Navigating Anxiety: Mental Health Challenges and Resilience in African American Communities

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Disclosures

- No conflicts of interest to report

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Trainers Objectives

- This training is meant to be interactive, and participatory

- I would like to create a "brave space" where stereotypes can be challenged

- Discussion regarding mental health challenges that are specific to African Americans

- Resilience in the African American community

- Implicit Bias

- **Look for bolded text to help answer the post test questions**

MEASURABLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Compare three difference in rates of anxiety disorders among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and Whites.

2. Name four types of racism that have been associated with anxiety disorders in African Americans.

3. Identify two gender-specific associations between discrimination and anxiety disorders in some African American men and women.

4. Evaluate two ways that family and friendship support networks can be related to social anxiety disorder in some African Americans.

5. Explain the difference between provider level and health care system level strategies to address disparities in youth mental health service utilization.

Defining Anxiety

- According to Merriam-Webster (2024), "anxiety is a feeling of fear or nervousness about what might happen in the future. It can also be described as an abnormal sense of apprehension and fear that can cause physical signs like sweating, tension, and a rapid pulse."

- Merriam-Webster does not identify that anxiety can also be caused by events that occurred in the past.

- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM5) defines anxiety in terms of psychological symptoms of excessive apprehension and worry that are associated physical symptoms of neurobiological activation including muscle tension, restlessness, feeling on edge, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, and irritability among others. These symptoms negatively impact social and occupational functioning.

Current Prevalence of Anxiety

- What are we, as a society, anxious about?

- American Anxiety Statistics (2024)
  - Adults are particularly anxious about current events (70%) — especially the economy (77%), the 2024 U.S. election (73%), and gun violence (69%).

- American Psychiatric Association (2024)
  - Keeping themselves or their families safe
  - Keeping their identity safe
  - Their health
  - Paying bills or expenses
  - The opioid epidemic
  - The impact of emerging technology on day-to-day life

- The 2024 results of the American Psychiatric Association's annual mental health poll show that U.S. adults are feeling increasingly anxious.
  - In 2024, 43% of adults say they feel more anxious than they did the previous year, up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022
  - 15.6% in 2019 HealthDay News (11/7/2024)

- Why might this trend be occurring?

Epidemiology

- The British Medical Journal (BMJ) (2024) defines epidemiology as "the study of how often diseases occur in different groups of people and why."

- Research on prevalence rates of anxiety disorders among African Americans has yielded conflicting results.
  - Some report higher rates within African Americans, however, others reveal lower rates.

- Asnaani et al. (2010) conducted research entitled "A Cross-Ethnic Comparison of Lifetime Prevalence Rates of Anxiety Disorders"
  - The samples included:
    - 6,870 White Americans
    - 4,598 African Americans
    - 3,615 Hispanic Americans
    - 1,628 Asian Americans

Epidemiology

- White Americans consistently endorsed symptoms of SAD (12.6%), GAD (8.6%) and PD (5.1%) more frequently than African Americans (8.6%, 4.9%, 3.8%, respectively), Hispanic Americans (8.2%, 5.8%, 4.1%, respectively), and Asian Americans (5.3%, 2.4%, 2.1%, respectively).

- African Americans more frequently met criteria for PTSD (8.6%) as compared to the White American subgroup (6.5%), Hispanic Americans (5.6%), and Asian Americans (1.6%).

- Why do you believe the numbers look this way?

- Does this mean that African Americans are exposed to more experiences that would lead to PTSD?
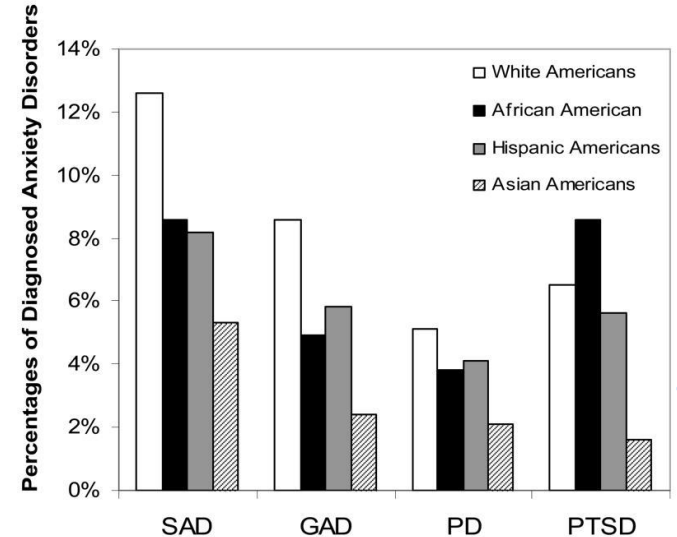
Anxiety Across Cultural Groups

- Levine et. al (2015) identified that "Anxiety disorders are the most pervasive class of mental health conditions, with 28.8% of individuals experiencing at least one anxiety disorder over the lifespan"

- Research in the mental health realm indicates that U.S. Black populations tend to have lower prevalence rates of mood and anxiety disorders compared to non-Hispanic whites.
    - However, while mental health disorders are less prevalent in minority populations, the course of the disorder tends to be more severe and persistent, indicating the complexity of investigating mental health conditions among minority groups

- The National Survey of American Life (NSAL) is the largest survey of Black psychopathology to-date.

- **Research from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) and the National Comorbidity Study-Replication (NCS-R) indicated higher rates of anxiety disorders in African Americans and Caribbean Blacks as compared to Whites.**
    - **False**

- Although African Americans and Caribbean Blacks may experience higher rates of certain anxiety disorders compared to Whites, the data is complex and indicates that the overall prevalence of anxiety disorders is generally higher among White populations.

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)

- According to Levine et. al (2015), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), one of the most common anxiety disorders, is characterized by fear and/or avoidance of social or performance situations.
    - Individuals with this condition are concerned that they will say or do something that will result in humiliation or embarrassment; these fears can be so severe that socially anxious individuals avoid most social encounters or endure interpersonal situations with extreme discomfort.
    - SAD was once largely ignored by the psychiatric community but has more recently garnered attention as an impairing but treatable condition.

- Individuals with social anxiety are more likely to be single or divorced, have fewer friends, and report less satisfying and less frequent dating and sexual relationships.

- What are some protective factors associated with SAD?

- What are some risk factors associated with SAD?

Protective and Risk Factors Related to (SAD)

- **Social Anxiety Disorder in African Americans has been associated with which of the following _protective_ factors?**
  - Emotional contact with friends can be a protective factor
  - Emotional closeness with family can be a protective factor
  - Emotional community support
  - All of the above

- **Social Anxiety Disorders in African Americans has been associated with the following RISK factors**
  - Negative interaction with families
  - Hostile communities
  - Systematic and structural racism
  - All of the above

Diagnosis & Treatment

- Diagnosis- Some studies suggest that African American adults are less likely to be accurately diagnosed, less likely to be offered treatment, and less likely to receive culturally appropriate interventions for anxiety disorders.
  - Cultural influences may shape how African Americans express or disclose symptoms of anxiety.

- Treatment- While research data suggest that African Americans with anxiety are more likely to experience higher symptom severity, longer courses of illness, and worse functional impairment, more research is needed to evaluate the subjective experiences of anxiety and mental health service utilization among African Americans.

- Historical Trauma-Through a legacy of slavery and oppression, African American communities have experienced transgenerational trauma which not only affected the psychological and social emotional health of individuals and their families, but also conferred genetic risks for certain physical and mental health conditions including anxiety.

Considerations

Contemporary Times- Racism and discrimination continue to be associated with anxiety disorders among African Americans.

Gender Considerations- African American men and women can be impacted by racial discrimination in different ways, resulting in gender differences in rates of various anxiety disorders.

Developmental Considerations - African American youth and young adults face particular sociocultural risks for anxiety. Topics to be discussed include exposure to racial violence and social injustice, reduction in affirmative action and diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic and professional opportunities, and harmful effects of social media

Normal vs Pathological Anxiety

- Normal anxiety is adaptive.
  - It is an inborn response to threat or to the absence of people or objects that signify safety can result in cognitive (worry) and somatic (racing heart, sweating, shaking, freezing, etc.) symptoms.

- Pathologic anxiety is anxiety that is excessive, impairs function.
  - Combs, 2019

- Pathologic anxiety can lead to trauma...

Definition of Trauma

- DSM-IV-TR (PTSD 309.81)
  - **Criterion A: stressor**
    - The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present:
      - The person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.
      - The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Note: in children, it may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.

- DSM-V (PTSD 309.81)
  - **Criterion A: stressor**
    - Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:
      - Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s)
      - Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others
      - **Learning** that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threated death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental
      - **Repeated or extreme indirect exposure to aversive details of the event(s), usually in the course of professional duties (e.g., first responders, collecting body parts; professionals repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse). This does not include indirect non-professional exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures.**

Let's Talk About Trauma

- The effects of human trauma are thought to be much broader than the diagnosis of PTSD and can overlap with many other diagnostic categories.

- "Recent physiological research supports the complexity of neurobiological responses to childhood stress and trauma. Trauma disconnects the person physiologically, emotionally, spiritually, cognitively, interpersonally, and socially." (Wheeler, 2007)

- Trauma can occur on an individual, social, and/or collective level (systemic forces, oppression of minority groups).

- Van Deusen Hunsinger (2021) posited that "trauma is triggered by an inescapably stressful event that overwhelms people's existing coping mechanisms" (p.361).

What Can Trauma Look Like?

- Single Incident Traumas (may present with)
    - Insomnia
    - Irritability
    - General anxiety
    - Vigilance
    - Impaired concentration

- Numerous Traumatic Events (may present with)
    - Problems with aggression
    - Self-hatred
    - Dissociation
    - Somatization
    - Depression
    - Distrust
    - Shame
    - Relationship problems
    - Affect regulation

Trans-Cultural Framework

- Trans-cultural researchers strongly support the inquiry and understanding of the roles of psychosocial factors such as resilience, social cohesion, coping skills and support networks in the healing of trauma.

- Supporters of the trans-cultural view seek to heighten awareness of traditional practices of healing – which speak to the central values of the individual and the community – within the generalized PTSD construct.
    - For example, it is imperative to take into account the indigenous expressions of disorder, idioms of distress, and ethnocultural sensitivities in assessing norms, formats, language and concepts within the PTSD construct.
        - Torres Bernal & Mille, 2011

Strength-Based Community Strategy

- "I believe that it is only as we learn to face our situation *together in community* that we can build the collective resilience and strength we need" (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2021, p.359).

- Adapted, trauma-informed yoga program for Indigenous adolescent girls in a residential unit
    - Integrated a blended model of cultural teachings, group dialogue and trauma-informed yoga
    - Approach included circle sharing, cultural teachings, gentle progressions of physical postures, guided medication, breathing techniques, centering practices, and beadwork.
    - Promoted cultural connectedness, safety, and resilience among Indigenous adolescent girls removed from their rural and remote communities to a residential facility in an urban area.
    - Barudin, 2021

- Considerations for implementing and/or supporting mental health support and resources on an individual, familial and community level
    - "Poor long-term health outcomes for childhood survivors can be prevented and significantly reduced by (a) learning from survivors what they most want and need for healing, and (b) incorporating what survivors teach us about healing into a community-based healing model" (Todahl, Walters, Bharwdi, & Dube, 2014, p.630).

Faith-Based and Religious Constructs

- In a study by Sinko & Saint Arnault (2020) looking at the healing process for women who were survivors of gender-based violence, they cited that "religion was a prominent vehicle to connect with the world for many women in their healing process, with seven of the 21 participants mentioning the significance of God in their journey to reconnection" (p.1628).

- For some, it created additional barriers to their recovery, especially when it coincided with survivor blame.

Art Therapy

- Art can be used to emphasize meaning, explore feelings, communicate ideas and imagine possibilities. The goal of art therapy is for patients to process hidden emotions and thoughts and allow unconscious images to emerge.
    - Not just for kids...

- Teachers creating curricula that encourage self-expression may help students with trauma learn about and regulate their emotions, leading to increased agency for the students in understanding and working through their trauma.

- Encouraging the exploration of social ideas or social issues related to one's identity may overlap with students' trauma and allow them to work through feelings and personal reactions to their individual, social, and/or collective trauma.
    - Reeves, 2020

Additional Intervention Considerations

- Teaching resilience

- Teaching coping self-efficacy
  - The belief that someone can effectively deal with a stressful situation

- Equine-assisted therapy

- Yoga

- Mindfulness

- Residential Treatment and/or Outpatient Centers
  - Healthcare Heroes program launched by Sierra Tucson (5-day, 14-day & 30-day program tiers)
    - Offers complementary teleassessment for any health care worker to determine the best individual treatment recommendation.
  - "We thought to bring [patients] in and let them step out of their lives" (Mental Health Weekly, 2020)

Resilience in African American Communities
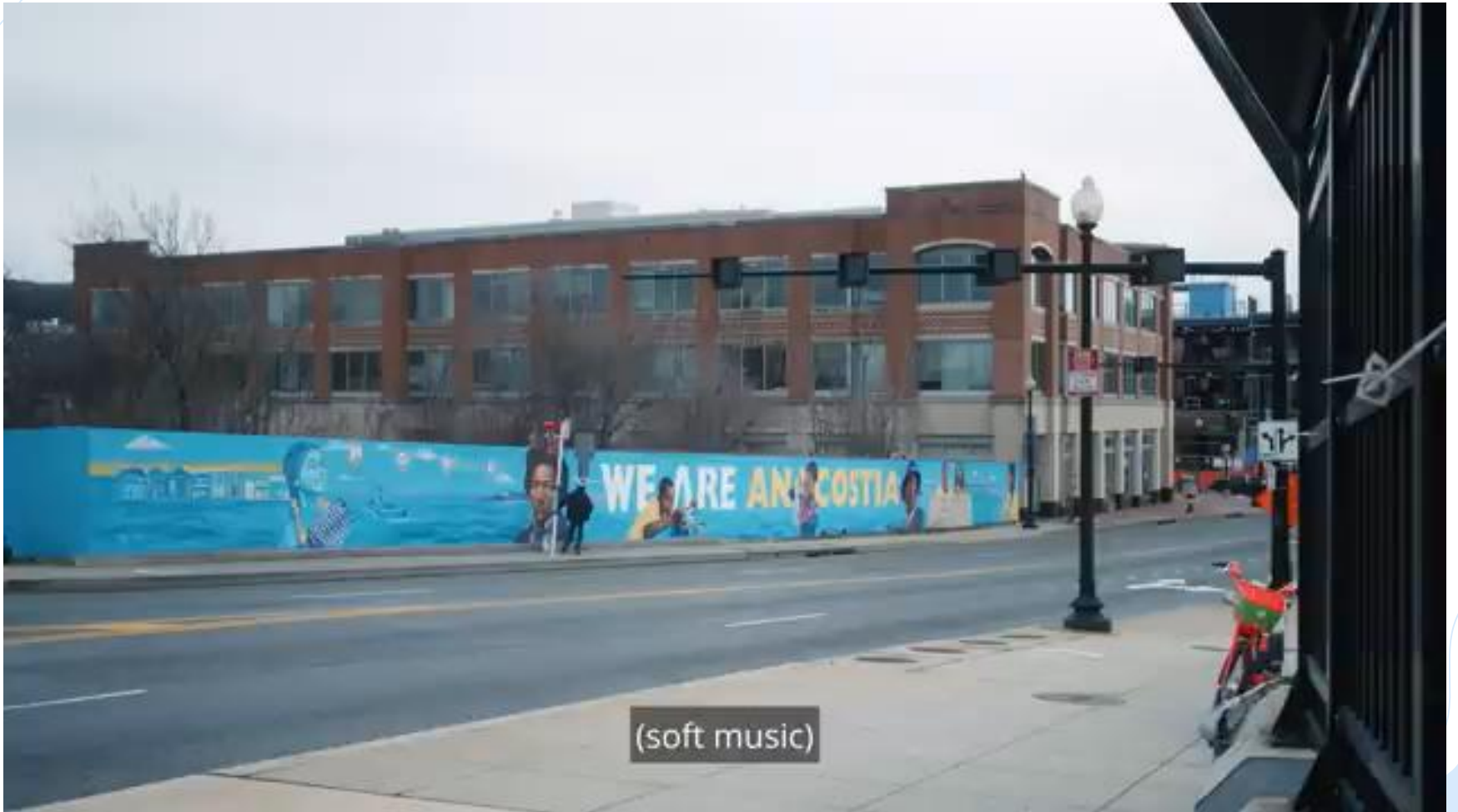
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What Did You Hear?

- What stuck out to you from what Dr. Nicole Cammac stated?

- Is there anything that resonated with you?

Resiliency Defined

- According to Merriam-Webster, resilience is defined as the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change. It can also refer to the ability of a strained body to return to its original size and shape after being deformed.

- Alternate definition- Resilience has been referred to as the capacity to recover from adversity.

- Does one ever truly recover?

Stigmas

- Reducing stigma and promoting awareness of cultural factors affecting experience and expression of anxiety by patients and evaluation by providers may help to increase early identification.

- **Which of the following may be associated with mental health stigma among African Americans?**
    - **African Americans persons with mental illness are often stereotyped to be criminals or dangerous.**
    - **African Americans are more likely than Whites to get mental health treatment through primary care than specialists.**
    - **African Americans may express medical mistrust of health care providers and systems due to experienced discrimination and historical events.**
    - **All of the above**

Social Context

- Studies have shown that the frequency of contact and quality of family and friendship support networks may be protective against the development of social anxiety in some African Americans.

- Address and dismantle systemic and structural racism.

- Relief from academic and occupational pressures.

- Increase community safety and social justice.

Family Resilience

Stern, Coard, Barbarin, & Cassidy (2024) article entitled "What Attachment Scholars Can Learn From Research on Black Family Resilience."

- Parental Protection
    - Preparation for bias- conversations intended to prepare Black children and adolescents to respond to racial discrimination and physical dangers they are likely to face in the world
    - Moderate emotion suppression
    - Monitoring; limits on autonomy
- Extended Social Networks
    - Fictive Kin- people who are treated like family, even though they are not related by blood, adoption, or marriage
    - Natural Mentors
    - Spiritual community
- Positive Racial-ethnic Socialization- promotes healthy psycho-social well-being and supports the development of a strong-racial identity in children of color.
    - A mom buying her daughter books with black main characters
    - Counter-narratives/inoculation to negative stereotypes
    - Racial pride messages
    - "Black Joy"

Complicated Grief and Resilience

- Dissertation completed by Grant (2024) entitled "Understanding Complicated Grief, Resilience, and Coping Skills in African American Women: A Phenomenological Study."

- The population for this study was African American women, living in the southern areas of Connecticut, who have experienced complicated grief after a significant loss within a 2-year timeframe.

- The overwhelming majority, 35 out of the 38 participants, felt that spirituality and a relationship with God is a prominent coping skill to demonstrate resilience when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss.

- As indicated in the open-ended survey results, the overall common theme was established that African American women lean on their spiritual connection and relationship with God to cope with complicated grief after a significant loss and that there is a need for a safe space to express significant loss when dealing with complicated grief and to increase forms of support, interventions, and treatments in faith-based institutions.

Expectations for African American Women

- African American women encounter complicated grief and its adverse consequences at higher rates than all other demographic groups (Aten et al., 2019).

- The second theme identified in this study is that resiliency is not a choice or option, but a standard expectation among the African American women population.

- The findings of this study support the recent study of Johnson et al. (2019) which reported that the African American female population alter their self-presentation by shifting responses to accommodate cultural norms and social expectations which can be construed as coping and demonstrating resiliency among the African American adult female population when coping with grief or complicated grief (Johnson et al., 2019).

- The findings of this study further support recent research that living up to the expectation of being strong and not wallowing in their grief as a sign of weakness and moving forward after a significant loss is not an option because of multiple factors that are required such as honoring financial obligations, fulfilling employment responsibilities, caring for children (participants who have children), and a surviving parent (participants who have surviving parents).

Lazarus' Cognitive Stress Theory

- Lazarus's cognitive stress theory, also known as the "cognitive appraisal theory," states that stress is not solely determined by a stressful event itself, but rather by how an individual interprets and evaluates that event through a mental process called "cognitive appraisal," which involves two key steps: primary appraisal (assessing the event's significance) and secondary appraisal (assessing one's ability to cope with the event);essentially, how a person perceives a situation determines their stress level, not the situation itself.

- Let's go over an example and determine how stressful this following event is for each of you.

Prevention Programs

- In a randomized controlled trial of Black rural families, Lei and colleagues (2021) found that participation in a family-centered prevention program [Protecting Strong African American Families (ProSAAF)] buffered the impact of racial discrimination on increases in depressive symptoms.

- This protective effect was mediated by changes in parenting behaviors such as "asks the child what they will be doing, where they will go, who they will be with, when they will get home, checks on them when they are out, discusses house rules, enforces house rules, and reminds them of why they should be proud of being African American" (Lei et al. 2021, p. 460).

Implicit Bias

Defined

- National Institute of Health (NIH) 2024 identified implicit bias as
  - The subconscious feelings, attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes an individual has developed due to prior influences and imprints throughout their lives.

- Cultural knowledge

- Cultural humility

- Cultural competence

- Cultural responsiveness

- Specialized measures

- Specialized treatments

Implicit Bias

- Galvan & Payne (2024) article entitled "Implicit Bias as a Cognitive Manifestation of Systemic Racism"

- Today, over 90 percent of white and Black Americans support racially integrated schooling and reject laws against interracial marriage.

- Another poll in 2019 found that 72 percent of white respondents believe it is never acceptable for a white person to use the N-word.

- Such polling data illustrate the eventual decline in white people expressing explicit biases against Black Americans in surveys.

- For decades, researchers have conducted field experiments responding to job postings with two versions of otherwise identical résumés: one with a name that implies a Black identity and the other with a name that implies a white identity. The rate of callbacks to the applicants is a measure of racial discrimination between otherwise equally qualified candidates.

- Recent meta-analyses of similar field experiments have demonstrated that racial discrimination in hiring has remained relatively constant since the late 1980s, and housing discrimination has decreased but remains potent.

Implicit Bias

- For example, even if all discriminatory behavior stopped today, preexisting disparities in income, wealth, and educational opportunity would still ensure that racial inequalities are passed on to future generations.

- For example, experiments have shown that seeing Black Americans in a positively valenced context, like at church or a family barbecue, results in participants having lower anti-Black implicit biases compared with when they see Black Americans in a negative context, like prison

- A number of studies have connected redlining, a legal practice until the passing of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, to current inequality.

- To provide only a sampling of recent research, historical redlining patterns are associated with life expectancy, the proportion of health care professionals, access to quality food, home heat vulnerability, environmental racism, cardiometabolic risk, tobacco retailer density, gentrification, alcohol outlet density, nonfatal shooting incidence, air pollution, fatal encounters with police, and COVID-19 exposure.

Cultural Humility

- Cultural humility is defined by Yeager & Bauer-Wu (2013) as:
  - **A process of self-reflection and openness to sharing power in therapeutic interactions in order develop deeper appreciation of a patient's culture.**

- Why is this important for us to do?

- Cultural Humility Toolkit created by Academic Senate for California Community Colleges
  - Let's take a look at the toolkit *(QR code and link in the chat)*

Questions?