



Cultural Sensitivity and Intersectionality Policy

13.1 Policy Statement

Cultural Safety aims to ensure all individuals and groups are treated with respect in relation to their unique cultural needs and differences. It assumes the right to difference and calls for interactions that do not diminish, demean or disempower individuals on the basis of any perceived or actual difference.

The core business of GTA is concerned with supporting the development of compassionate, ethical, responsible and culturally aware psychotherapists from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. We are committed to ensuring that all students (and staff) experience a safe-enough¹ environment, and that our graduates are trained to practice in culturally sensitive ways.

Policies of this sort are often explicitly concerned with ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians experience a safe learning and working environment. It is also the right of all individuals from all backgrounds and identities to expect culturally sensitive engagement in the course of their work and/or study. While all people can claim to come from unique cultural backgrounds, the deliberate creation of a culturally safe environment is particularly concerned with those backgrounds and cultural perspectives that are often marginalised in mainstream culture. These will likely include issues of race, sexual orientation and gender identity.

The theory of *Intersectionality* is consistent with gestalt's relational field approach and the need to hold complex understandings of experience. Intersectionality considers that various aspects of humanity, such as class, race, sexual orientation and gender as not existing separately from each other, but as complexly interwoven, and that their relationships are essential to an understanding of the human condition. When systems of justice or other entities attempt to look at each aspect in isolation, misconceptions may occur and essential understandings may be lost.

Intersectionality proposes that all aspects of one's identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other and affecting one's privilege and perception in society, and that these facets of identity cannot simply be observed separately. As such, Intersectionality is not simply a view of personal identity, but rather an overarching analysis of power hierarchies present within identities that reflect the complex structuring of our shared contexts.

In addressing the experience of cultural difference, there will often be difficult conversations, with each party needing to be willing to examine their own cultural positioning and prejudice to the best of their

¹ We recognize that the idea of 'safety' is complex, with people's felt experience of safety determined by the interaction of many factors. Our use of the term 'safe-enough' in no way minimizes the importance of safety, particularly cultural sensitivity in relation to groups and individuals that experience marginalisation and oppression. The term 'safe-enough' is used in recognition of the principles and commitments central to creating an environment that feels safe, while also understanding that at times people may still feel unsafe for a variety of complex reasons. Our fundamental commitment is to respectfully explore such experiences, while seeking to provide the necessary support to enable people to remain engaged in the learning process.

ability. Some conversations will (albeit unintentionally) perpetuate painful experiences of exclusion and persecution. The idea of *Cultural Fitness*² holds that only by being a part of these difficult conversations can we learn how to be with others in our differences. In this way, cultural sensitivity fitness supports resilience (a willingness) to stay in dialogue and to keep developing the pathways to greater understanding. This is consistent with gestalt's dialogic theory, particularly with reference to 'the commitment to dialogue'.

By adopting a welcoming and open stance our cultural sensitivity fitness emerges in process. In this way we are honouring our commitment to dialogue and our respect for the complexity of human experience. Supporting these important conversations about diversity and difference, we allow for deepening compassion, trust and robustness at GTA and in the broader community.

To this end, GTA endorses the following principles underpinning this policy:

- There is no single Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, just as there is no single non-Indigenous culture. Our interactions and practices acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous and other cultures, locally, nationally and internationally.
- Culture can be constructed to relate to more than ethnicity alone – it may be linked to socio-economic status, religion, gender, age, sexuality or disability. As such, it is important to recognize that there is no single experience of any of these others facets of culturally constructed experience.
- Faculty will be attentive to and take seriously any experiences that suggest or point to a felt sense of being 'unsafe' and will endeavor to explore these, while ensuring that the experiences and differing cultural backgrounds of all individuals are respected.
- Staff and students of GTA will strive to demonstrate and facilitate Cultural Fitness in their professional encounters through:
 - Examination of and reflection on one's own culture and its potential impact on others;
 - Developing and displaying sensitivity to historical influences on the health and well-being of others;
 - Acknowledging power relationships and dominance that are a result of cultural privilege and acting to ensure equitable and respectful engagement;
 - Ensuring respectful dialogue and avoiding use of language that may be colonising or 'othering' in nature;
 - Acceptance of the right to hold differing world and other views.

13.2 Implications

Cultural safety is a philosophy and a way of operating that aims towards all individuals and groups being treated with regard to their unique cultural needs and differences. It assumes the right to difference and calls for interactions that do not diminish, demean or disempower individuals on the basis of any perceived or actual difference.

GTA maintains a relationship with We Al-li, an indigenously owned and operated business. They will provide ongoing training and other consultation to GTA faculty and students, as required.

A complaint about a breach of this policy can be made using GTA's *Grievance and Complaints Policy*.

² We have borrowed, with permission, the idea of Cultural Fitness from Professor Judith Atkinson and the work of We Al-li.