologists, professors, and practitioners and asked for their experiences within our profession as people of color. Drs. Holmes and Finney are African American Psychologists (AAP) and Dr. Ron Durán is a gay, Chicano Psychologist. They each have impressive careers and reach. Erica Holmes, PsyD is the Associate Program Chair and the Director of the Psychological Trauma Studies Specialization in the Master's in Psychology program at Antioch University Los Angeles. She has also served as an Executive Director of Champion Counseling Center at Faithful Central Bible Church and is the founder of HOMMs Consulting. Dr. Holmes has provided psychotherapy and counseling, training and consultation, education and research services to individuals and organizations for over 20 years. Dr. Kimberly Finney, PsyD, ABPP, ABMP is a Clinical Associate Professor of the Department of Adult Mental Health & Wellness at University of Southern California. Dr. Finney is Board Certified Clinical Psychologist, and a Board Certified Medical Psychologist. Most recently Dr. Finney published a book, *The Reality of Diversity, Gender, and Skin Color* (Finney & Fitzgerald, 2020). Ron Durán, PhD is an Associate Professor of Psychology with the Los Angeles campus of Alliant International University. He also served as their Associate Provost for Research and Scholarship from 2013-2016. Before joining the Alliant core faculty in 2005, he was a member of a community of researchers who conducted several NIH-sponsored projects at Stanford University and the University of Miami in the areas of HIV/AIDS and breast cancer.

Although their paths have not crossed professionally, Drs. Holmes and Finney both have had very similar experiences in relationship to professional organizations (not specifically CPA). They provided food for thought for ways in which profes-

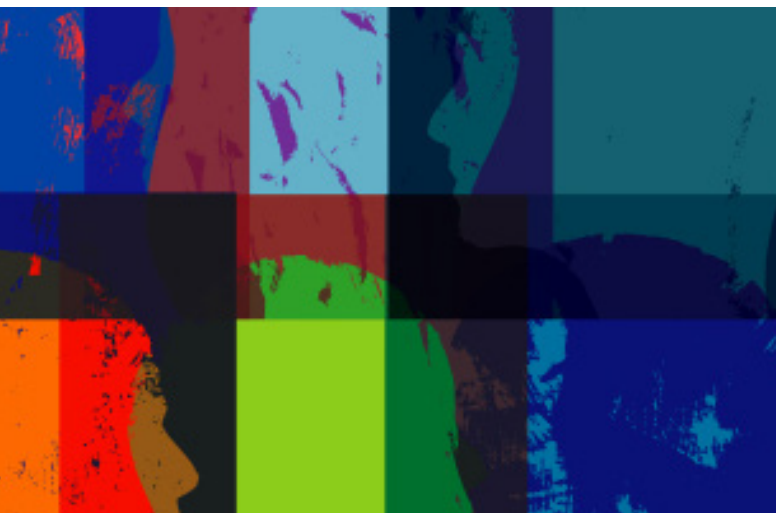
sional organizations can be more attentive to issues of racism that reside within us and how to take an anti-racist stance. Dr. Finney has co-authored a recently published book, *The Reality of Diversity, Gender, and Skin Color: From the Living Room to the Classroom* (2020), which includes a chapter on the *Paradox of doing diversity, equity and inclusion work*. In this chapter, Dr. Finney talks about the lack of effort to recruit psychologists or students of color in predominantly white institutions despite inclusion being a stated goal. Both Drs. Finney and Holmes remarked that they notice a lack of representation on the board of directors, committees, sub-committees, of many psychology and mental health professional organizations. They noted, independently of each other, that this leaves them feeling unwelcome; and that unless this changes they will continue to feel unwelcome as AAPs. Additionally, they noted they do not see any active recruitment efforts to change this picture. However, they both reported feeling more optimistic and hopeful at this point in time, compared to other moments in history when there have been mass protests. The difference, they note, is based in seeing the diversity among the people who have been and continue to protest for social justice and equality in the current movement.

Dr. Holmes stated that noticing the diversity, or the lack thereof, at psychology conferences and committee and board meetings communicates and is an indication of the attention to inclusivity. From her perspective, self-care may look like deciding not to join or dropping out of an organization where you do not feel respected or seen. She posed the question, "When there are yoga classes at a convention, are they led by an African American or a person of color?" Self-care activities at conferences can be absent BIPOC leadership and guidance.

Further, specifically regarding the needs of AAPs, Dr. Holmes expressed concern about the term *BIPOC*. Although it is inclusive of many other marginalized groups who also require social justice healing and repair, it misses the specific need for anti-black-racism for our AAP colleagues. In her experience, this terminology waters down the Black experience and invalidates their oppression felt over generations. BIPOC is not a term of self-description and conflates many different experiences, which can yield further micro and macro-aggressions.

When asked for suggestions for self-care tools, Dr. Holmes provided the following tools that other AAPs may use for self-care:

1. Use a buddy system. Attend conventions or meetings with someone who can validate your experiences.
2. Be aware of your own resources and honor the internal and external resources available to you at any given time.
3. Speak your truth rather than internalize the feelings related to micro or macro aggressions.
4. Have a list of trusted people who can be sounding boards at times like these, who are able to validate your experiences.
5. Engage in activities that are replenishing. E.g. - At conferences and conventions, choose to not attend every session and use that time to exercise instead.



Dr. Durán began his career as an AIDS researcher in the late 1980s. Early in his career, he kept his researcher, gay, and Chicano identities separate due to both internalized and external racism and homophobia. He noted similarities to the current COVID crisis both in diagnosis, treatment and support being much less available to people of color and in people's resistance to using protective measures that could save lives. Dr. Durán still clearly remembers a professor refusing to give him an A, even though he was excelling, because of his ethnicity and sexual preference. Other professors voiced amazement that Dr. Durán wrote English so well, even though he was born in California.

Many years ago, Dr. Durán adopted the term "Talking Armadillo" which is also the name of the consulting firm that he founded. He notes that if we heard an armadillo speak, we would think that it was the brightest thing in the world. Even though Dr. Durán is an accomplished psychologist with an impressive CV, he often questions whether colleagues really see him as capable or they are just mesmerized by the talking armadillo (metaphor for capable professional of color). This long-term lived experience is alienating and stressful.

Although there has been progress since he was in graduate school, Dr. Durán shared some stories to illustrate that systemic racism continues to significantly impact psychology graduate students. Black students have told him about professors being surprised that they are "so articulate." Conversely, students of color are all too often told by supervisors that they are not well-trained, capable or professional if they have English as a second language, interpret through a different cultural lens, or bring discussion of ethnicity into supervision or the therapy room. One student shared; "I feel like a stupid girl".

He described an additional stressor, imposter syndrome. Experienced by some students of color, it can manifest in them not feeling worthy or that they have to do things twice as good in half the time. Dr. Durán notes the additive burden of being a student of color and female, LGBTQI identified and/or living with a disability in institutions geared towards a majority culture.

All these experiences can and do prevent some students from getting help and support from their supervisors and professors, as well as connecting with colleagues. This discomfort with colleagues or reluctance towards help-seeking or joining professional organizations can continue well beyond graduate school. Community building and supportive supervision and consultation is essential for self-care and career growth, as well as inoculation against secondary traumatization and burnout. In addition, each of us misses out on the perspective and innovation that these professionals could bring to our community.

Dr. Durán offered several recommendations that can offset systemic racism in our professional organizations and increase community self-care.

1. We all, no matter how much we think we know, can take the opportunities available to educate ourselves about our biases and the effects of micro and macro-aggression. We can

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strive to be mindful of our messages. Micro-aggression may be difficult to avoid but awareness can mitigate the impact.

2. Provide opportunities for colleagues of color and sometimes specifically black colleagues to meet separately. That may mean that colleagues from other marginalized groups may be grouped in with the majority group. (Dr. Durán offered a personal anecdote of being assigned to a meeting of mostly white colleagues during an Academics for Black Academic Lives program at his university. He understood that he was there to strategize how to recognize and mitigate the effects of institutionalized racism toward his black colleagues and students, not to focus on his own identity as a person of color).
3. Be attentive to students and ECPs who are manifesting imposter syndrome and hiding difficulties. (The authors recommend that we also attend to this potential struggle within ourselves.)
4. Directors of Clinical Training could endeavor to increase student safety and well-being by expanding their awareness of racism and asking informed questions about diversity when considering internship sites for their students.
5. Recognize cultural bias and potential racism when interpreting another's behavior.
6. Colleagues of color often carry the additional weight of supporting students and clients of color within an organization. Majority colleagues can share this responsibility by increasing their education and awareness and let colleagues of color know that they do not have to do this alone.
7. Conference and meeting organizers can prominently display signs of safe space that might include artwork, symbols or other representations of different cultures and schedule race and culture-related presentations, posters and programming during prime times.

He also shared several things that he personally does to decrease micro-aggressions towards him:

1. In his office he prominently displays books and artwork that reflect his ethnicity and identity. This has the dual purpose of creating a safe space for himself to work and educating others about the role of identity in his work as a psychologist.
2. He takes responsibility to be known and to both educate himself about racism and others about how to treat him.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Much of the literature on Diversity and Inclusivity focuses on gaining cultural competency to work with our clients. Yet, there is very little focus on supporting psychologists of color or showing up for them in meaningful ways. From talking to these psychologists, we have gained a greater sense of our responsibility as members of the professional mental health community. We need to educate ourselves on the injustices Black people and psychologists of color experience all around us but also experience within our organizations.

This most recent wave of increased consciousness regarding racism surging in our larger nation has yielded as many experiences as there are citizens; the same can be said for our very own profession of psychology. For some, the journey of social justice has been long, with steadily increasing consciousness, and an active part of our lives since childhood. For others of us, the awakening out of denial only recently truly began. For our Black colleagues, deep generational and collective pain and trauma is just now being named and recognized by the larger culture.

Drs. Holmes and Finney, both support having more open dialogues regarding changing the culture within our profession and taking an active stance of anti-racism. Regarding continuing these conversations about race, we need to have more conversations, even if the conversations are not easy and get messy. Town halls are a good way to start these conversations but having these regularly and more often than annually could yield more in this needed area of focus. In response to

the question about the often poor attendance at these events and the discomfort of many to enter the inevitable “messy” conversations, Dr. Holmes suggested a communal strategy of asking each person who attends to implore one more person to join the conversation next time.

We are encouraging psychologists and psychologists in training to work together to engage in these constructive conversations and create a brave space in all our workplaces and organizations. Drs. Kim and Del Prado, in their book *It's time to talk (and listen)*, (2019), help us to understand what a “constructive conversation” is. They define it as “an exchange in which people involved speak about their personal experiences, thoughts, feelings and beliefs on matters of culture and diversity and listen to the other person with genuine openness.” Micky ScottBey Jones, Director of Healing and Resilience Initiatives for the Faith Matters Network, shares the concept of brave space, “Together we will create brave space. Because there is no such thing as a “safe space.” We exist in the real world. We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds. In this space, we seek to turn down the volume of the outside world. We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere.... We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know. We will not be perfect. This space will not be perfect. ...”

As we take a look within our profession, with the help of our three esteemed colleagues, we note that while many of us have awakened to a deeper level of true empathy and increased consciousness, others may still be struggling with accepting the systemic problems within our profession. We are seeking even broader compassion and true motivation toward genuine mutual respect and equality for black lives specifically and all races, ethnicities, genders, abilities and identities. This awakening can be both liberating and painful, full of validation and loss, exhilarating or terrifying, and even mundane at times. It is not easy to undergo a reckoning within our own professional house, especially while navigating roadblocks and potholes.

Although it can feel uncomfortable to engage in the process of inclusion, these processes can and will be easier and ultimately more successful if we incorporate individual self-care and compassion. We will make mistakes and can compassionately learn from the inevitable micro-aggressions. In this process of social justice awakening and healing, if our goal is to invite compassionate understanding of ourselves and others, we can engage in this process as a brave form of individual and communal self-care. ■

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