



# Perception Is Everything: Implicit Bias in Human Services

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# What Is Perception?



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

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

# 2 Things



**Disposition or personality.**



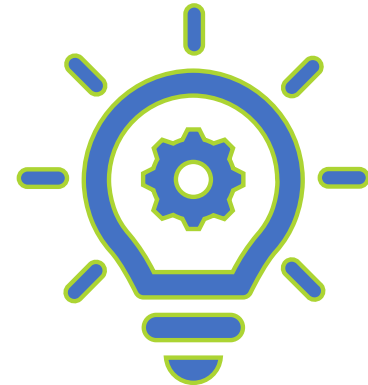
**Lived Experience**

Everything that we have:

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

# What Is Human Services?

**Human services is an interdisciplinary field of study with the objective of meeting human needs through an applied knowledge base, focusing on prevention as well as remediation of problems, and maintaining a commitment to improving the overall quality of life of service populations.**



# *Know The Power You Hold*



Your perception, your implicit bias may affect how you, as a provider, interact with clients in terms of communication, recommendations, or available options, or life choices.



# A Chance Encounter

# What If....

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



Are you as a clinician or human services professional, finishing my story based on your perception?

# Implicit Bias

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**I would argue that implicit bias is outside of an individual clinician, counselor, service provider's, or policy maker's conscious awareness, but it is woven into the fabric of behavioral health, and human services in general.**

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**It even influences a counselor's ability to engage in a truly person-centered relationship or interaction.**

**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 Behavioral Health

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.

# Historically:

- ▶ **Only about 20% of blacks get treatment for a mental health issue, compared to 41% of whites.**
- ▶ **Compared with whites, African Americans are:  
Less likely to initiate treatment  
More likely to terminate treatment prematurely**

**Outpatient treatment centers are less likely to be located in predominantly Black neighborhoods**

# Inherent Issues

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.

# Contributing Factor

Lack of  
Diverse  
Clinicians

13% of  
people in the  
US are Black.

4% of  
Psychologists  
in the US are  
Black.

2% of  
Psychiatrists  
in the US are  
Black.


**Many  
Clinicians and  
Counselors  
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.



Implicit bias can affect both perception and clinical decision making, and studies show that implicit bias is significantly related to patient-provider interactions and treatment decisions.



**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



The person with PPD will believe others are using, lying to, 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:


Statistically, African Americans are over 7x as likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods with limited to no access to mental health services,

African Americans comprise less than 13% of the US population, but make up 40 percent of the homeless population.

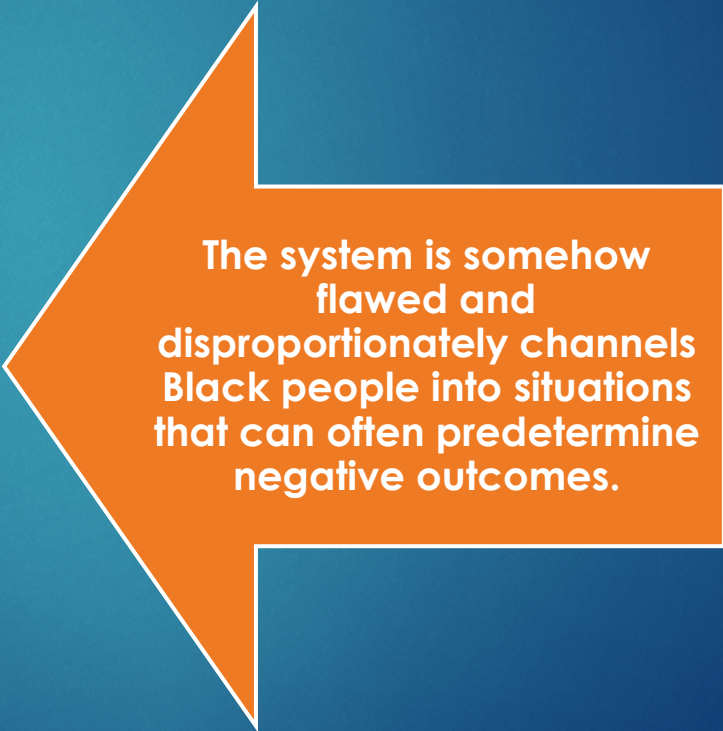
African American youth make up about 17% of the youth in the US, but 40% of youth in the criminal justice system and 45% of children in foster care are African American.

According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2018 Black males accounted for 34% of the prison population, white males, 29%, and Hispanic males 24%.

# One Would Have To Believe That Either:



African Americans are genetically flawed or given to deviant behavior, and therefore pre-disposed to failure.



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

# Critical Issues Faced by Multicultural Communities That Can Impact Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Intervention

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?

By Victor Armstrong

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?

# Do You Hear What I Hear?



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 What I Hear?



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 What I Hear?



**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 What I Hear?



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 What I Hear?



**Do you hear the screams of a startled and frightened Arnaud 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 What I Hear?



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 8 minutes & 46 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.



# Remember

PERCEPTION IS EVERYTHING