



Perception is Everything: Stigma, Mental Health, & Suicide in Historically Marginalized Communities

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What Is Perception?



The ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses.

Our way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression

2 Things



Disposition or personality.



Lived Experience

Everything that we have:

- Learned
- Been taught, or
- Been socialized to see.

Disposition plus Life Experience helps us form our sense of community.

Family

Friends

Neighbors

Co-workers

Cultural &
Ethnic
Groups



A Chance Encounter

What If....

based on your life experience, your perception is incomplete or flawed?



Are you as a clinician finishing my story based on your perception?

Implicit Bias



I would argue that implicit bias woven into the fabric of behavioral health.

Implicit bias influences a provider's ability to engage in truly patient-centered care.

How can you engage in person centered care with me when you don't acknowledge, understand, or accept my perception of my life as a Black man in America?

Vulnerability of the Profession

Behavioral health is particularly vulnerable to implicit bias because the diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions rely heavily on provider discretion.

The providers' unconscious attitudes toward historically marginalized populations can have a direct impact on outcomes for individuals seeking mental health treatment.

According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health

- ▶ Black adults in the U.S. are more likely than white adults to report persistent symptoms of emotional distress, such as sadness, hopelessness, and feeling like everything is an effort.

Despite the Need

- ▶ According to the American Psychiatric Association's Mental Health Facts for African Americans guide, African Americans are:
- ▶ Less likely to receive guideline-consistent care
- ▶ Less frequently included in research
- ▶ More likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists)

Historically:

**Compared with whites, African Americans are:
Less likely to initiate treatment
More likely to terminate treatment prematurely**

Consider

Outpatient treatment centers are less likely to be located in predominantly Black neighborhoods, so how are Blacks introduced to the system?

It's Not Your Fault

Historical Treatment models were built and designed from the perspective of White males, during a time when people of color and women were thought of as "lesser".

They were not designed to account for or accommodate the nuances of race, ethnicity, or culture. (inward versus higher power)

Historically, there is a lack of diagnostic and treatment studies on mental health in African Americans. As a group African Americans are underserved, understudied, and misdiagnosed.

Lack of Diverse Clinicians

According to
the American
Psychiatric
Association:

While Blacks
make up
about 13% of
the US
populaion


4% of
Psychologists
in the US are
Black.

2% of
Psychiatrists
in the US are
Black.

Many
Clinicians
Don't Have
The
Framework to
Acknowledge
and
Understand:



Historical adversity, which includes slavery, sharecropping and race-based exclusion from health, educational, social and economic resources, translates into socioeconomic disparities experienced by African Americans today.



Socioeconomic status is linked to mental health: People who are impoverished, homeless, incarcerated or have substance abuse problems are at higher risk for poor mental health.



Historically, there is a lack of diagnostic and treatment studies on depression in African Americans. As a group African Americans are underserved, understudied, and misdiagnosed.



When I'm Right I'm Right

Simply
put:

**What you can see and interpret is
influenced by your experience and
your perception.**



How Do You Hear Me?

Paranoid Personality Disorder per DSM

PPD is characterized by a pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others such that their motives are interpreted as malevolent, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts

Symptoms of Paranoid Personality Disorder



They will believe others are using them, lying to them, or harming them, without apparent evidence thereof.



2. They will have doubts about the loyalty and trustworthiness of others,



3. They will not confide in others due to the belief that their confidence will be betrayed.



4. They will interpret ambiguous or benign remarks as hurtful or threatening, and



5. Hold grudges,



6. In the absence of objective evidence, believe their reputation or character are being assailed by others, and will retaliate in some manner and




7. Will be jealous and suspicious without cause that intimate partners are being unfaithful.

How Do We Hear Patient Information?

A Black man may describe the pressures he's facing by talking about current politics, employment issues, and violence in his community. The patient may sound like he's coming from a position of anger or even paranoia, but, instead, he's merely communicating the experience of a Black man in the United States.

Introduction to The System

Consider, for example, a black man who has grown up in a society where men and boys of color disproportionately have negative outcomes when involved with law enforcement.



His vigilance in everyday life might be perceived as a natural consequence of racial profiling by a provider of color but may be perceived as paranoia related to schizophrenia by a White clinician.

Consider That:

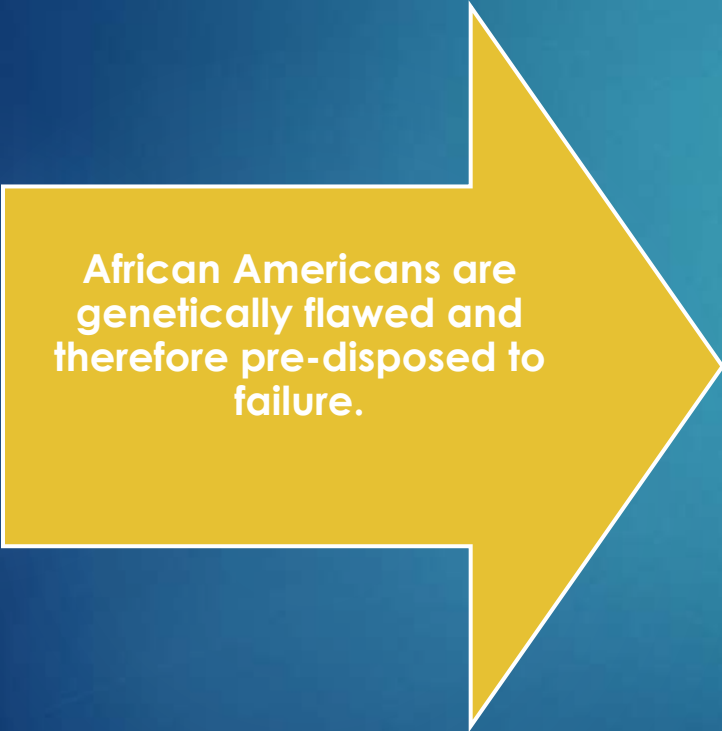
African Americans are 7.3 times more likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods with limited to no access to mental health services

African Americans comprise 40 percent of the homeless population.

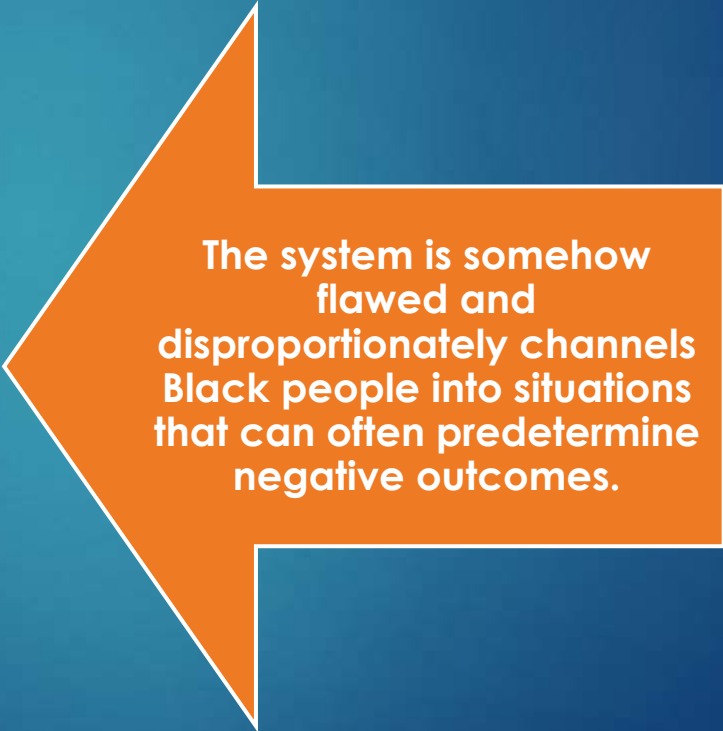
African American youth make up 40% of youth in the criminal justice system and 45% of children in foster care are African American.

African Americans make up 1/2 the inmates in America's jails and prisons.

One Would Have To Believe That Either:



African Americans are genetically flawed and therefore pre-disposed to failure.



The system is somehow flawed and disproportionately channels Black people into situations that can often predetermine negative outcomes.

The Effects of Stereotypes

17 Million

Whites reported having used an illicit drug within the last month

4 Million

Blacks reported having used an illicit drug within the last month

Although African Americans make up only **12.5%** of illicit drug users, **33%** of drug incarcerations are black. This leads to major roadblocks in treatments for substance abuse among the population, as there is a fear in self-reporting.¹



¹ <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>



Stereotypes Impact Perception

According to SAMHSA

- 6.9% of African Americans have a substance use disorder compared to a rate of 7.4% among the total population.
- 3.4% of African Americans have an illicit drug use disorder compared to a rate of 3% among the total population.
- African Americans report lower lifetime use of cocaine (8.5%) compared to Caucasians (17.6%) and Hispanics (11.1%).
- Alcohol use disorders are less common among African Americans (4.5%) than the total population (5.4%).
- The rate of heavy drinking among African Americans (4.3%) is much less than the general population (6.1%) and Caucasians (7.2%).

Critical Issues Faced by Historically Marginalized Communities

Less access to treatment

Less likely to receive treatment

Poorer quality of care

Higher levels of stigma

Culturally insensitive health care system

Racism, bias, homophobia or

discrimination in treatment settings

Language barriers

Lower rates of health insurance

Tackling Implicit Bias.....



....TAKES TRAINING
AND FORETHOUGHT.

CLINICIANS SHOULD
SEE MORE THAN WHAT
IS IN FRONT OF THEM.



YOU HAVE TO SEE
WHAT IS LIVING INSIDE
OF YOU.



TO TRULY SEE ME, YOU
HAVE TO SEE THROUGH
MY LENS.



TO TRULY HEAR ME,
YOU HAVE TO HEAR
WHAT I HEAR.



Do You
Hear What
I Hear?



GROUP OF SLAVE-CHILDREN ON BOARD THE "DAPHNE."

(From a Photograph by the Author.)

Do You Hear What I Hear?

When you listen to what's in the ground, buried in the soil of America, do you hear what I hear? Do you hear the rattle of chains as my forefathers were huddled together as cattle, sold into bondage or do you only hear the stories of slave owners who "built America" with the sweat of their brow?

Do you hear the spatter of bloodshed and the crack of the whip as it pierced the back of my great, great grandfather toiling in the cotton field, or do you only hear the clatter of Eli Whitney's cotton gin as it spun out fine linens that adorned generals and business men?



SLAVES TO SELL!

ON SATURDAY, 15TH OF SEPT'R NEXT,

I will sell at the Court House door, in the town of Jackson, Cape Girardeau county, Mo., on a credit of twelve months, with interest from date, all the Slaves belonging to the estate of John Randol, deceased. Said Slaves consist of

**A NEGRO MAN,
Negro Woman & Child
AND TWO FEMALE CHILDREN**

With approved security, will be required for the purchase.
NAMES
Administrator



Do you hear the wails of African mothers as their babies were stripped from their arms and sold to the highest bidder, or do you only hear the stories of the daughters of the confederacy, who showed their grit as they supported their men in battle?



Do you hear the sound of the gavel as Black fathers were taken from their families and sold on the auction blocks, or do you only hear the stories of today's "absent Black fathers"?

Do you hear the cries for freedom from the bondage of slavery, or do you only hear the rebel yell, and battle hymns, of oppressors to whom monuments were erected?

Do you hear the last gasp for breath as a Black man was lynched in the Jim Crow south for no other reason than being Black, or do you only hear of the strength and mettle of poor white farmers who survived the Great Depression?



Do you hear the screams of the 300 Black citizens murdered in the Wilmington, NC “massacre” of 1898, their businesses burned to the ground by a mob of 2,000 angry white men, simply because they dared to prosper, or do you only hear angry Black protestors in 2020?





Do you hear the spirituals ringing out as freedom marchers locked arm in arm, sang “We shall overcome”, while being set upon by dogs and fire hoses, or do you only hear of how great the 60’s were, prompting you to long for days gone by, and to seek to “Make America Great Again”?

Do you hear the cries for justice, for equality, and freedom, as I take a knee, or do you only hear the Star-Spangled Banner, and avert your eyes?



Do you hear the voice of 14-year-old Emmett Till, lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for speaking to a white woman, or do you only hear the tales of Black male “predators”?

Do you hear Eric Garner’s stifled “I can’t breathe”, or do you only hear the often repeated, “he should have complied”?



Do you hear the screams of a startled and frightened Ahmaud Arbery who, while out jogging in Georgia, was murdered for something someone thought he might have done, or do you only hear their pleas of innocence, and that they have to protect their property?

Do you hear the cries of Breonna Taylor asking “why”, as she was shot 8 times, in her own home, by law enforcement officers who were at the wrong residence, or do you only hear how we shouldn’t “police the police” when Black lives are lost?



Do you hear George Floyd crying out to his mother; to all Black mothers, as he lay dying on the concrete with an officer's knee on his neck for 9 minutes & 29 seconds, or do you only hear the call for law and order against the "base elements" of society?



Listen

Do you hear what I hear, as I place my ear to the ground? Do you hear the spilled blood crying from the depths of the soil? Can you hear it? Can you hear my pain? Can you hear my anguish? Can you hear me? I hear you, and sometimes the silence is deafening.



If you can't see me and if you can't hear me, if you can't identify with, and feel empathy for, the historical trauma that I have to live with, if all you see is a Black body that signals danger and a need to be controlled, your interaction may become another traumatic experience that I have carry.



Questions and Discussion