

**Knowing what we Need to know, and Feeling what we need to feel: Racism and Responsibility**

2015 Chancellor Diversity Awards  
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First, I'd like to acknowledge the presence of higher intervention that guides my life's journey and equally recognize the blood, sweat, and tears of my ancestors and family, on whose shoulders I stand.

**Telling me that I'm obsessed with talking about racism in America is like telling me I'm obsessed with swimming when I'm drowning." - Hari Kondabolu, Comedian**

**Racism is so universal in this country, so widespread and deep-seated, that it is invisible because it's so normal. -Shirley Chisholm, Congresswoman**

**To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time -James Baldwin, Author**

This year was a tough year. Due to television, technology, and the power of social media the ghost of our country's shameful history that is inextricably linked to race and racism, was uncovered. The ghost is alive and well and it still haunts us.

It feels fitting that I landed in the world of trauma. Because the work of trauma is the work of truth telling. My training in trauma has equipped me with understanding how experiences shape behavior, how to reframe the question, "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?", and how to place trauma in perspective so one can return to a normal trajectory. In 1979 Psychologist, John Bowlby, wrote about, "*On knowing what you are not supposed to know and feeling what you are not supposed to feel.*" He contends that much of psychopathology stems from impressions, scenes, and experiences of childhood having been forgotten, denied, not acknowledged yet continuing to influence thought, feeling, and action. No, you did not see that. No you did not hear that. No you don't feel that. Can you imagine how crazy making that is? Well think bigger. Let's entertain a larger framework of psychopathology to the historical and geographical context that we live in - America.

What are the impressions, scenes, and experiences of America that have been forgotten, denied, not acknowledged and yet continues to influence thought, feeling, and action? What are the things our country is not supposed to know and what are the feelings our country is not supposed to feel? Colonialism. Genocide. Slavery. Oppression. Shame. Pain. Guilt. If Vincent Felitti identified a set of Adverse Childhood Experiences that lead to long-term health outcomes, these are the Atrocious Cultural Experiences of our country and the feelings that lead to symptomatic behaviors that find themselves in our political, economic, and educational systems. Crazy making. The long-term impact has been toxic and a matter of life or death for some of American's citizens.

Talking about race and racism in professional settings is taboo. It's too risky. It's unsafe. It's destabilizing. It doesn't feel good. So it doesn't happen. Well that's where I disagree.

**Paraphrasing a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr , “Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truth, we must see the need to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism.”**

I got hung up on this notion of “creating a tension in the mind.” When it comes to race, racism, oppression, privilege, and supremacy, I seek to create tension that challenges intellectual narrow-mindedness and political paralysis. But let me be clear. Seeking to create tension does NOT mean creating division. It will be messy and disruptive, but what growing pains have you encountered that weren't challenging? I aim to create learning environments where we can disagree. Where multiple perspectives can be held in one room without the dynamics of power and its punitive ways. Where budding professionals can examine their anchors: why they believe what they believe and why they know what they know. That's where you learn. That's where you grow. When all that you know is not agreeable and you're challenged to at least be in the presence of differing minds.

I'm often challenged that classism and poverty is the real issue at hand. Not racism. Well I ask, do we have to choose one? Can we accept them all and give them all equal power in how we choose to view the concerns we see today? Can we work to not abandon one perspective because it makes us feel uncomfortable? Can we know what we are supposed to know and feel what we are supposed to feel? Our generation did not initiate the racialized problem we are living in, but we must become responsible for attempting to unravel it. Let's engage in an intervention, that turns the magnifying glass on us as an institution and as professionals. This is where you can take up the task of individual responsibility. Let us examine ourselves, through courageous dialogue, in hopes that when we work with oppressed and marginalized communities, we do so from a place that is more humane.

UCSF, let this not be a moment. Let this be a movement for higher standards of excellence. Let's build infrastructures and leaders that serve to dismantle injustices.

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