

# Are We Really Appreciating Difference?

Themes for a more responsible participation in a multicultural world

Laurie B. Lippin

I welcome this invitation to address the psychological type community in a personal manner on a topic that I care about deeply. My intention is to stimulate and facilitate your learning in an arena of life for which most of us never received formal education. Given the continued impact of racism in the U.S., my purpose is to encourage type practitioners to: 1) interrogate your own social identity, 2) examine your relationships with people who are racially or ethnically different, and 3) work actively together toward a more inclusive and responsible type community. I have written more objectively on this particular topic, but the passion of an ENFP totally engaged in what she was meant to do, pours out of me when I present. So I am writing this article as I would present it to you, a type audience who, I believe, also cares about this topic. First, I will give some personal context, then address a domestic and global imperative, and finally, provide more practical issues of the intersection of type and race/ethnicity.

Since publishing my coauthored book *Understanding Whiteness/Unraveling Racism: Tools for the Journey* in 2001, I have been catapulted into my own incredible journey. As a longtime MBTI® type practitioner, who was “grandmothered” into the world of qualified practitioners in the days before we even had qualifying programs, my commitment to appreciating difference had become a way of life. As a Jewess, and a lesbian-oriented bisexual, my own marginalized so-



cial identities made me even more sensitive to the social justice issues abounding in our society. Add in my formative Civil Rights summer in 1965 in Mississippi, the year after Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman had been found murdered, and you have more of my story. That life-changing experience probably influenced the attention I paid to race in my own 1988



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doctoral research, *Personality Types of Incarcerated Women in the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women*, in which I discovered that the modal types for African American inmates were very different than those of white inmates. After writing this dissertation, I made a commitment to continue to identify race in the demographics of my clients in order to be clear about different patterns of generalization, to encourage CPP to include race on the MBTI® answer forms, and to enroll myself in learning more about diversity issues at every opportunity.

It is an exploration of those diversity themes that concern this APTi *Bulletin*, and our impact in an international and multicultural world. How can we not address issues of dominance, invisible biases, perpetuation of stereotypes and assumptions, and invisible privilege? Domestic and global concerns require that we attend to dominance factors, especially those that are normative and go unchallenged. The personal and media conversations stirred up recently by the Democratic presidential candidates underscore the challenge to the dominance of a white male power system and thus the continued impact of both racism and sexism in this country.

How is it that despite teachings and values of loving kindness and equity for all in the United States, we live in such a self-segregated society, we live in fear of one another, and most of us do not *personally* live in a multicultural world. Our lives are not integrated, our organizations and our boards are not integrated, despite wishes that it be otherwise. Conventional attention to racism and diversity training has always focused on people of color, on the "other." While people of color have, of necessity, been studying white people most of their lives, white people are usually unconscious of powerful forces present every day which assist them and disadvantage others.

As practitioners, it is imperative that we understand this dynamic if we want to be truly culturally sensitive, to be in respectful relationship with our clients and our colleagues, and to practice our craft with integrity. It has everything to do with who we "be" in the world; may it inform what we "do" in the world.

Furthermore, as I will elaborate below, we do have a limited attention to the intersection of race and type in our research and practice, but not only is much more needed, none directly address the issues of invisible privilege.

As a faculty person at the University of California-Davis teaching "Ethnicity and American Communities," I face more than 125 very diverse students every year, hungry to relate to each other across the boundaries that society has set up. Hungry, yes, and curious, and also terrified. Over the last 7 years, I have presented day-long, experiential workshops on "Understanding Whiteness/Unraveling Racism" to corporate audiences as well as to nonprofits, federal government agencies, university departments, and to audiences at major professional conferences around the U.S. The response is always extraordinarily positive. "Eye opening," many people report in evaluations.

What has been eye opening for so many in experiential educational settings is learning of the white normativeness and white/European privilege that is prevalent in American society. What does this mean? It means that "normal" is defined by white norms, such as dress code, language, standard of beauty, and even the image of the divine. That being the case, white persons enjoy privilege bestowed on them prenatally that allows them to be seen as credible, trustworthy, competent, etc. The classic article on this phenomenon was written as a process of self-discovery by Peggy McIntosh (1989).

Here, for our purposes, is a relevant definition of racism: *racism is a system of oppression that disadvantages people of color and advantages white persons.* Every "ism" disadvantages or *targets* one group of persons, and *advantages* another, but we have paid much less attention to the interrogation of life on the privileged side.

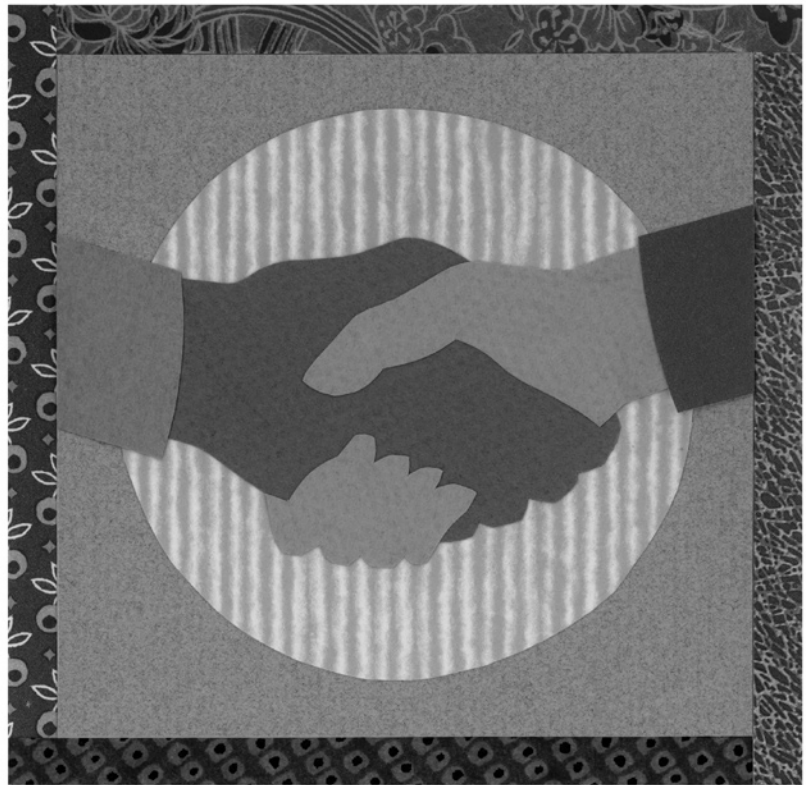
Let me say clearly that this essay is not about blaming white people or proving how bad they are. It is not our fault in the etiology of white privilege, but we are nevertheless responsible for the conditions we may unwittingly perpetuate. Until those privileged by the system are working just as hard as those targeted by the system to create change, the "isms"

will not become “wasms.” All professional wisdom points to the importance of those of us who are people workers to pay close attention to these often invisible and unconscious (especially to the dominant group) power dynamics and to begin with awareness of ourselves.

In a world of systemic racism, practitioners who are unaware of their own racial/cultural social identity, and unaware of differing worldviews of culturally diverse clientele, risk perpetuating insensitive behaviors and unconscious exclusion which results in the under-utilization of type by communities of color and the under-representation of practitioners of color in the field. This certainly applies to the world of type, to APTi itself, and to the world of coaches as well as other professions. Is this not pointing us to an area of cultural insensitivity that is having the negative effect of exclusion? Our practices always reveal who we are, even if we are unaware and do not intend the impact of our behavior.

Here are some examples. In a recent International Leadership Association Conference (ILA) in Amsterdam, I presented a workshop on this subject seeking to learn whether Western European norms predominated as normative. My participants from many different countries affirmed this to be so. Additionally, almost every plenary presenter for the first two days was a Western European man. When we celebrate our international diversity, it remains important to continue to look at who is dominant, who is in charge, etc. Another telling example comes from a global corporation doing Understanding Whiteness work with me last year. One corporate executive in charge of international markets was stunned when he realized that his counterparts in Asia were changing their names so that Westerners could pronounce them, and, of course, there is the expectation that everyone will speak English.

We need to uncover the often invisible and unconscious forces that keep racism and dominance in place; thus, we need to understand the role that whiteness, white privilege, internalized whiteness, and internalized racism can play in our type world and our personal lives. Unintentional and unconscious racial



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slights and insults are commonplace and go unnoticed. Perhaps type bias operates similarly.

In the type world, being culturally sensitive translates to awareness of our own type preferences and the appreciation of others who have different preferences. This includes learning to talk a language that communicates to those whose minds process information differently than ours. This means finding common ground. Those of us who practice type know this is truly harder than it sounds. In fact, it is a lifetime of practice that hones these skills, and a practice that is founded on a deep and genuine appreciation of difference. We also teach that we do not practice stereotyping, or type-bashing, but know that these practices continue, often by whatever type is dominant in

the setting and sometimes masked with humor. For an excellent discussion on inclusive language and stages of type awareness, see Jean Kummerow's award winning article in the *Journal of Psychological Type* from 2001.

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While the purpose of this article was to bring issues of race, and particularly privilege, to our APTi community, I would like to mention other areas of race and type intersections that are instructive and that I have found valuable. One of the first to call our attention to this subject was Pat Battle, who had a number of presentations and articles on a phenomenon she called the "masking of type" by African Americans in the late 1980's and 90's. Her area of research included the dynamic that this "target" group in society might show up as a different personality type (predominantly ISTJ) in mainstream U.S. society rather than as their "at home" type in the Black community, and both were legitimate for them. Consult the CAPT Bibliography ([www.capt.org](http://www.capt.org)) for 8 references to Pat Battle's publications and presentations, including one with Dan Robinson.

Wendy Horikoshi builds on this theme in *The Roots of Self-Identity: Assessing Best-Fit Type* ([www.transformativeleadership.net/media.html#rsi](http://www.transformativeleadership.net/media.html#rsi)). In the introduction, Wendy Horikoshi asks:

*How do ethnicity and culture affect the self-discovery process of finding a best-fit type? Do we as practitioners of type assume that the perspective in which we understand and find our way to our type is meaningful and authentic for persons from diverse cultures, religions and socioeconomic classes? If so, we may be wrong. As*

*practitioners of MBTI type, how can we incorporate a fuller understanding in how ethnicity may be at the roots of our identity while simultaneously exploring the MBTI preferences to enhance our understanding of ourselves?*

Horikoshi explores the cultural expectation for ISTJ preferences and also this "masking of type" for different generations of Japanese Americans.

Finally, a great resource exists in the multicultural chapter written by Linda Kirby and Nancy Barger in the *MBTI® Manual* (1998). Although the chapter speaks more to international multicultural diversity than the domestic issues focused on in this essay, the authors have identified numerous studies and practitioner issues with the clear instruction so oft repeated at MBTI qualifying programs: *culture has an impact on the expression of type*.

I hope that I have given you a sense of the importance of these diversity issues for our type community, but not just to open up new arenas of thought, feeling, and study. What we are looking at affects not only our practice and our organizations, it affects all our relationships. It affects the world we live in and the world our children will inherit, a world that is visibly becoming more diverse demographically every day, but not necessarily more multicultural. To be multicultural means the sharing of power and the creation of a truly inclusive and equitable society. Can we commit to *actions* that dismantle unconscious privilege in our type practices, in our type organizations, and in our lives? Is it not required of us to do more than just appreciate difference?

## References

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