

# There is No Systemic Racism in Psychoanalysis

How Shabby Science Continues to Embarrass the American Psychoanalytic Association

by [Jon Mills](#) (March 2024)



## Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst's Office, by Remedios Varo

After The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis filed its [final report](#) on Juneteenth, 2023, it received a [series](#) of [scathing critiques](#). Arguing that the study was ideologically biased, lacked empirical rigor, and was deeply methodologically flawed, the investigation was rendered scientifically invalid by critics. At a whopping price tag of over \$200,000 USD, it was deemed a complete waste of the American Psychoanalytic Association's (APsaA) reserve funds.

All scholarly criticism of the study was chalked up to [racism](#) by its critics. Rather than taking such critiques seriously, in a complete failure of nerve, the APsaA Executive [praised](#) the study and accepted its findings that American psychoanalysis is indeed racist. What this dog whistle means is that findings of racism are only levelled against those who are white or Jewish. The ramifications of such a thoughtless and myopic position by the Executive Committee and Board of Directors is nothing short than scandalous: by implication, all white analysts are racist. How's that for a categorical lynching! In McCarthy-like fashion, a chilling proposal was even made to appoint a DEI ombudsman who would adjudicate acts of racism where ever encountered. Not only does this complicity in racial identity politics sully the profession, it shows a lack of courage by leadership who are not willing to confront blatant distortions of truth and reality. Furthermore, this gutless pandering to DEI optics belies all human decency. It is nothing short than a sycophantic embarrassment to the rest of the psychoanalytic world.

## The New Embarrassment

Setting aside the fact that the [Holmes Commission](#) Chairs and Co-Chairs are black, and that [no East Asians](#) were initially included until a token was appointed after the commission was made to acknowledge its *faux pas*—and that no Indigenous or Arab members are represented—and despite having a few Jews and a WASP, should we conclude a double standard or racist enactment? Or, should we simply consider that these folks do not typically seek out psychoanalytic training for any number of reasons regardless of race? Why should we automatically assume that their underrepresentation in the field is due to racism?

In another perfunctory and performative ingratiation to identity politics, rather than axe all funding for further research, the Executive decided to throw more money away in some cursory display of solidarity with its so-called oppressed members. On January 3, 2024, the HC issued a [message](#) to the members of APsaA announcing the introduction of an additional “evaluative study.” The Holmes Commission (HC) was now soliciting responses to an “anonymous survey” it posted online by “writing your experiences in reflecting on and employing the work” of the Commission’s conclusions that systemic racism is rampant in psychoanalysis including remedies to reduce it (p. 1). In response to critiques of the HC final report, [including podcast videos](#), the *communiqué* also included a “[Methodology Statement](#)” from [Michael Russell, PhD](#), an educational researcher specializing in [white supremacy, systemic, and antiblack racism](#), in order to clear up “some concerns” and “misunderstandings about the design” of the research study. Given the HC commissioned a so-called “specialist” in the very subject matter the HC presupposed in its investigation before any data collection was initiated, we should not be surprised that the methodologist’s bias would ring its little bell in his attempt to explain his methodology and results. Instead of hiring a neutral and impartial social

scientist who has no stake in the outcome of the research study, this provides further evidence that the HC deliberately recruited a hired gun to deliver the verdict they wanted. Not only does this provide another reason to reject the design, methodology, validity, and conclusions of the HC report, it exposes another attempt at gaslighting the membership under the guise of science.

But before we unpack such ideological biases, we may be suspicious that this new call for reporting “experiences” will be analyzed by the same methodologist at a large additional expense to the APsaA membership. Given the first study cost an arm and a leg, how could this new evaluative study be worth a nickel more in expenditures when the outcome is already baked in the results before data are even gathered? Will any criticism of the HC study be honestly reported, or will this new evaluative study merely cloak the data, cherry-pick responses, exclude outliers it does not like, and continue to engage in sampling selection errors like it did in the original study in order to cook the books with the narrative it wants laid in stone? And predictably, just like before, if any criticism of the original study itself or the methodologist’s statement of justification for his research design is questioned, this will simply be verification of systemic racism as a forgone conclusion. Given the HC convened on February 9, 2024 to present its new findings at an APsaA forum where it invited members to “share how you have used the HC’s work individually and institutionally” to combat “systemic racism” within psychoanalysis (p. 2), we shall not be surprised about any further conclusions. Guilt inducement, whitelighting, moral debasement, silent witnessing, personal confessions, self-flagellation, and taking a knee in groveling humility were all to be expected.

## **The White Methodologist**

Despite my loathing of racial identity politics, I cannot help but be amused that the HC deliberately chose a white researcher, Prof. Michael Russell, who specializes in white supremacy, antiblack racism, and research methodology bias in educational assessment and testing. What should we make of the white boy wonder? It should be obvious to any educated person that he was selected for his favorable views on advancing oppressive racial narratives. He is clearly a woke researcher who embraces the ideological tenets of critical social justice (CSJ) with a penchant for critical race theory (CRT) that is stamped into the very core of his research agenda. Let us ask, how can a white researcher elude the “white racial frame” (p. 1) which he criticizes without imparting his own bias and self-avowed white supremacy into the equation? If we are to be generous in our critique, we should “bracket” this inconvenient fact and simply look at his arguments. So, let us do that.

Dr. Russell first wants to minimize any “confusion and misunderstanding” (p. 1) in his methods and methodology. But he employs the presupposition of a white racial frame that conditions social science research despite the fact that social scientists are comprised of many multicultural cohorts. And given that scientists are supposed to be impartial and open to competing hypotheses in data collection and analysis utilizing an objectivist epistemology where verification, falsifiability, and refutation of conjectures are the cornerstone to rigorous research methodology, why would the color of a person’s skin change these criteria? And if this was remotely the case, then the same argument would apply to any scientist who frames their research under the prism of their own race. And here we would have to conclude that there is no such thing as objectivity because all results would succumb to a racialized subjectivist epistemology informing all interpretation of the data. So much for the scientific

method. Given that empirical facts transcend any particular race, we may dismiss this premise as ideological bias.

When we examine Russell's argument more closely, he specifically relies on an interpretation of scientific methodology as "tools to control what qualifies as knowledge;" and by "call[ing] into question through critique of the methods and methodology employed" (p. 1), such focus on methodology subverts new modes of knowledge. What he is essentially saying is that you cannot question the framework for which knowledge is acquired. This is absurd.

He insists that by directing "attention to procedures ... questions the legitimacy of the individuals who generated that new knowledge" (pp. 1-2). This argument lacks sophistication because if procedures are flawed, inaccurate, or misapplied, it draws into question the results, truth, and legitimacy of any knowledge claim. Furthermore, what constitutes "knowledge" may be little more than opinion or subjective attitudes that cannot be generalized to others let alone transcend personal phenomenology. What one may personally know or believe is not the same as empirically verifiable or falsifiable facts or episteme that describe and explain objective parameters that would apply to a general or universal framework of knowledge. Russell's argument is akin to saying that predications, personal experience, or the way in which one knows anything is beyond criticism.

In his defense of the methods chosen to construct the HC survey, Russell fails to mention that his study did not employ a random sampling method, but rather cherry-picked participants and relied on volunteers who had vested interests in presenting particular points of view. Because the methods suffer from selection sampling errors, the population is not evenly distributed nor representative of a wider general sample, so the data is highly illustrative of a particular subgroup's perspective including those who are not even psychoanalysts but rather those "positioned to become members"

(p. 4); in other words, those who want to put forth grievances based on antiracist ideology in order to attack the establishment.

Russell admits that the HC itself had already presumed the outcome “in which systemic racism may influence practices within training institutions and the field of psychoanalysis more broadly” (p. 3) rather than explore to see or discover if racism existed or not. Here the conclusion was predetermined rather than derived from genuine knowledge that was acquired through an open inquiry and impartial investigation into the subject matter, which is the nature and proper purpose of scientific reason and analysis. In effect, the methodologist was asked to go fishing for what the HC wanted to find in order to introduce agents of change in the establishment based on a preconceived notion that the establishment is racist.

## **The Ordinariness of Systemic Racism**

Professor Russell concedes that he had no intention to conduct an experimental study “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” (p. 4). It is unclear why Russell would assume that experimental methods could not be designed to assess whether racism exists within a system, as one could in principle scrutinize policies, procedures, codes of conduct, and individual actions by members within an institution or organization that examine relations between various sets of variables. But in applying his logic, you then cannot make a claim that systemic racism is caused or is causal in APsaA. Like the HC, Russell merely takes for granted that systemic racism is an extant ontological force within the organization, which contradicts his claim that systemic racism cannot be studied experimentally by making a causal claim of existence

without providing any evidence. He is simply begging the question that something exists without having to bother to prove it. Here Russell commits a *principio principii*, an informal fallacy of logic where his premises assume the truth of the conclusions.

In a further series of question-begging assumptions, Russell makes a hasty generalization that because racism exists in society, it exists “systemically” in APsaA and in *all* American psychoanalytic institutions. In other words, because systemic racism “is in operation at all times in ways that are both visible and invisible” (p. 5), its ordinariness in social sectors warrants the foregone conclusion that it also saturates the psychoanalytic profession. Despite the fact that Russell failed to conduct a proper empirical study with random sampling, and that, in his opinion, no experimental design can study the causal claim that systemic racism exists, how can he then justify the proposition of an existential instantiation (*There is:  $\exists x$* ) with no evidence? Furthermore, the claim that systemic racism exists within the profession becomes unquestionable—simply a sacrosanct article of faith, yet at the same time is a non-falsifiable hypothesis, hence, by definition, non-scientific, as it cannot meet a basic criterion of providing requisite conditions for the possibility of refuting conjectures. Here a new woke religion has been smuggled in the backdoor of a profession that once stood as the modern foundation of the discipline of [psychology](#).

## **The Social Construction of Reality**

Just when Professor Russell could not possibly outdo his philosophical brilliance, he rises to comic heights. Most embarrassingly is his false claim that systemic racism is as factually true as the law of physics. He proposes a ludicrous non sequitur that just as “gravity exists,” so does systemic



racism. One does not need to “demonstrate” or “prove” such matters, just as an aeronautical scientist does not have to prove “the existence of gravity” (p. 6). The problem with this argument is that gravity is proven and is a central tenet of the physical sciences while systemic racism in all American psychoanalytic institutions is not. The assumption that systemic racism is ordinary in psychoanalysis is based on personal caprice and/or imports a projective fantasy, which does not encompass an objectivist epistemology nor does it remotely correspond to empirical reality.

Russell fails to meet the most basic requirements of any elementary scientific undertaking: (1) research neutrality; (2) sound methodology and design; (3) testing of hypotheses; and (4) empirical demonstration of proof. Rather, he (a) presupposes the existence of the very thing he has the obligation to prove; is (b) unable to demonstrate where in the “system” racism exists, as if psychoanalysis is a unified structural system when it is not; (c) relies on self-sampling selection of participants (volunteers who are largely aggrieved) rather than randomized controls; (d) fails to acknowledge the plurality and independent governance of psychoanalytic institutions with their own theoretical schools, clinical approaches, and missions; and (e) makes spurious generalizations across a multiplicity of organizations branded as hotbeds of institutionalized oppression with no facts to back it up.

Russell tells us that his research methodology is based on “The Holmes Commission’s understanding that systemic racism is ordinary” in our field (p. 8). Given that the Chair of the HC, Dr. Dorothy Holmes, had [accused](#) the former APsaA president, Dr. Kerry Sulkowicz, of being [racist](#), and who promptly [resigned](#) with the countercharge of antisemitism perpetrated by the Commission, we may not inappropriately infer that racism is as [normal](#) as breathing, it is simply a matter of degree; but it still does not mean that it infiltrates systemic, structural,

and institutional policy and organizational governance that discriminates against people.

Russell's research findings that boast to offer "newly generated knowledge that challenges existing practices and paradigms" (p. 10) is in reality a manufactured narrative based in CRT indoctrination through the manipulation of data response sets to contrived questions that presuppose the outcome one wants to find and promulgate as woke quackery. We may simply deduce that the HC study and final report is bogus, untrue, and the product of bias rather than sound, empirically objectifiable science. It does not meet the standards of scholarship, reason, or logos and is instead the product of propaganda based in critical social justice ideology. At most, it presents doxa based in personal prejudice projected onto a generic psychoanalytic community and treated *as-if* it were an actuality when it is a purely socially constructed consensus of a subgroup's worldview that evades all demands for proof. Therefore, based on logical analysis, such findings are vacuous and meritless. It is fair to conclude that systemic racism in American psychoanalytic organizations does not exist.

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