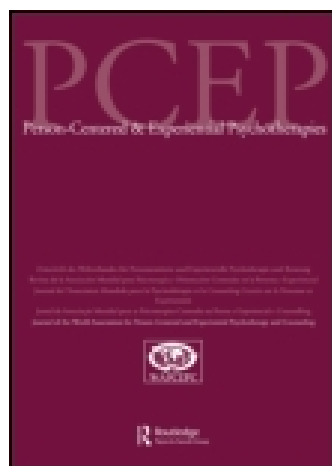


This article was downloaded by: [Swansea Metropolitan University]

On: 14 August 2015, At: 06:23

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpcp20>

Diversity: The depoliticization of inequalities

Gillian Proctor ^a

^a Bradford District Care Trust , Bradford, UK

Published online: 16 Nov 2011.

To cite this article: Gillian Proctor (2011) Diversity: The depoliticization of inequalities, Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies, 10:4, 231-234, DOI: [10.1080/14779757.2011.626618](https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2011.626618)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2011.626618>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

FOREWORD

Diversity: The depoliticization of inequalities

Gillian Proctor*

Bradford District Care Trust, Bradford, UK

(Received 1 July 2011; final version received 15 July 2011)

The rhetoric of diversity and difference depoliticize the inequalities in society. Linguistic equality cannot change material reality. Embracing the diversity rhetoric is in danger of obscuring inequalities and thus further perpetuating the structures of power in society. I hope that the person-centered approach can embrace its “revolutionary” roots and focus instead on power and inequalities.

Keywords: diversity; difference; power; inequality; politics

Verschiedenheit: Die Entpolitisierung von Ungleichheit

Die Rhetorik um Verschiedenheit und Unterschiede entpolitisiert die Ungleichheiten in der Gesellschaft. Linguistische Gleichheit kann die materielle Wirklichkeit nicht verändern. Sich in der Verschiedenheits-Rhetorik zu bewegen, bringt die Gefahr mit sich, Ungleichheiten zu verwischen und damit die gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnisse zu perpetuieren. Ich hoffe, dass sich der Personzentrierte Ansatz wieder auf seine revolutionären Wurzeln besinnt und das Thema von Macht und Ungleichheiten ins Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit rückt.

Diversidad: La despolitización de las desigualdades

La retórica de la diversidad y la diferencia despolitiza las desigualdades en la sociedad. La igualdad lingüística no puede cambiar la realidad material. Abrazar la retórica de la diversidad puede ser peligroso al ocultar las desigualdades y así seguir perpetuando las estructuras de poder en la sociedad. Espero que el enfoque centrado en la persona pueda abrazar sus raíces “revolucionarias” en vez de centrarse en el poder y las desigualdades.

Diversité : La dépolitisation des inégalités

La rhétorique sur la diversité et la différence dépolitise les inégalités dans la société. L'égalité linguistique ne peut pas changer la réalité matérielle. Adopter la rhétorique de la diversité c'est prendre le risque de voiler les inégalités, perpétuant ainsi les structures de pouvoir dans la société. J'espère que l'approche centrée sur la personne pourra s'appuyer sur ses racines “révolutionnaires” et focaliser plutôt sur le pouvoir et les inégalités.

Diversidade: A despolitização das desigualdades

A retórica da diversidade e da diferença despolitiza as desigualdades existentes na sociedade. A igualdade linguística não basta para alterar a realidade material.

*Email: Gillian.Proctor@bradford.nhs.uk

Acatar a retórica da diversidade conduz ao risco de que se disfarcem as desigualdades perpetuando, dessa forma, as estruturas de poder da sociedade. Espero que a abordagem centrada na pessoa possa aceitar as suas raízes “revolucionárias,” focando-se alternativamente no poder e nas desigualdades.

多様性：不平等の非政治化

多様性と違いのレトリックは、社会における不平等を非政治化へと導く。言葉の平等は物質世界の現実を変えることはできない。多様性のレトリックを取り入れることは、不平等を見えにくくし、社会における力の構造をさらに浸透させてしまう危険性を持っている。私は、パーソンセンタードアプローチが、もともと持っていた「革命的な」特徴を取り戻し、力と不平等というテーマにフォーカスすることを望んでいる。

We used to worry about power, inequalities, prejudice and unfair discrimination. Now we consider “difference” and “celebrate diversity.” What has happened in this shift is a worrying depoliticization of the inequalities that underlie the differences and diversity (Proctor, 2004a). Difference and diversity do not refer to just *any* qualities in which we all differ and are diverse; for example, they are not terms used to refer to the diversity of eye colors or singing voices of the population. They are terms used to refer to qualities, attributes or social signifiers that differentiate us and are historically and culturally attached to differential access to power and privilege. One variety of each attribute is attached to value, status and what is considered “normal.” Other varieties are devalued, stigmatized, marginalized and considered aberrant or abnormal. Examples of the “differences” that are thus categorized are gender, age, class, sexuality, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and religion. For example, men and White people are valued and given status. Women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are devalued and stigmatized.

Dalal (2002, 2011) also points to the depoliticization involved in “diversity” rhetoric. He similarly argues that social groupings and cultural practices are created by power relationships. Furthermore, the function of such cultural practices is to signal where the “us” begins and the “them” ends. He contends that the diversity project is based on the philosophy of fear of the unfamiliar, thus counteracting ignorance by increasing the profile of the “different.” However, he points out that this cannot explain the marginalization of women. He suggests that unfair discrimination is based on abuse of power, not ignorance. He critiques the reliance of diversity and difference rhetoric on categories of difference, and argues against the grouping of people into categories who can then become “them.” Furthermore, once people are in groups, these groups are then assumed to be homogeneous, and powerful representatives of the groups are held up to be celebrated, thus perpetuating the power relations within groups.

Here the person-centered approach can be a useful ally against grouping, with its phenomenological philosophy emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual. However, I argue that we also need to be politically mindful of commonalities among people as a result of their shared position in society. The person-centered approach has struggled to act politically due to the reticence of people to act together for a common cause, as opposed to emphasizing the difference of each individual. (See Proctor, 2004b for further discussion of talking about groups of people for political purposes.)

The rhetoric of “diversity” is an attempt to make equal linguistically diverse groups of people who have never been equal with respect to power or opportunities. “Diverse” suggests that each value is considered equally, with all power differentials disappearing. “Celebrating diversity” suggests that we can celebrate these differentials out of existence. Could this be true? Could it be that in “celebrating” the existence of groups that have been discriminated against, the status of these groups will increase and the individual members will be more valued? Changes of language have not led to changes in status before. Changing the terminology from “retarded” to “mentally handicapped” to “person with learning difficulties” to “person with learning disabilities” has not noticeably shifted the status of the individuals who are thus labeled and remain second-class citizens in Western societies. But perhaps the diversity rhetoric is more than just language? Does it bring shifts in attitude and practice towards people who have previously been discriminated against?

There is a government equalities office in the UK and recent UK legislation has used the term “equality” rather than diversity which makes clear the issue of unfair discrimination (The Equality Act, 2010). However, “diversity” and “difference” are still the preferred terms when looking at practice in the workplace. The National Centre for Diversity in the UK (<http://www.nationalcentrefordiversity.com/index.php>) explains what it means by diversity saying “Diverse means different. We are all different, therefore diversity includes us all.” Furthermore, “The National Centre for Diversity believes because everyone is different, diversity should not be seen as a peripheral issue about people from minorities as it has been in the past. It is a mainstream issue and it should be understood and managed in that context.” Thus diversity is not about marginalization, it is about embracing difference. There is little recognition of the uneven playing field from the start and how to address these inequalities. They make a business case for “diversity” saying, “By committing to embrace diversity you will see many business benefits which range from meeting legal requirements, reducing staff turnover and enhancing new product development.” Diversity has become a marketable commodity, depoliticized from any critique of society and dynamics of power.

Attempting to increase the status of one group can never change inequalities or structures of power without challenging the differential between dominant and marginalized groups. For example, celebrating gay and lesbian people can never decrease the marginalization of this population without challenging all the status and value attached to heterosexuality in society. I argue that instead of making any shifts towards reducing discrimination or closing inequalities, the rhetoric of “diversity” and “difference” instead obscures the inequalities involved and in so doing further perpetuates the structures of power and inequalities. Instead of challenging structures of power and systemic ways in which these inequalities are perpetuated, now difference is fetishized and exoticized; those who are “different” are sought to demonstrate the open-mindedness of organizations or brands who wish to appear tolerant and acceptant of difference, or even celebrate difference.

Many people speak of being attracted to the “revolutionary” (Rogers, 1978) person-centered approach because of the political and ethical position on equality that it appears to advocate (Proctor, 2004b). However the approach is in danger of obscuring inequalities in society by the focus on equal persons (Proctor, 2002). I suggest that celebrating diversity carries the same danger. Let us talk again about the issues that really make a difference – power and inequalities.

References

- Dalal, F. (2002). *Race, colour and the processes of racialization: New perspectives from psychoanalysis, group analysis and sociology*. London: Brunner Routledge.
- Dalal, F. (2011, May). *Tolerating discrimination: Discriminating tolerance*. Guest lecture delivered at the Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility (PCSR) Politics and Psychotherapy conference. London, UK.
- Home Office. (2010). The Equality Act. Retrieved 21st July 2011, from http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_act_2010.aspx
- Proctor, G. (2002). *The dynamics of power in counselling and psychotherapy: Ethics, politics and practice*. Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books.
- Proctor, G. (2004a, April). *Opium for the masses or help for those who least need it*. Guest lecture delivered at Leeds Metropolitan University Centre for Psychological Therapies annual conference "Working in a diverse world," Leeds, UK.
- Proctor, G. (2004b). Opening remarks. In G. Proctor, M. Cooper, P. Sanders, & B. Malcolm (Eds.), *Politicizing the person-centred approach: An agenda for social change* (pp. 1–4). Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books.