



# Analyze This!



The Official Newsletter of the  
San Gabriel Valley Psychological Association

SGVPA.org

AN OFFICIAL CHAPTER OF THE CALIFORNIA PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

March/April 2021

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Dr. Elisa Hernandez and Cinthya Hernandez  
Moderated by Dr. Wayne Kao  
Saturday, March 20  
9 am - 12 pm

\*Register for this Event:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/diversity-series-latinx-mental-health-tickets-135560805017>

### Native American and Indigenous Mental Health/Healing

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Moderated by Dr. Wayne Kao  
Saturday, May 22  
9 am - 12 pm

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SGVPA supports Black Lives Matter and systemic social justice reform. We are making efforts to increase diversity representation in our organization, in our profession, and nationwide.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



### *Good Faith:*

*A sincere intention to be fair, open, and honest,  
regardless of the outcome.*

**D**ear Colleagues,  
By the time you read this, February will be over. February marks not only Black History Month, but also the Lunar New Year, observed on February 12 this year. Both are occasions representing and celebrating underrepresented communities that others may have little understanding or appreciation for.

When any culture is represented in this country, there can be room for so much misunderstanding and misinterpretations. We all have varied ways in which we see the world, live our lives, and uphold our values. It's all too easy to see others' actions as offensive, harmful, and ill-willed. In these days of such division and many grievances, I'm reminded of the simplicity of "good faith."

For the most part, I believe people move through their lives, not with intentions to hurt or demean others, but in *good faith*, i.e., with a sincere intention to be fair, open, and honest, despite being curious or even put off by the unfamiliar. I truly believe that when most of us say or do something that may be seen as insensitive or offensive, it is with a good faith intention to better understand or to connect with those that are different from us.

As a child growing up different from the rest of my San Diego community, I would often be faced with questions about the way my family and I lived our lives, about our language, about our food, etc. When it came time for Lunar New Year, in February, I would often be asked about the red decorations around our house, and what they meant. Some neighbors found our customs offensive, due to the fact that they were not explicitly American, and we would face demands to take down the decorations, or to only celebrate American holidays. When I was confronted with questions regarding my family's culture, I could sometimes see the disdain and fear in people's faces.

Of course, this was in bad faith.

And yet, the majority of the people that inquired appeared genuinely curious, and not aggressive in any way. Even though they often did not realize that they were asking a child to explain the intricacies of his cultural background—the reasoning behind Lunar New Year, and why it was different from the Solar New Year—it seemed that they were making their queries in good faith, with a genuine desire to connect, and to understand. Oftentimes, I would be asked truly insensitive questions like, "Why don't you all just follow the American calendar," or begin their question with, "Do your people...?"

Obviously, these ways of inquiring made me feel uncomfortably *different*, and it wasn't easy telling the difference between good and bad will. Many intended to label me as different and unwanted. Yet, I knew many of these inquirers were my friends, or their parents, and even my teachers. I noticed that when friends invited me over to their homes, their parents always welcomed me graciously. I saw that my teachers graded me according to the quality of my work, and were largely very kind to me. I realized this was all true, *despite* the frequent insensitivity or awkwardly phrased questions.

It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that understanding and acknowledging that fact is the only way that we can move forward together. As much as we need to know when someone is meaning harm, we also need to see when someone means well.

In keeping with this idea, I look forward to the continuation of our Embracing Diversity CE Series, with Latinx Mental Health on, Saturday, March 20 from 9-12 pm, and Native American/Indigenous Mental Health on Saturday, May 22, from 9-12 pm. Our goal is explore the obstacles that face our various communities and cultures, as we also learn from and celebrate the contributions and wisdom of our mental health professional presenters, who all come from diverse backgrounds. Both events will be held via Zoom, and will provide 3 live, interactive CE's for those who attend.

In placing such a focus on the diversity of our society, I'm struck by the simple truth that anyone from any culture wants to be *seen* and *acknowledged*. It is when individuals feel *invisible* that division and mental health concerns arise, involving anger, pain, and even the violence and aggression we have seen over the recent months. My hope is that SGVPA's continuing education events, and upcoming book clubs, and movie nights, will bring increasing visibility to those we may overlook, or have a difficult time accepting.

Finally, please also look out for the Diversity Forums, held bi-monthly on Fridays from 12-1 pm. These are always uniquely bold and stimulating discussions that seek to find how we can understand, advocate for, and provide resources for those in need.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone soon at these events.

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne Kao, PsyD

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*Disclaimer: The opinions and views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the San Gabriel Valley Psychological Association.*

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# How Can They Believe That?



By Jon-Patrik Pedersen, PhD

During this time of violence that has arisen out of aggressive irrationality, many people are asking how their fellow citizens and family members can believe in outrageous conspiracies and assertions for which there is no credible evidence.

As I see it, there are at least five primary explanations or causes: Human Psychology; Tribalism/Xenophobia; Economic Suffering; the Failure of Public Education, as seen in a de-emphasis of critical thinking; and Social Media. Although there isn't space here to address the complexities of each, I believe these factors to be primary.

## Human Psychology

We are all born into a world of psychosis and magical thinking, and while we proceed to make our way toward sound reasoning and correct perception of the social and physical worlds, no one fully succeeds—even with the most competent parenting. And one particularly significant developmental challenge is to successfully move through a period of paranoia—the feeling/belief that we are the target of a malicious persecutor.

To quote Mark Twain, “Let us consider that we are all partially insane. It will explain us to each other; it will unriddle many riddles; it will make clear and simple many things which are involved in haunting and harassing difficulties and obscurities now.” In typical times, this can be seen in the constant number of unfounded beliefs among “normal” people, who are certain they have been abducted by extraterrestrial aliens, that our lives are influenced by the positions of the planets, and that we are all controlled by a cabal of wealthy men, among other beliefs. One only need listen to Coast-to-Coast Radio any night to hear dozens of these stories, which have been listened to and shared by thousands of callers for decades.

More serious are the *consequences* of excessive paranoia, which can be seen in the felt need of millions of Americans to own multiple guns they believe should not be regulated in any way. This pervasive vulnerability to paranoia also makes average citizens prey to sociopaths with power, whether they lead a cult or a political party, who cultivate belief in a dangerous Other they must be protected from, or defeat.

## Tribalism/Xenophobia

The Pulitzer Prize winning historian and geographer Jared Diamond tells the story of traveling to a location where the tribespeople have rarely encountered a person outside of their community. He explains that when he comes across a scout, he must find some way to show they have a social, if not blood, connection, or he will be killed. Finding this bond has sometimes taken hours to achieve.

Evolutionary psychologists more broadly claim that this reliance on kinship is a fundamental part of the human condition, as is its inverse, xenophobia, the fear of others unlike ourselves.

While humans are becoming more able to see and feel that community spans beyond our immediate location and across physiological differences, such as skin color and facial features, the power of tribal bonds and fear of Otherness lurk just below the surface of our “civilized” lives. Examples abound, from the KKK, to gangs, to sports fans, who can and have perpetrated vandalism and caused the loss of life simply because they lost a championship title—or even because they won.

## Economic Suffering

In his groundbreaking book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and*

*Homosexuality*, Yale history professor John Boswell definitively demonstrated the causal effect of economic strife on social values. In this survey of the early Christian Church's attitude toward homosexuality, as well as Jews and witches, he showed that when the economy was booming, tolerance, and even acceptance of these groups of Others, predominated (including the sanctioning of same-sex marriages). But when the members of this Christian Society could not afford the necessities of life, persecution of homosexuals, Jews, and witches, as scapegoats, skyrocketed.

When people suffer economically for an extended amount of time, irrationality grows, along with trends towards tribalism and xenophobia.

## The Failure of Public Education

It goes without saying that the inability to think critically, to use logic and scientific reasoning, makes a person, and a society, vulnerable to snake oil salesmen; that is, to sociopaths of every degree, who will use a target's ignorance for their own benefit. But a lack of critical thinking also makes people vulnerable to manipulation by those in power, or those aspiring to power. Unfortunately, public education has generally failed to instill critical thinking skills in its graduates.

Alarmingly, this approach has occasionally been codified as an imperative. For example, in the 2012 education platform of the Texas Republican Party, its penultimate draft explicitly stated their opposition to “critical thinking skills,” because they “have the purpose of challenging the student's fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority.” With political intentions such as this, along with insufficient funding and confused priorities in the public schools, it becomes increasingly hard to foster an informed and discerning populace.

## The Social Media

Whereas long-distance communication was once limited to the telegraph, telephones, and letters, most people are now able to share their opinions at the speed of light, for very little cost, to virtually any location on this planet. And as we have seen recently, those who own these social media platforms benefit financially by stoking the fires of their subscribers' fears, prejudices, ignorance, and gullibility. These fires are further fueled into bonfires by limiting the information their subscribers can see to whatever will get them to stay online longer and buy more products.

Thus, we have the creation of “echo chambers”—pockets of communication wherein the participants only hear opinions that support their views, or opposing views that are usually extreme and inaccurate, which increases their ire and confirms their fears and beliefs. What they don't hear are reasoned and reasonable challenges to their thinking. All news media join in on this, but the internet-based social media is arguably the most influential.

In this way, the irrational angels of our nature can gain power. Vaccines can be said to cause autism or to carry computer chips implanted by the The Government. Celebrities and politicians can be accused of Satanism and cannibalism. And millions of people can come to believe that a national election is rigged, without any evidence for their assertion.

And it takes only one demagogue, abetted by power seekers and sycophants, to use social media to draw on the public's tendency toward irrationality and tribalism, as well as their suffering and poor reasoning skills, to turn them toward violence. How to turn them back is now the most important question.

*Dr. Jon-Patrik Pedersen can be reached at [drjonp@earthlink.net](mailto:drjonp@earthlink.net).*

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# Culture, Neuropsychology, and the Future:

## Personal Recollections and Reflections

By Mercy Huang, PhD  
Early Career Professionals Chair



I vividly recall the first time I arrived in Southeast Asia, astonished by how foreign the experience was, and how little I understood in terms of the people and their experience. We were hosted by a recently widowed, elderly Malaysian woman whose husband had passed from what she referred to as “head-brokenness.” The intensity of her grief was consuming and the image of her despondence lingered in my mind, as she relayed the rapidness of his decline and the futility of any medical relief. In retrospect, I owe to my early childhood experiences—traveling across a vast number of countries—for my appreciation of the poignant experiences of varied cultures. I traveled widely, due to my parents’ work, and often witnessed the underprivileged and disabled who were forgotten in the blanket of ethnic generalizations. I heard stories of those oppressed and without hope. These moving experiences ultimately led me to studying psychology.

Becoming absorbed in various rural and urban communities in Southeast Asia stimulated my cultural interests. I gained an appreciation for different cultures, and could sense that my future calling lay in a field that addressed this appreciation. Moreover, in the course of my academic journey, I also developed a fascination with the human brain. Studying cognition reminded me of my travels in Malaysia, and the elderly woman whose husband had most likely acquired a neurodegenerative condition—which she termed “head-brokenness.” This experience was later clarified and reinforced by the learning about the neurological disorders I became acquainted with during my undergraduate research on memory. I soon found myself exploring the tenets of neuropsychology, and becoming drawn to a deeper understanding of neurodegenerative disorders—and later, traumatic brain injuries.

Yet the ethnic composition I came across and the resources available were largely homogenous. Most of the resources were available to white patients. As I proceeded with my studies, and was given the opportunity to wrestle with these topics of cultural and community, the disparity in mental health resources became increasingly apparent and, to be frank, disconcerting to me. That awareness spurred me to understanding what it would mean to deliver psychological and neuropsychological services, to people of diverse backgrounds.

When I reflect on how my past curiosities have converged with my current pursuits, I’m often reminded of the time I

spent sitting with the elderly Malaysian woman—hearing her pain and confusion about her husband’s decline—and how traumatizing the adjustment had been. Although I was only a young child at the time, such early memories inspired me to want to help individuals who face difficulties brought on by neurological, psychiatric and other medical conditions. It led me to find out more about how biological, psychological, and social aspects of these problems impact the body and the mind.

My own academic and professional journeys have led me to face the historical juncture which Western mental health currently faces. In light of recent sociopolitical events, and the systemic inequality and discrimination revealed to have become part of the fabric of our society, I have faced the glaring truth that as a society, we have much to address. It should come as no surprise that current models of pathology, assessment, and psychotherapy have been largely lacking in cultural considerations. One could say that the shift in our model of healing from implicit oppression and imposed values, to a celebration of many cultures’ perspectives, is long overdue. We can no longer dismiss the sociocultural determinants of pathology, or the ramifications for how we practice. Cultural considerations such as valorized emotions, synergy vs. scarcity, and independence vs. interdependence are all avenues we can begin to explore in our re-constructed models of pathology and healing. This new framework of thinking will undoubtedly be challenging—but one, I believe, that is necessary in order to be practitioners who are truly attuned to the afflictions of culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse populations.

Clearly, the movement to provide more sensitive, culturally informed interventions and assessment is work in progress. There are centuries of ingrained injustices, implicit biases, and deeply rooted pains that need to be addressed, and amended, for ethnic minorities who seek services in the United States. I see this move towards cultural renewal as dynamic and ongoing, rather than an overnight transformation. We need to accumulate and cultivate knowledge and accountability, and to embrace the transformative spirit, so that we can bring hope and culturally sensitive treatment to those who need it. In the words of Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire, “...Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” May we continue to understand one another in a spirit of justice, equity, and inclusivity.

*Dr. Mercy Huang can be reached at [mmhuang14@gmail.com](mailto:mmhuang14@gmail.com).*

## Poetry to Ponder

Submitted by Catherine Fuller, PhD

As I approach that line between old middle age and young old, I am thinking and reading more about what some call “elderhood.” This developmental stage is commonly thought of as little more than a time a time of decline and decrepitude, yet writers such as our beloved Margaret Atwood (age 81!) demonstrate how to flourish and thrive. Her latest book, *The Testaments*, won a Booker Prize in 2019.

I like this poem because of its mixture of wry humor and non-sentimental empathy.

### FLATLINE

by Margaret Atwood  
(b. 1939)

Things wear out. Also fingers  
Gnarling sets in.  
Your hands crouch in their  
mittens.  
Forget chopsticks, and buttons.

Feet have their own agendas.  
They scorn your taste in shoes  
and ignore your trails, your  
maps.

Ears are superfluous:  
What are they for?  
those alien pink flaps?  
Skull fungus.

The body, once your accomplice,  
is now your trap.  
The sunrise makes you wince:  
too bright, too flamingo.

After a lifetime of tangling,  
of knotted snares and lacework,  
of purple headspace tornados  
with their heartrace and rubble,  
you crave the end of mazes

and pray for a white shore,  
an ocean with its horizon:  
not, so much, bliss  
but a flat line you steer for.

No more hiss and slosh,  
no reefs, no deeps,  
no throat rattle of gravel.

It sounds like this:



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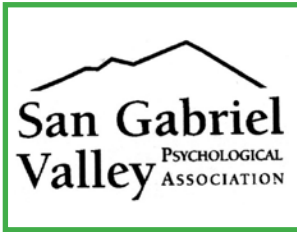
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