

Freedom of expression around diversity guidelines

Following the response to J.K. Rowling's essay 'Reasons for Speaking Out on Sex and Gender Issues' and the 18 June *Newsnight* report of safeguarding concerns at the NHS Gender Identity Development Service, we call for an immediate review of the recent BPS Guidelines for Psychologists Working with Gender, Sexuality and Relationship Diversity (BPS, 2019).

These guidelines state that a 'gender-affirmative' stance should be the default position adopted by psychologists. We are concerned that the instruction to 'integrat[e] an affirmative stance into their model of practice' restricts the use of many core models (systemic, trauma-informed, developmental) in formulating the factors resulting in the clients' presentation. This places limitations on researchers and practitioners exploring the wider context of 'gender' and seeking to establish 'best-evidence' for the support of individuals with gender dysphoria.

For those unfamiliar with the guidance or discussion in this field, 'gender affirming' practice calls for psychologists to work on the basis that an individual's belief in self-ascribed gender is 'valid and legitimate'. We hope all psychologists value and respect the varied understandings that people hold of the world around them and of their personal experience. We suggest it is possible to value and respect a client's experience, without taking a position of affirmation. Indeed we often do this within our work with various client groups. The BPS guidance stipulates that practitioners validate a belief in gender (both in general and in particular to the individual's sense of self) without considering the evidence base in relation to the practice of belief validation.

Individuals who are questioning their identity with respect to their sex and gender clearly report significant levels of psychological distress. The long-term implications for this population resulting from the provision or denial of access to treatment are substantial. We recognise that appropriate, evidence-based guidelines are imperative to support the skilled psychological practice which our profession seeks to uphold. However, such guidelines can only be effective when these are the result of comprehensive research, conducted in an environment that supports free and independent enquiry.

In particular, we think it is imperative that psychologists are not prevented from using our core professional skill of formulation, exploring the origins and nature of distress rather than ascribing to one pre-determined 'diagnosis' or explanation. With other presentations we are in agreement that there are multiple contributory factors to psychological distress. It is only from this exploration that we can develop individualised formulations to guide our attempts to alleviate that distress. We think the current guidelines effectively prohibit psychologists from taking a questioning approach



and applying ethical practice in these situations. The absence of a robust evidence base supporting psychological and medical intervention is a concern in this rapidly growing population, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of many relevant issues. The disproportionate increase in presentations of females to services, the phenomenon of so-called Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria, the voices of individuals who have desisted or detransitioned, and the experiences of those for whom existing treatments have been of value must all be addressed in the search for quality research informing best-evidence practice. Such research can only be conducted in an environment that is open to discussion in a respectful and professionally inquisitive manner.

We would like to see the current guidance withdrawn and the topic reviewed afresh in accordance with the rules of proper intellectual inquiry: the weighing up of evidence; the ethical considerations of psychological practice; and the avoidance at all times of ad hominem forms of argument. Some of the signatories below, with others, have submitted a formal request for the withdrawal of the guidance to the Society. We hope that readers will support our expectation that the freedom of expression of all psychologists will be defended, unambiguously and at all times, in relation to both research and practice.

Katie Alcock, Rachel Corry, Nina Gadsdon, Louise Fernandes, Pat Harvey (Guinan), Peter Harvey, Ian Hancock, John Higgon, Anna Hutchinson, Gill l'Anson, Eric Karas, Jeanie McIntee, David Pilgrim, Julia Richards, Cas Schneider, Karen Scott, Sarah Verity, Robert Watts, Anne Woodhouse [titles in online version]

Own goal or progress?

Society response: We acknowledge that the BPS is a broad church, and there will always be differing views among our members on some issues. We are confident that our guidelines are based on the best current evidence and research in this important area, having been developed by experts working in the field. Clearly we share your concern about the safeguarding of children and young people, but our guidance is specifically for the care and treatment of adults, not children.

The draft guidance was sent out for Society-wide consultation on 19 March 2019. It was also sent to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, APA, BACP, BABCP, UKCP, Stonewall, LGBT foundation and COSRT for comment. At the close of the consultation on 12 April 2019 34 responses had been received. Just one of these responses mentions the issue of dissenting voices that is raised in your letter. This respondent also stated that the document was 'well intentioned and positive'.

All our guidance is periodically reviewed. This particular guidance is the second version, having been revised in 2019. If there is a change in practice or evidence, then the need to revise the guidance would be established. In this instance, we will review the guidance if there are implications for the care and treatment of adults following the outcomes of:

- the judicial review regarding the use of hormone blockers in child services on grounds of capacity to consent
- NHS's Independent review of puberty suppressants and cross sex hormones
- NICE review of the latest clinical evidence.

As a Society we are committed to our members having a view and welcome different perspectives. As such any revised guidance will be sent out for Society-wide consultation and we would welcome your input into the revised consultation process.

When reading the opening material in the July/August 2020 edition (Covid-19 workstreams), the one thing that struck me was what seems to be the unintended low value Diversity and Inclusion is given. Reading the other workstreams, they are being led by professors, doctors, Lead Clinical Consultants, Presidents of the BPS, yet the Diversity and Inclusion workstream is represented by a student. Please, this is not focused on the individuals mentioned – instead, it is based on the titles of the individuals and how these titles attribute standing and stature within and outside the psychology community.

I understand this article will have been only a very short summary of the great work underway in many fields. However, appearances matter and this seems like an own goal by the psychology community. If Diversity and Inclusion is important, let's show it is important.

Tim Artus
Grantown on Spey
Scotland

David Murphy, Chair of the Covid-19 Coordinating Group, responds:

The co-ordinating group was formed very rapidly in March in response to the crisis; however, one of the first actions was to appoint a Diversity

and Inclusion Champion. At the same time, the Presidential Taskforce on Diversity and Inclusion needed to take a pause as the original chair, Binna Kandola, needed to step down. We appointed Layne Whittaker as the Diversity and Inclusion Champion and her role involves linking with, and being supported by, the rest of the taskforce.

The role involves promoting consideration of aspects of diversity rather than being an expert in every area. I would strongly urge readers to view the Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce webpage to read about and watch short videos from all of the amazing members of the taskforce. This letter gives me a welcome opportunity to acknowledge the incredible contribution that Layne has made to the group. The insights and wealth of experience of different aspects of diversity she has brought to the group have been absolutely invaluable. I know all of the members of the taskforce are deeply grateful for Layne's contribution, and that of other taskforce members.

The correspondent asserts that 'appearances matter'... however, I believe that when we begin to see people rather than categories or titles, we will know we are making the sort of progress that the taskforce has been established to bring about.

Time to 'go big' on the curriculum

It does seem extraordinary that all young humans don't currently learn (or are educated) about themselves, their brains, their feelings, their thoughts and behaviours. There are of course are some superb packages and programs within schools which tend to focus on feelings (anxiety for example). Is it time for Psychology to make the switch from being a fringe science, which you can only learn from GCSE onwards, or come across if you need support and help whilst still a child, to being available to all?

Imagine a society where each person had the tools to understand something more about what and how their (and other people's) mind, emotions and behaviours

operate. If this knowledge was developed from a very early age, challenges could be managed and understood more readily as they occurred. It wouldn't solve everything, but it would certainly be a strong stepping stone in the right direction.

Could we be brave and embed Psychology into the school curriculum from Reception right through the school system? In the same way Chemistry and Biology went from Natural History and Life Sciences into discrete subjects taught to very young children onwards, Psychology is now grown up enough to be a core subject. The beauty of Psychology of course, being that developmentally we know which concepts to share and explain at each age and stage.

I can of course see the reams of arguments

saying there isn't room on the curriculum – and that understanding oneself is already squeezed into PSHE lessons (Growth Mindset is a regular item). But this is about moving from pockets of great work into a comprehensive curriculum approach (with a pilot study of course to inform and amend before full roll out).

A psychologically informed and literate society could be a game changer for how we all interact with each other and how we structure our institutions of governance and service. Post Covid we're all looking to make some changes and improvements. Shall we collectively, as Psychologists, go big?

Emma Haddleton
CEO haddletonknight.com

How do we address racism in therapy?

As a psychological wellbeing practitioner, I have engaged with various discussions around discrimination and therapy recently. Broadly speaking, one of the key aims of any therapy setting is to build therapeutic alliance with a client. This can be achieved in various ways, including empathic statements, showing positive regard for the client and letting the client feel heard. This year, the BLM movement has rightfully asked us to address racism in its various insidious forms. Within my service, this has raised discussions around how we deal with racism in the therapeutic space and has highlighted a tension that emerges in therapy. This tension raises the question, how do we balance the need to build therapeutic alliance whilst addressing discriminatory comments from clients?

In recent group supervision sessions addressing discrimination and racism in particular has been discussed in detail. As a white British cis-gendered heterosexual male I have yet to be discriminated against directly by a client, but I have been privy to racist or discriminatory comments from clients which has left me uncomfortable and uncertain about how to respond. This could be a derogatory comment about the BAME community or a sexist comment about women. Our group supervision sessions proved insightful and upsetting about how often BAME

colleagues have experienced direct and indirect racist comments from clients. These horrible experiences are nothing new to these practitioners but up until recently it seems as though there hasn't been a focus or specific guidance to help therapists through these situations.

When addressing these issues as a group, one point of discussion that came up was the role of the therapist. Are we there to educate people or improve mental health conditions? The consensus appeared to lean towards the latter; we are not teachers and cannot consistently spend sessions educating clients around racism. This is especially relevant in the time limited sessions that psychological wellbeing practitioners have. Despite the consensus we should not necessarily educate people, there was still a feeling that discriminatory comments by clients need to be addressed.

When dealing with implicit or explicit statements, our discussion suggested a graded scale of how a therapist or practitioner could deal with racism in the therapeutic space.

1. If there is a one off implicit or explicit racist remark, a definitive statement could be agreed across a service. This could be stated to set boundaries and then further funnelling around an unrelated comment could be made to continue with the session. For example, 'we do not encourage or tolerate discrimination within our

service. You mentioned that you feel upset by how you are being treated at...'

2. If there are repeated implicit or explicit remarks, the therapist feels particularly uncomfortable with a remark or they have been directly discriminated against, we discussed that a therapist can challenge this comment. Previous experience of this has suggested that it can lead to changed viewpoint from the client or no further mention of it in the future. This challenge could be, 'You mentioned... Can I ask what makes you think this way?' or 'what evidence do you have to suggest this is true?'
3. If there are repeated comments or the therapist no longer wants to engage with the client, this can be discussed in supervision and/or raised with senior leadership. The therapist can remove the client from their caseload, be spoken to by senior staff or even barred from the service.

This is my understanding of how we respond, based on suggestions from colleagues, and is by no means a definitive set of rules. Various questions still remain. What role do therapists have in combatting racism and other forms of discrimination? How do we best deal with discrimination in therapy? Can we create universal guidance?

Jonathan Dawson
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from the president



Break silos and collaborate; why psychology needs to be agile and creative

BPS president, Dr Hazel McLaughlin, explores how we can leverage the benefits of meaningful collaboration to build the BPS of the future.

'Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much', I echo the words of the US author and activist Helen Keller. As psychologists we recognise the value of collaboration

but often fail to put it into practice. But why is collaboration increasingly important in today's world?

At first glance technology enables us to collaborate easily and efficiently but we also need to take care to build mutual trust and to establish relationships that will enable effective outcomes. The collaborative nature of the BPS response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is an excellent example of the potential within our reach. Experts across psychology worked together, ignoring silos and achieving outcomes that added significant value to people's lives.

This has also played out on the world stage with the Global Psychology Alliance, which has enabled the BPS to connect with psychologists globally, to build a common vision and community and to share ideas that shape psychological policy and services. Alongside our talented global partners and more local colleagues, I am privileged to contribute to this global community and seek to build this to the next level of partnership. The recent statement from 60 psychological associations in over 20 languages on 'What do Psychologists and Psychology offer Humanity' is a current and valuable example of the benefit of collaboration.

The psychology behind collaboration

When collaboration works well, it fosters innovation and delivers high quality results, enabling organisations and individuals to be more agile and responsive in real time.

Yet as psychologists, we know that meaningful collaboration is built on the foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust,

and a sense of fairness. We need to have a common purpose built on shared values and an approach that enables us to share both success and failures. Creativity is enhanced when there is an openness to experiment and try out new solutions without fear of blame or reprisal. This can increase agility and responsiveness. Whether the collaboration is internal-facing or external to an organisation, there need to be perceived benefits in working together with open and forthright communication. This takes time to build and is supported by empathy and mutual understanding. The organisational culture and the rewards and incentives can foster or hinder collaboration. If people have individual targets and are recognised and rewarded for individual success, this encourages competition rather than co-operation.

We can link this to the other articles within the edition. Whether in the context of research, practice or interpersonal relationships, there are distinct benefits from the collaborative approach. But this requires a different style of leadership; one that is more inclusive and that builds on the capabilities of the team. Modelling collaborative leadership is fundamental. As Ibarra and Hansen stress in their *Harvard Business Review* piece 'Are you a collaborative leader?'; 'Leaders today must be able to harness ideas, people, and resources from across boundaries of all kinds.'

Don't 'stay in your lane'

In organisations and institutions, there is often a competitive environment; our tendency is to consider how best to achieve for ourselves and our team. Breaking down silos and working with peers across perceived 'divides' is key. As Heidi Gardner's research shows, organisations can succeed in breaking down silos through smart collaboration with effort focused on key areas of the business that will deliver the most impactful return.

Building collaborative capacity

Engaging in collaborative working enables us to build our collaborative capacity, and working collaboratively increases the capacity for further collaboration. It becomes a cycle that enables us to work better and smarter to achieve shared goals. As Ken Blanchard says, 'None of us is as smart as all of us.' I invite you to share your views on how we can enhance meaningful collaboration in the BPS and within psychology.

The view from the political pulpit

The editor may consider that he does not have to make any apologies for your continuing promotion of 'the whiff of revolution' in all of its guises (Jon Sutton on Professor Stephen Reicher's Keynote, *The Psychologist*, September 2020) and may respond with usual platitudes about balance and the wishes of the current readership for the content of *The Psychologist*. However, I am not alone in thinking that you

do need to make apologies to the families and colleagues of those individuals whose obituaries you have reduced to thumbnail portraits and directions to a website rather than acknowledging in print their lives and contributions to a science and a profession in all its guises that may just matter more than the view from your political pulpit.

As more people throw *The Psychologist* in the bin without

removing the wrapping, it must be time for the BPS Executive to review the purpose and position of editor in the hope that a new direction can be found that is more relevant to the readership than the promotion of your political alliances.

Adrian G. West
Forensic and Clinical Psychologist

Editor's reply: Omitting obituaries from the print edition is probably the

hardest thing I have to do as editor, and I do indeed regularly apologise to the families and colleagues involved. Most understand that the volume of obituaries we are receiving, alongside all kinds of other material, means that difficult decisions have to be made as part of an integrated print and online offering. They are warned in advance too.

The way the magazine is printed means we go up in 8-page sections, so it's not as simple as just adding in another page or two of obituaries. We have to consider cost, and what makes sense in terms of a print reading experience.

Of course, we could bump other content out, and this is probably where we get to the nub of it. Your other comments and other

correspondence suggest this is as much about what is included in the magazine as what is not. As I wrote in the September editorial, I simply cannot see the inclusion of the work and views of BAME psychologists, and discussion of issues around racism and inclusion more broadly, as being about 'political alliances'.

In terms of direction, all that we do is informed by reader feedback, by the Society's recent work on the member journey, and by the Psychologist and Digest Editorial Advisory Committee. It would be great to have some better stats on how many members are throwing the magazine in the bin without removing the wrapping, but I hope people will understand that kind of information is difficult to come by beyond the

anecdotal... at which level we have plenty of evidence which suggests the opposite.

To return to obituaries, I suspect that as the discipline and our reach continue to expand, and more and more notable psychologists sadly pass away, we will continue to need to make difficult decisions on how many tributes can be included in print. The Psychologist is increasingly an integrated print and digital offering, and we again encourage everyone to visit our collection of wonderful memoirs from those who knew these brilliant people, via <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/obituaries>. Here, we can host extended and multiple obituaries in a timely fashion, and share them widely on Twitter.

Working under a totalitarian regime

David Sher's account of the work of Hans Asperger in the late 1930s and during the Second World War ('Looking back', September) is indeed damning. Similar accounts are also contained in Edith Sheffer's 2018 book 'Asperger's Children' and Donvan and Zucker's 2019 'In a Different Key'. As Sher himself points out there is also evidence present in Steve Silberman's 2015 'NeuroTribes' that Asperger, earlier in his career, acted to save children. Like us all Hans Asperger was not all good or all bad.

Very few psychologists reading this letter have had the experience of living and working under a totalitarian regime and therefore

cannot know how we would react to oppressive working strictures and an alien political philosophy. I came across this passage while reading Vasily Grossman's great 2019 novel *Stalingrad*. One character speaks of the predicament of Science in Nazi Czechoslovakia:

It's impossible to describe... Science is in fetters. People are afraid of their own shadows. They're afraid of their fellow workers. Professors are afraid of their own students. People's thoughts, their inner lives, their families and friendships – everything is under fascist



control...a friend of mine begged me not to ask him any questions what so ever...afraid the police might collar him at any moment. 'Don't ask me anything at all' he said 'It's not only my colleagues I'm afraid of. I'm afraid of my own voice. I'm afraid of my own thoughts'.

Let us all hope and pray that we never have to work under the kind of regime endured by Hans Asperger.

Dr Jeremy Swinson
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Letters online: Find more letters at www.thepsychologist.org.uk/debates:

PDA – a new type of disorder? Richard Woods on Pathological Demand Avoidance.

Psychological support in Multiple Sclerosis – Hannah Morris-Bankole on a new survey.

Closer attention to height and weight for anorexia? – Hilary Trevelyan writes.

Work capability assessment: review, reform, or replace? – Mo Stewart.

Deadline for letters for the November print edition is Friday 25 September 2020. Letters received after this date will be considered for the following month and/or for publication online. Email letters to psychologist@bps.org.uk with the subject line 'Letter to the editor'.

Robert (Bob) Audley 1928-2020

Bob Audley came from a working-class background and went to Battersea Grammar school: a child evacuee during the war, he was awarded an LCC scholarship to UCL which he entered in 1949 following national service (partly in Germany). He spent his first year mostly 'drinking beer and playing bridge'; the second year concentrating on his statistics subsidiary (lecturers were E.S. Pearson and the formidable Florence Nightingale David); the third year there was a change of staff (Roger Russell was appointed head) and syllabus (a switch from textbooks to journal articles) and he got stuck into psychology seriously, obtaining a first-class degree.

Bob thought he might be a prison psychologist, and applied to the Home Office. He was sent a form to apply to be a warder, which he tore up into little strips and sent back to them. He was then offered a R.A. position at Washington State University in the McCarthyism era, with 'untold wealth' plus a Fulbright scholarship. After this he returned to UCL as a postgraduate student studying with A.R. Jonckheere, whom he acknowledged, saying 'much of the thesis is the result of long periods of almost daily argument with him'.

Colleagues remember him as warm-hearted, urbane, intellectual, scientifically rigorous, and quirkily witty. He was a lovely person. But he was also a major figure in UK psychology in the second half of the last century.

He made three important contributions. First, to decision making. He was one of the main mathematical psychologists of the late 1950s and the 1960s – Audley's 1960 Theory of Choice still stands the test of time. Then his further work on reaction time (Audley, Caudrey, Howell and Powell) and work on map understanding with Richard Phillips. But his final major contribution in the 1990s may have been the most important: with Charlie Vincent and Maeve Ennis, he triggered development of the now major research area of medical accidents.

From the UCL Psychology department's point of view, he guided us through the dark days of the Thatcher years with aplomb. With the stringent budget cuts of 1981, many departments closed and some universities (e.g., Salford) almost did too. Tenure was eliminated and people were worried about their jobs. Bob's strategy, after moving us into Bedford Way, was to make the department much bigger – after becoming a major contributor to the UCL budget, we were safe. His plan to have a separate school of psychology outside life sciences didn't come off but, in hindsight, it still seems that it would have been a good idea.

He also made critical contributions at a national level. It was at least partly, maybe even largely, thanks to him that psychology was categorised as a laboratory-based biological science rather than as a social science, addressing the Science and Technology Committee (on behalf of the BPS) on this issue. It ensured that psychology departments across the country were relatively well-funded.

The academic landscape of psychology was fundamentally changed for the better by Bob Audley, and there are still many colleagues who are at UCL because of him. He was a staunch defender of psychology, and a very kind and generous colleague.

Nigel Harvey and Elizabeth Valentine

Robert Audley was President of the British Psychological Society 1969-1970, during which time he hosted the International Congress of Psychology – diplomatically dealing with international delegates and editing the Proceedings. He also helped to set up the Mathematical, Statistical and Computing Section of the BPS and was inaugural Chair in 1970. He was the Editor of *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, 1963-1969.



Alex Hossack 1949-2020

Our friend, mentor, and boss John 'Alex' Hossack died suddenly due to heart complications in July 2020.

Alex was head of Mersey Forensic Psychology Service, a regional NHS service, having developed it for over 20 years until retiring in 2014. Alex was most proud of the innovative work the service provided to adults who had sexually offended, which he nurtured throughout his career, incorporating approaches from across the psychological spectrum. He championed the idea of para-professionals; ex-service users coming back to offer support and insight, included throughout the interventions. This service was, and still is, highly regarded across the criminal justice system. He was also well regarded as an expert witness and consultant to statutory agencies. Alex was fiercely protective of psychological services and roles within the wider system,



defending the professional skill set and was resistant to them being assimilated into other professions; this did not always win him friends in high places but his knowledge and expertise was widely recognised and respected. Many of those who worked with him wanted to share some thoughts [see the online version of this, via <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/obituaries>].

Alex was not only the long-serving captain of the forensic psychology service, but he also captained his own boat up in the Lake District; although Cathy, his partner, had to get it out of the dock and back again. He was an avid Egyptologist, musician, traveller and *bonne viveur* who made the most of life.

Simon Duff, Lorraine Perry, Nick Wakefield, Lisa Wright, Sara Finlayson