

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION OF RACISM AND SUICIDE RISK

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Research Letter
December 16, 2020

Racial Differences in Statewide Suicide Mortality Trends in Maryland During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic

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Cook County Addresses Rise in Suicide Deaths Among Black Residents

The alarming rise in suicides among African American residents in Cook County was addressed recently by Cook County Board President Paul Vasanelli, Cook County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. James Prochaska and Cook County Health Director of Behavioral Health Dr. Louise Washington.

President Prochaska says the African American community has become an alarming focus of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially mental health, leading to suicide risk and even fatalities.

"There has been more suicides in the last year in the Black community than in all of 2019," said President Prochaska. "Most suicides are among an increase in youth suicides. The numbers exceed the year-ago peak for years."

According to data from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, 2020 is on pace to be the worst year for suicides in the Black community in a decade. The office has already confirmed 54 suicide deaths - that's compared to a total of 34 in all of 2019. Nearly 90 percent were men. 80 percent were under the age of 35. Three were under 18. The youngest, a 1-year-old boy, was discovered by family on Oct 5.

DISPARITIES OBSERVED

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RING THE ALARM

THE CRISIS OF BLACK YOUTH SUICIDE IN AMERICA

Still Ringing the Alarm

AN EXHORTING CALL TO ACTION FOR BLACK YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

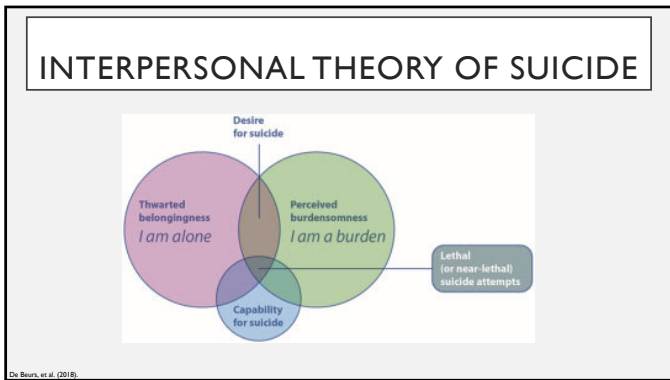
August 10, 2021

JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
Center for Communications Programs

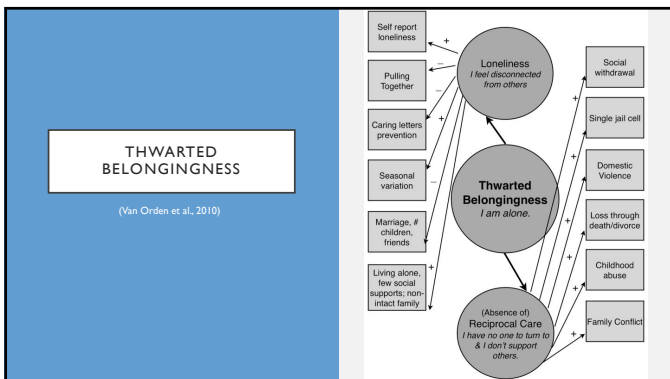
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INTERPERSONAL THEORY OF SUICIDE

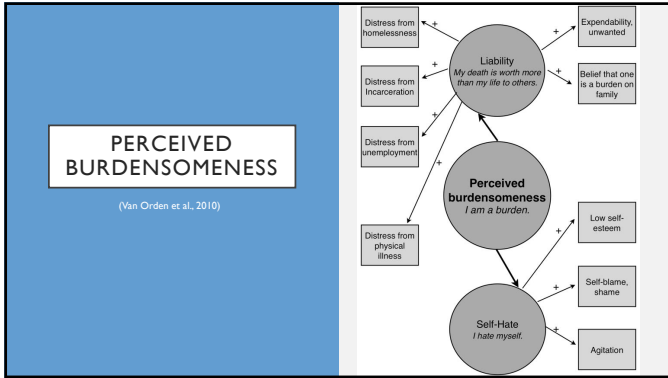
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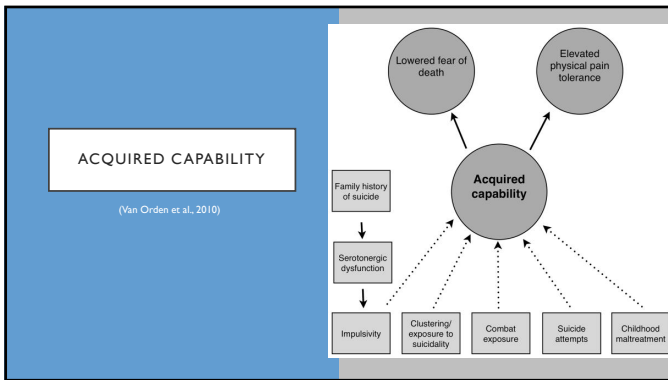
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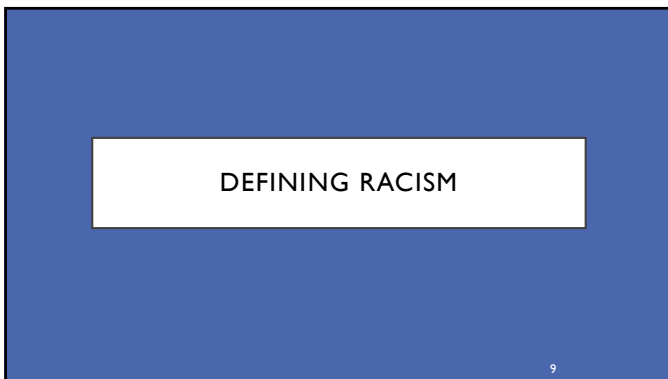
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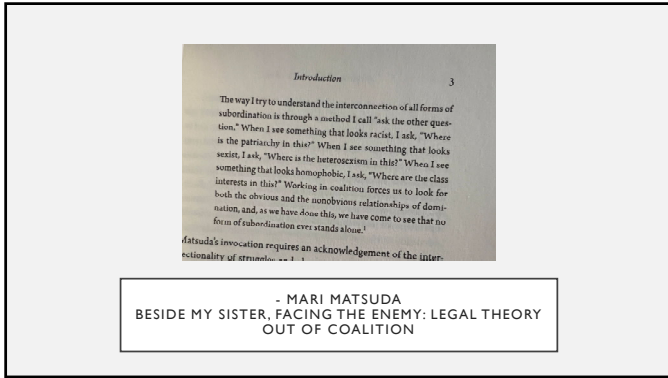
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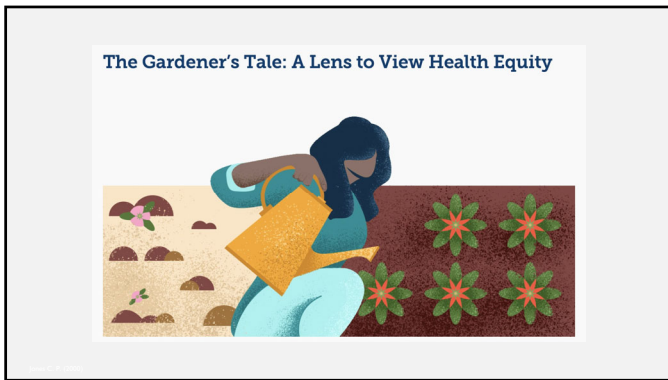
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DEFINING RACISM

Structural/Institutional	
Interpersonal	Differential assumptions and actions towards others according to their race
Internalized	

James C. P. (2000)

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INTERPERSONAL RACISM

- Intentional or unintentional
- Acts of commission or omission
- Normalized
- Upholds structural barriers

James C. P. (2000)

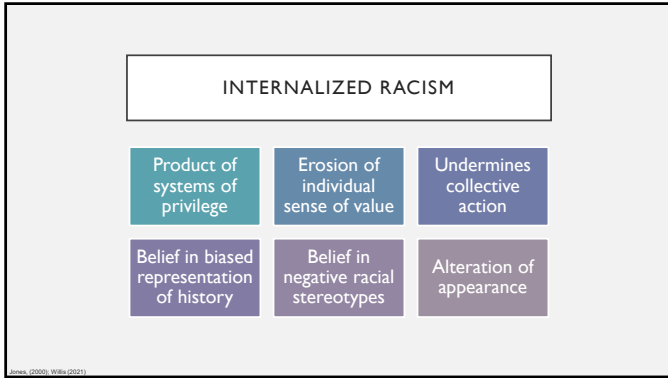
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DEFINING RACISM

Structural/Institutional	
Interpersonal	
Internalized	An individual's acceptance of negative messages about their own abilities and worth on the basis of their own race

James C. P. (2000)

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INTERPERSONAL AND INTERNALIZED RACISM

- Everyday racial discrimination
- "Painful and provocative event" (Brooks et al, 2020)
- Negative impacts on self-esteem, self-worth, mental health
- Psychological distress
- Associated with suicidal ideation and capability
- Colorism and suicidal ideation

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INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

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*“Institution aint just a building -
 But a **method**
 Of having Black and Brown bodies fill them”
 - Common, Letter to the Free*

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STRUCTURAL/INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

The Gardener's Tale: A Lens to View Health Equity



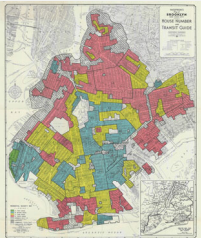
Jones G. P. (2000)

- Differential access to goods, services, and opportunities on the basis of race that have been normalized and codified in our customs, practices, and laws
- Initial historical insult
 - Separation of the red and pink seeds
- Structural barriers
 - Two different types of soil, sun exposure, watering
- Normative
 - Preference of red over pink (assumption that red is better than pink)
- Who is the gardener?
 - Power to: decide, act, allocate resources

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REDLINING

- Less likely to live in a two-adult household
- Less likely to have upward economic mobility
- More likely to have lower income
- Continued neighborhood disinvestment
- Increased financial strain and instability > risk for DV, child neglect, neighborhood violence



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BUILT ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

- Significant association between suicide rates and distance to the nearest urban center and distance to the nearest transit station
- Less green space
- Exposure to air pollutants
- Indoor environmental quality
- Lead exposure
- Increased risk for chronic health conditions



Jiang, et al. (2021)

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MASS INCARCERATION

- Ability to physically and financially care for their children



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MASS INCARCERATION

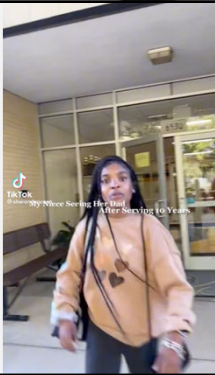
- Loss of income, financial burden shifted to family
- Increased risk for homelessness
- Difficulties obtaining employment
- Cost of incarceration
- Family discord



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MASS INCARCERATION


Disruption in Caregiver Attachments



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SLAVE PATROLS AND MODERN POLICING


- Deputized citizens to capture runaway enslaved people by any means necessary, including death
- Complaints about harshness and brutality of slave patrols
- Genesis of law enforcement departments after abolition



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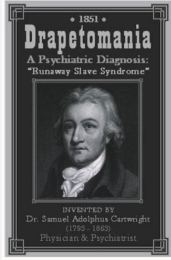
POLICE VIOLENCE

- Black people represent 40% of people who die from police violence
 - Significantly less likely to be unarmed compared to their white peers
- Physical injuries or disabilities resulting from police violence
- Psychological injury
 - PTSD
 - Exposure to police violence of unarmed Black person = + 3.3% negative mental health days
- Police are rarely held accountable
- Notion of Black expendability
- Reactions to protests



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MEDICAL RACISM



- Pathologizing of Black and trauma rebellion
- Drapetomania
- Protest Psychosis
- Justification of slavery
- Medical Apartheid
- Criminalization of Black health

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MEDICAL RACISM AND ACCESS TO CARE

- Insurance
- Transportation
- Paid leave
- Medical distrust
- Lack of representation
- Substandard care
- ADHD diagnosis disparities

"Sorry, I'm Not Accepting New Patients": An Audit Study of Access to Mental Health Care

Heather Rappaport
 First Published June 1, 2018 | Research Article | [Find in PubMed](#) | [Get in ScienceDirect](#)
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022148118047598>

Article information

Abstract
 Through a phone-based field experiment, I investigated the effect of mental help seekers' race, class, and gender on the accessibility of psychotherapists. Three hundred and twenty psychotherapists each received voicemail messages from one black middle-class and one white middle-class help seeker, or from one black working-class and one white working-class help seeker, requesting an appointment. The results revealed an otherwise invisible form of discrimination: Middle-class help seekers had appointment offer rates almost three times higher than their working-class counterparts. Race differences emerged only among middle-class help-seekers, with blacks considerably less likely than whites to be offered an appointment. Average appointment offer rates were equivalent across gender, but women were favored over men for appointment offers in their preferred time range.

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CULTURAL TRAUMA

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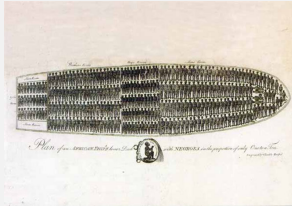
CULTURAL, INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

- An unbearable event undermining the collective group and is passed down to subsequent generations
 - Epigenetics
- Systematic stripping of culture
 - "Lost sense of who we are"

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TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE AND CHATTEL SLAVERY

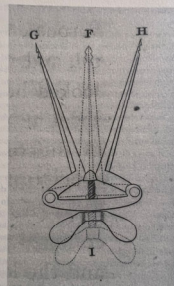
- Brutal working conditions
- Sexual assault
- Separation of families
- Early and frequent death



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ORIGINS OF SUICIDE PREVENTION METHODS



1.1. The speculum iris, used to forcibly hold slaves who refused food and water. Source: Thomas Clarkson, An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African (1786). This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

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PRESENT DAY TRAUMA

“A blatant disregard for Black life, along with notions of Black expendability is structured into our social, economic, political and legal systems.”
– (Waldron, 2020 p. 31)

- Highly circulated incidents of police brutality
- Debilitating sadness, hyperarousal, chronic fear of dying, constant sense of helplessness (Hawkins, 2021)
- Community violence
- Incarceration
- Loss of loved ones
- COVID-19

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EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

“The more at home we are in the world, the less aware we are that “feeling in home in the world” is even part of our experience”

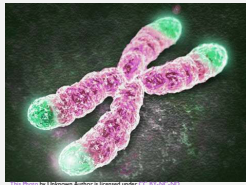
- Ratcliffe et al. (2014)

- Hypervigilance
- Toxicity of chronic stress
- Suspicion and distrust
- Sense of foreshortened future and “narrative foreclosure”
 - Acquired capability
- The inherent isolation of interpersonal trauma
 - I am alone
- Loss of trust and sense of safety
- Feeling irreparably damaged
 - I am a burden

Ratcliffe, M., Ruddell, M., & Smith, B. (2014).

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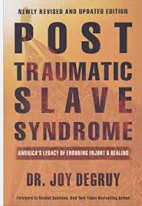
WEATHERING EFFECT



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POST-TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME

- Attitudes, habits, and behaviors socially transmitted in families, communities
- Vacant self-esteem
- Ever present anger
- Racist socialization



(DeGruy, 2017)

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STRONG BLACK WOMAN SCHEMA

“Strong Black Woman” is a mantra for so much a part of U.S. culture that it is seldom realized how great a toll it has taken on the emotional wellbeing of the African American woman. As much as it may give her the illusion of control, it keeps her from identifying what she needs and reaching out for help.

- Romero (2000, p. 225)

- Perseverance with limited resources, no social support for coping, and no expectation of reciprocal support
- Associated with:
 - Poor health outcomes (Weathering effect)
 - Strained relationships
 - Self-silencing
 - Depressive symptoms
 - Loneliness

Liao, et al. (2019).

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INTERPERSONAL AND INTERNALIZED RACISM AS A SUICIDOGENIC FACTOR

Perceived Burdensomeness	Thwarted Belongingness	Acquired Capability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization to mask psychological distress and be self-reliant (Strong Black Woman Schema)^{24,25} • Vacant esteem and racist socialization (Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome)²⁷ • Decreased immune function associated with chronic traumatic stress¹⁷ • Low self-esteem and self-worth associated with microaggressions¹⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of reciprocal care, loneliness and strained relationships as a result of Strong Black Woman Schema²⁴ • Rejection of one's own culture¹⁴ • Experiencing colorism from one's own community¹⁵ • Mistrust or suspicion of others due to trauma²² • Mistrust, feelings of rejection, social isolation due to microaggressions¹⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ever-present anger (Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome)²³ • Sense of foreshortened future due to trauma^{18,20} • Substance use and/or self-injurious behavior as a means to cope with trauma²³ • Racial discrimination as a painful and provocative event¹⁶ • HPA axis changes from chronic exposure to stress¹⁷

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INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL RACISM AS A SUICIDOGENIC FACTOR

- | Perceived Burdensomeness | Thwarted Belongingness | Acquired Capability |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expendability of Black people's lives (e.g. lack of police accountability¹⁷, justification of police violence, condemnation of protests¹⁸) • Disability/injury from police violence impeding ability to be employed • Accelerated deinstitutionalization and aging, "The Weathering Effect"^{16,19} • Loss of income and shifted financial ability to family members due to incarceration¹¹ • Inability to physically and financially care for children due to incarceration¹⁴ • Increase risk of homelessness among children with incarcerated parent¹⁰ • Increased risk of poor physical health outcomes in redlined communities²⁰ • Far distance to urban center or public transit²¹ • Difficulty obtaining employment due to incarceration history¹³ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incarceration impeding development and maintenance of positive, supportive parental relationships¹¹ • Less green space which could promote social cohesion activities^{21,22} • Loss of a loved one due to incarceration or death (e.g. community violence, police brutality) • Increased risk of domestic violence, child neglect, and community violence in redlined communities²⁴ • Far distance to urban center or public transit²⁰ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a victim of or exposure to police brutality or killing of unarmed Black people as a painful and provocative event • Poor impulse control due to lead exposure in redlined communities²⁵ • Increased substance use associated with parental incarceration¹¹ • Increased risk for childhood maltreatment in redlined communities²⁶ |

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THIS... IS A LOT. JOIN ME IN AN EMBODIED PRACTICE.

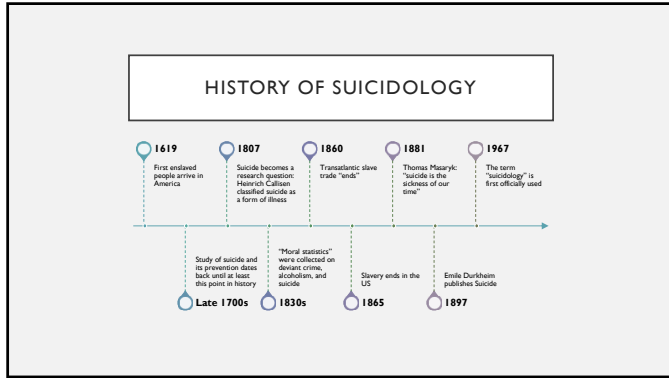


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STRUCTURAL ISSUES IN THE FIELD

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Gardener's Tale: A Lens to View Health Equity

- Who is suicidology's "gardener"?
- Funding?
- Research priorities?
- "The suicide rate among Black people is so low compared to other communities"
- "Black people are protected from suicide"
- Strong Black Woman schema: "super-human"
- What constitutes "science"?
- US doctoral recipients in 2019:
 - 7% were Hispanic/Latino
 - 0.2% were American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - 27% were Asian
 - 5% were Black

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STRUCTURAL ISSUES IN SUICIDOLOGY

Dearth of literature

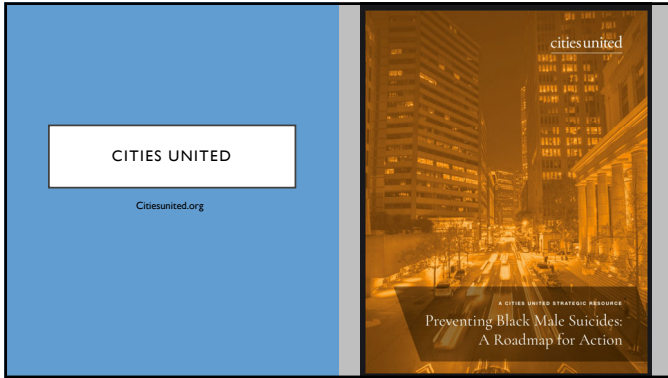
- Whose perspective is literature written from?
- Risk assessments and interventions are not culturally responsive
 - Hopelessness less reported
 - Hidden ideation
- Restrictive definitions of terminology
- Adapt later rather than innovate now mentality

Value of cultural healing practices

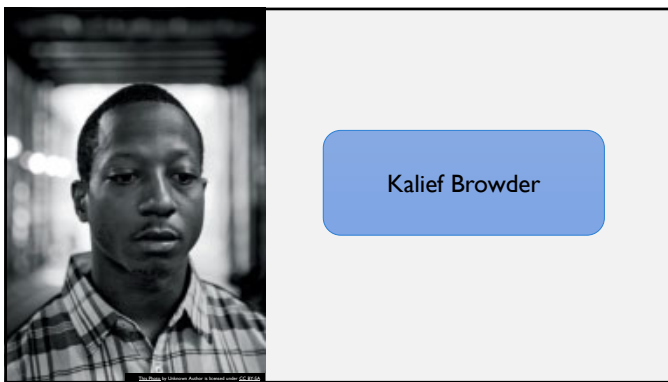
- Culturally incongruent environments and defectiveness schema
- Are cultural healing practices valued?

Klibert et al (2015)

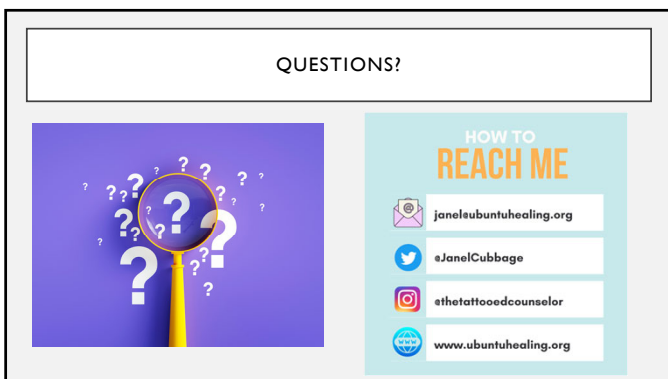
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