

# Black Lives Matter

## North American Drama Therapy Association Position Statement

### May 2015

Black Lives Matter. Like many around the world, we at the North American Drama Therapy Association share the profound grief, anger, and pain as we grapple with the loss of Mya Hall, 27; Freddie Gray, 25; Trayvon Martin, 17; Romain Brisbon, 34; Tamir Rice, 12; Yvette Smith, 47; Akai Gurley, 28; Kajieme Powell, 25; Ezell Ford, 25; Oscar Grant, 22, Dante Parker, 36; Michael Brown, 18; John Crawford III, 22; Tyree Woodson, 38; Eric Garner, 43; Victor White, 22; Yvette Smith, 47; McKenzie Cochran, 25; Jordan Baker, 26; Andy Lopez, 13; Miriam Carey, 34; Jonathan Ferrell, 24; Carlos Alcis, 43; Larry Eugene Jackson, Jr., 32; Deion Fludd, 17; Kimani Gray, 16; Johnnie Kamahi Warren, 43; Malissa Williams, 30; Timothy Russell, 43; Reynaldo Cuevas, 20 and countless others. Their deaths have brought international attention the daily violence experienced within communities of color at the hands of the police and civilians who are rarely held responsible for their actions.

We, at the NADTA, do not see these deaths as isolated events but an epidemic that affects the safety and well-being of society, our members, and those with whom we work. We recognize that what we are experiencing is the systemic failure of our society to address our own history and legacy of colonization and slavery that continues to rationalize the domination of one racial or ethnic group over other group(s) and to maintain psychological and material advantages through the ongoing dehumanization and criminalization of people of color in every social sphere that we choose to acknowledge from our systems of healthcare, education, justice, human services, banking, and housing. Social acceptance of the myth of a colorblindness, institutionalized racism, and a pervasive fear of the “other” are at the root of these acts of brutality (Mayor, 2012; Sajnani, 2012).

We also recognize that we are an organizational expression of society and therefore implicated in the struggle for social justice and equality. Therefore, we see this statement as a critical part of our commitment to upholding high standards of ethical practice. In the words of art therapist Dan Hockoy (2007), "There is no possibility to end psychological suffering until we work on the social disparities that result in ‘intrapsychic trauma,’ and, no matter how much political activism and community service we do, there is no possibility for social justice until we come to terms with the forces of marginalization within our own psyches" (p.37). Racism, implicit bias, and race-based privilege disrupt the mental health and psychological functioning of both victims and perpetrators of racial injustice and this contributes to the maintenance of racist systems and interactions (APA, 2015).

We understand the inclination to respond to this position statement with an assertion that all lives matter and, of course, they do. However, as George Yancy and Judith Butler noted in their [recent article](#) in the New York Times (Jan. 12, 2015),

**“If we jump too quickly to the universal formulation, ‘all lives matter’, then we miss the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of “all lives.” That said, it is true that**

**all lives matter...but to make that universal formulation concrete, to make that into a living formulation, one that truly extends to all people, we have to foreground those lives that are not mattering now, to mark that exclusion, and militate against it. Achieving that universal, “all lives matter,” is a struggle, and that is part of what we are seeing on the streets...Only through such an ever-growing cross-racial struggle against racism can we begin to achieve a sense of all the lives that really do matter.”**

The current climate of violence most directly and negatively impacts people of color and it affects all of us. We condemn police brutality and the US and Canadian systems of racialized, mass incarceration. To our members who have expressed feeling invisible, forgotten, or silenced we are deeply grieved. We stand with our members who have experienced the trauma of racism and intersecting oppressions. We call on our community as a whole to bring your experience, critical thinking, research, and artful approaches to creating spaces where we can extend our understanding of the impact of racism and other forms of social injustice on health and well-being.

Towards this end, the NADTA has been and will continue to engage in a number of initiatives. These include the development of guidelines concerning cultural response/ability in ethical practice. Your input on these guidelines is critical so please [click here](#) to read them and provide your comments. These guidelines will be discussed at our [next annual conference](#) which is focused on how drama therapists draw on an understanding of dramatic reality, embodiment, improvisation, role, narrative, witnessing, and performance amongst other processes to promote empathy, diversity and to connect healing with social justice (Oct. 15-18, 2015). Please consider participating in the online activities and conversations coordinated by the [conference pre-education committee](#). You also are welcome to share your reflections in a blog post on the official NADTA blog, [Dramascope](#) (via email submission to the [dramascope@nadta.org](mailto:dramascope@nadta.org)) or submit an article or a clinical commentary to [Drama Therapy Review](#), the peer-reviewed journal of the NADTA. Issue 2.1 is a special issue entitled: Borderlands: Diversity and Social Justice in Drama Therapy and the deadline is August 1st, 2015. The NADTA Diversity Committee will also host community conference calls on the topic of racism and other matters of interest and concern to members. The first call will be focused on the impact of racism on mental health and will take place on Monday, June 1st, from 8-9pm EST. Please [click here](#) to sign up for this call and to receive call-in details. We are also aware of the trailblazing work done by colleagues in related fields who have documented the psychological causes and consequences of [racism](#), [transphobia](#), [homophobia](#), [ageism](#), ableism, sexism, sizeism, [poverty](#), and other forms of interpersonal and institutionalized bias on mental health and invite you to make use of these resources and to contribute others by contacting Jessica Bleuer, Diversity Chair, at [diversity@nadta.org](mailto:diversity@nadta.org). We close with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who, in his influential book *Why We Can't Wait*, wrote “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (1963, p. 87).

In Solidarity,

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