

PTSD 101

[www.ncptsd.va.gov/ptsd101/](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ptsd101/)

**COURSE TRANSCRIPT FOR:  
Cross Cultural Issues: African Americans & Treatment Impact for PTSD  
Course Instructor: Robert Jenkins, Ph.D.**

**Slide 1: Cross Cultural Issues: African Americans and Treatment Impact for PTSD**

My name is Robert Jenkins and I'm a psychologist at the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder at the Menlo Park Veteran's Administration for Department of Veteran Affairs. And today I'm going to talk about cross-cultural issues, African Americans, treatment impact for posttraumatic stress disorder.

**Slide 2: African-American Clients – Introduction**

When we think about African American clients you want to be aware of a number of factors. You want to think about your primary work with African American clients if you're a clinician. You also want to think about your personal life experiences and how that impacts on your understanding of who African Americans are and some of the issues they may have faced. You also want to consider the diversity and complexity within the ethnic cultural group with African Americans as well as many of the homogenous features within their cultural group. You also want to have awareness of potential contrasting cultural perspectives and views of the world that African American individuals may possess. You want to think bi-culturally and multi-culturally-- if that can facilitate increased tolerance and awareness of others. So thinking about culturally and multi-culturally-- helps individuals to think about the complexity of the environment and the world that they're living in.

Clinicians need to think about persons of color not being culturally disadvantaged or culturally deprived as that implies a cultural deficiency for the majority perspective. It's important to understand the complexity of which the individuals are living in, the cultural issues that they may be having to deal with but not thinking that difference means culturally-deprived. Because this implies again that somehow they're deficient.

Psychotherapy and counseling traditionally have been geared towards white middle/upper class individuals with cultural influences being ignored or minimized in development of treatments.

**Slide 3: Cultural/Societal Issues**

It's important to develop an understanding many of the historical issues that African Americans have been confronted with. Number one for many, is the period of enslavement that many still

think about and refer to in thinking about how many generations of Africans and African Americans have suffered in the American system. With that, the forced immigration and servitude. The denial of humanity. Being reduced in law and civic life to basically a non-person. They were thought of as three fifths of a man legally in this country for a number of years and as being a surrogate of the master.

Also in thinking about many societal issues that African Americans have faced is the destruction of their finely tuned West African lineage systems that were basically undone and altered or destroyed when the men and women were separated and men were treated again as surrogates of the master. This led to traumatic impact on gender relations with the devastation of the husband-father role and aspects of the maternal role being maintained to nurture and raise children to be utilized by the slave master. Also, its important to understand that many of the women who were separated from their husbands or their loved ones were raped or abused by the master to do the master's bidding.

#### **Slide 4: Cultural/Societal Issues**

Again more cultural societal issues. Racism and discrimination as a pervasive and organized, institutionalized mechanism that permeates the family, community, and culture. Many African Americans transmit the stressors and the imagery from previous generations to newer generations, and this can impact on many of the newer generations-- experiencing a secondary PTSD.

Pinderhughes talked about the victim system, which is a system of oppression and exclusion. In this system, barriers to ability and access and opportunities impact on the individual family community foundation, possibly contributing within the systems and the family in the community to more vulnerability, poverty, disorganization, and altering or creating a shift in their cultural values.

#### **Slide 5: Cultural/Societal Issues**

In our society having advantages of being white-- all Caucasians have power and control. This facilitates and impacts on potentially providing a positive or worse neutral perception. And facilitating progress/mobility/access on society for people who have more of a similar background to the mainstream population or the people that are basically in charge of the society. Not having to worry about any negative stereotypes or racial profiling as what happens with persons of color. Persons of color, in not having the same neutral perception that can facilitate their progress, have to deal with negative impact of perceptions that decrease their mobility and access. This can come across when individuals are shopping or job hunting, driving, walking through the community, trying to seek home loans or other loans.

Many of you have heard of "driving while black" as a negative experience when these perceptions are coming across. I like to coin the phrase "living while black" because it impacts on more than just your ability to function while you're driving. It affects many aspects of your life. Over time this privilege that many whites experience enhances their confidence, sense of

identity, and trust. And it can erode the confidence, identity, trust of African Americans and other persons of color. I want to give you some examples in the next slide.

### **Slide 6: Cultural/Societal Issues – Coping with White Privilege- Examples**

So I'm looking at cultural societal issues and coping with white privilege. Some examples. Many African Americans have to cope with prejudice, bias, fears from others that impact on their ability to seek employment, acquire loans, and function in society. As I mentioned earlier living while black can be a very devastating experience.

And here are some personal examples I want to share from my own life experiences. One example, I personally have been profiled and harassed in department stores where security staff have followed me in the stores and clerks have called in my credit card even while I'm attempting to purchase fairly inexpensive items. So their perception there is that if I have a credit card, for instance an American Express card, it has a Ph.D. on that card, then that person on the card must not be me. So there is a perception that I must have done something to access that card. And even when I'm buying an item that's fifty dollars or less, people have asked for my driver's license and in effect, called my card in. And then others have, in other stores, indicated that my card has been called in when I go to get other purchases. And I've actually had to talk to people on the phone because there was some concern about my card having some usage that may have been not by me. So this is the kind of thing that can really impact on your self-esteem.

Another example. I have been questioned while I was attending college on the East Coast -- at Harvard, about my validity of even being at the school. So Caucasian individuals would sit there next to me in an upper level class and ask whether I was in the wrong place. So they were questioning my validity of even being in the school. And then when I'm in the dorm other students questioning that I wasn't supposed to be in the dorm even when I'm washing my clothes. These are things again that impact on the ability to feel as if you are deserving. It can increase your sense of anger and frustration and mistrust.

Another example. I have been stopped many times and even handcuffed by police in various cities and questioned when just driving or walking while just minding my own business. Overall, these occurrences can negatively impact on your self-esteem, confidence, as it has on mine in the past years, as well as increase cultural mistrust and fear, helplessness, frustration, and anger.

### **Slide 7: African-American Families**

I'm going to turn to looking at African American families. Nancy Boyd Franklin has done a lot of work working with African American families. One of the things that Nancy talks about is important understanding in diversity of characteristics, values, and lifestyles arising from such elements as geographic origin, degree of cultural congruence. That's look at how much people identify with African American culture and how that fulfills them. Socioeconomic status is also important. Level of education. Religious background. Age and generational concerns. Sexual orientation.

### **Slide 8: African-American Families**

Further information on African American families from Nancy Boyd Franklin. African heritage, the understanding of the legacy, the ethos with enduring elements at the African American or African cultural system. One of the things that comes through with this is family kinship ties with the extended family or the extended family-- or quasi-kin. These are people who are not necessarily blood relatives; the people that have become like family-- and other informally adopted members. In my own family of origin I grew up in an extended family with my grandmother and aunts as well as my mother and this was important for us being able to adapt in a community that we lived in. In these family systems there's flexible boundaries and shared roles in managing tasks, and mutual aid that's provided, as well as a sense of interdependence. And intergenerational transmission of values, history, and life experience from the elders. This is provided through the oral tradition. So again, many of the senior members or elders will provide information about past historical traditions, cultural traditions, valuable historical points, information that can then fill the younger generations with the past information and help them to take that into the next generation. Collective unity. One of the things that many African Americans will talk about is that the survival of the overall group or tribe is more important than the family or the individual. The individual has meaning in the context of the community or the overall group. The role of religion and church, spirituality-- this is an enduring integral part of the community's strength and survival.

### **Slide 9: African-American Families**

More on African American families. There's a case example that I want to go over that can help understand some of the flexible boundaries but also some of the issues that can happen in an intergenerational sense.

There's an individual named Clarence, age twelve, who was referred by his school principal, Catholic School, for acting out behavior. He wasn't listening to anyone and was placed on probation. His grandmother, age fifty or sixty, Mrs. Long, worked part time at a local public school. His mother, Margaret, age twenty-seven, who's at work, had given birth to Clarence when she was fifteen. And she had been raising him while she was also living with her siblings. Mrs. Long who is strong and domineering had essentially been Clarence's mother. And her daughter, Margaret, and Clarence were afraid to cross her and she developed resentment towards her mother. One of the things that you'd want to do is think about how you would intervene, and I'll be looking at that on the next slide.

### **Slide 10: African-American Families**

In looking at how to intervene in the situation one of the things that you want to look at is how to get the mother and grandmother to work together to parent and care for Clarence and to meet with the school as a united front. What's important there is looking at how the mother and grandmother can become adults and executives in an alliance to work with Clarence versus having the grandmother just be the parent and the mother still be like a child. Also assisting the mother as I'm just mentioning to be more of an adult than a sibling with her son. That is done

through restructuring the family-- involving the mother and its an ongoing treatment process. Culturally, as in other African American families, the therapist was never able to put the mother in charge in this example, but was able to renegotiate their “executive alliance” to assist Clarence in improving his behavior and being reinstated to school.

### **Slide 11: Role of Church and Spirituality**

This information is going to be talking more about the rule of church and spirituality in the African American community and with African American families.

The rule of the church. It’s an agency for social reorientation after the period of being enslaved. It provided many with ability to have ownership and this status was able to facilitate more respect for many in the community and also increased ability to express their talents and abilities. It’s also a sanctuary for handling the pain of racism and discrimination and abuse. It is also a way for the family to reinforce themselves and also for the community and educational values to be transmitted. Many within the church community were able to help in building, maintaining schools. It is also a place for people to come together and do story telling and imagery that can be shared during sermons which also reinforce the old tradition and also reinforce and maintain people’s abilities to imagine that they can overcome many of the problems that they were facing.

Source of economic cooperation. Mutual aid, social support. Also traditional source for counseling and therapy in times of need and crisis. Spiritual beliefs that many hold are beliefs that are part of a survival system as spirituality itself is imbedded within the psyche of the individuals to help them again overcome many of their struggles.

### **Slide 12: Differences in Cultural Patterns and World View**

One of the things that’s important to think about is differences in cultural patterns and worldview between African Americans and European Americans. Now with this slide that you can see there’s an emphasis on more community interdependence with African Americans as compared with more individual independence with European Americans. Also without listing all of the information on the slide some of the overall things that are contrasting there’s more of an emphasis on the extended family. Within African Americans there’s more of a sense of pride and value in the elderly and they’re viewed as reservoirs, as oral tradition and very functional in the extended family.

In the European community there is more emphasis on repression of feelings whereas in African American communities, there’s more emphasis on emotional expressiveness and vitality.

One of the things that is important to also think about is the emphasis placed by the European American families on more nuclear families. Again for the African American families as I was saying earlier, there’s more emphasis on extended family.

### **Slide 13: Shift in Cultural Orientation**

Shifting cultural orientation. In looking at the African American families I was just mentioning, there are certain important aspects that have been evidenced over many, many decades. There’s

mutual aid, the adaptiveness, the interdependence, and cooperativeness. But when people become involved in doing more selfish, individualistic activities such as getting involved in drugs this can impact and shift the normal, natural orientation in the family. So with the drug cultural orientation many of the cultural themes that have been expressed as being healthy in helping African Americans survive and move through the society begin to shift. So when individuals become more engaged in this activity and become more selfish, more pathological, more materialistic, more self-focused, manipulative, dealing with more immediate gratification, they become less family oriented and less community oriented. So their self-need becomes the priority. So this is where the many people shift and if they shift towards this, it impacts negatively on the African American family.

#### **Slide 14: Male/Female Relations**

The next couple of slides deal with male, female relations. Psychosocial pressures from the societal issues along with societal oppression and racism can impact on the role expectations and impact on the family-- impacting on their employment and finances with increased potential for mistrust and blaming, hopelessness and learned helplessness.

The stereotypes with men and women. Many times men have been seen over the years as being lazy and aggressive. They have to cope with what has been called the “invisibility syndrome” where people don’t really acknowledge them. They ignore them or avoid them because they’re projecting fear on the men and it’s going to affect their esteem and confidence. And as I was talking earlier, many men are racially profiled throughout their lives. And I’ve already given some examples for that.

Females many times have been perceived as superwomen because they’re engaged in child-rearing, raising the family, and also working and dealing with issues-- many times when they don’t have men in their households that are obvious. At times they’re also seen as being hostile and controlling because they’re having to uphold and work on so many levels.

In society, many African Americans experience society as being objectifying and dehumanizing. And with this, many can internalize negative stereotypes that are being projected on them. One of the issues that men and women are facing together is that they have differences in education levels and professional levels. With women over the last many years increasing their levels of achievement and “moving up” in the companies at higher levels. And many men not attaining the educational level aren’t raising their professional level at the same rate and this is causing problems with male, men and women in their relationships.

Overall men have been perceived as being endangered as a group in the society with many men being less available or attractive to many African American women due to disproportionate numbers being incarcerated, having lower social statuses, and as I was mentioning earlier lower education, having chronic maladaptive coping in the oppressive culture that we’re living in. And this can contribute to them having more physical and mental problems, substance dependence, violence, and even death.

#### **Slide 15: Male/Female Relations**

Looking at male/female relations with role flexibility and boundaries. Men have involvement in the families in a variable way as in other ethnic groups. Many may be in the home. Some may not. They may be active in a child rearing process or they may be more peripheral or less engaged or not engaged at all. If living in the home, many have primary or shared financial responsibilities, and some of the men that maybe helping the family maybe less obvious. So there may be extended family members from the parent family. There might be friends or church members also involved. With women they may, as I was saying earlier, have multiple roles and maybe the primary or in a shared financial situation. Women over many decades have worked outside the home and in conjunction with raising children.

Men and women together, what can be helpful for them is to work on increasing their communication and trust, work on their control issues, how they navigate the different roles and responsibilities, and also work on how they're going to use these roles within the relationships and in the family.

### **Slide 16: Racial/Ethnic Identity Issues**

The next slide deals with racial and ethnic identity issues that are important. With African American identity development, this is more or less an entity, resulting from positive encounters or affirmations of one's racial identity highlighted by developmental stages.

Also, it's important that within this identity development, many confront potential conflicts in attempting to balance and integrate different and divergent aspects of their, the Africentric or Eurocentric or also other cultural elements that they're experiencing as they develop in this society.

Another thing that's important to be aware of with African Americans is different levels of skin color, because there are many levels and grades of skin color on a continuum. And this involves many dynamics and issues of light to dark skin complexion that impact on people's level of self-esteem, success, mobility, societal acceptance. And this is also impacting on increasing or decreasing levels of privilege because those who are lighter may have some of the same ability to move through society as some of the whites in terms of the privilege, because of the lighter skin maybe more valued and seen as being almost white.

During the process of developing identity, individuals may experience feelings of confusion, frustration, alienation, isolation, disillusionment, anger and depression, and also a sense of disconnection and separation from other blacks or African Americans than others.

Individuals who are struggling with their identity may develop a two-ness or duality. And this is what I was talking about earlier in trying to integrate different aspects of who they are culturally. An effective resolution involves acknowledging the influence of various cultural elements while gaining an integrative bicultural, multicultural balance and accepting or internalizing their African American heritage and other cultural heritages as needed.

### **Slide 17: APA Minimal Multicultural Competencies**

The APA, which is the American Psychological Association, has developed minimum multicultural competency. This involves awareness of one's own cultural heritage, gender class, ethnic racial identity, sexual orientation, disability, and age cohort, and how that shapes the personal values, assumptions, and biases related to the different identified groups, also; the knowledge of the history and manifestation of oppression, prejudice, and discrimination in the United States and the psychological sequelae.

Also important, is the knowledge of social political influences, for example poverty and stereotyping that impinge upon the lives of identified groups. Also, the knowledge of family structures, gender roles, values, beliefs, worldviews, and how they differ across different identified groups in the US, along with the impact on personality formation, developmental outcomes, physical/mental illness are important to keep in mind.

Also important, is the ability to accurately self-assess one's own multicultural competence including knowledge of one's circumstances, for instance personal biases, stage of ethnic identity, skill and knowledge level, language fluency, and social political influences.

### **Slide 18: Psychotherapy**

In psychotherapy again, as I was mentioning on the previous slide, looking at the minimal competencies that are important, it's important that again as I was saying earlier-- the understanding of the impact of the period of enslavement on African Americans in oppression and that impact on their adaptiveness and functioning. African American themselves, can see their cultural and psychological perspectives as a source of strength. African American language styles also are important to be aware of as being able to code switch. What this means, "code switching"-- many African Americans can go into different contexts and present themselves and talk in different ways when they're in different situations. So switching means they can talk with people using more of the standard language and Standard English. And when they are in code switching with their own African American group they may talk with more lingo, more affect, or different words that may conceal meanings. And this can help because over many centuries people have used different language styles, used code switching as a major survival, and also for as we might see a sense of "cognitive affect synthesis", which helps them to feel more, connected.

Psychotherapy. It is important for people to be aware of potential identity concerns and also cultural mistrust. Again, that's mistrust that many African Americans and also other persons of color experience as an adaptive, interpersonal skill that helps them to not necessarily have their guard down when they first enter into situations, but to gauge and to scan situations to make sure that they're safe and able to move through the particular-- engage in that particular context. By doing that it, helps them to increase, to facilitate their functioning. So cultural mistrust is a healthy thing.

Also important for psychotherapists are to be aware of affective problems such as depression and anxiety that might be presented as physical or somatic complaints. Also one thing that sometimes comes up with African Americans is that there might be a perception that seeking therapy might be a sign of weakness.



### **Slide 19: Psychotherapy Issues**

African Americans are less likely, in general, to seek outpatient mental health services and tend to have fewer services available. Again cultural mistrust of many systems may include mental health facilities, which could be viewed as another racist institution. Many tend to be seen by less well-trained professionals when they do go to various clinics.

Past research has discussed problems with misdiagnosis of African American patients. This was fairly pervasive back in the sixties and seventies when people were talking about their mistrust. Many got misdiagnosed as being paranoid schizophrenic. Many African Americans have engaged in premature termination from therapy based on feelings, perceptions, fears of distortion, interaction, and sometimes valid concerns. And they desire to have a therapist with more cultural similarity and/or skill, experience.

### **Slide 20: Therapist and Client Framework**

When you look at the therapist and client framework potential sociocultural dimension such as language, differences in style and communication, various values from the class and education are important to be aware of, also social mobility and intergenerational issues. Cultural-bound values; cultural similarity can be an important factor in the client's self-disclosure. So again, if someone feels that there is similarity in the cultural racial background, they may feel more comfortable in the therapeutic process. Geographic differences can be important to be aware of. Family structure. Differing worldviews. And perceived comfort level of both client and therapist can also be important dimension in the therapist-client framework.

### **Slide 21: Therapist and Client Framework**

In this slide, again, this is a therapist-client framework. It's a grid that helps to evaluate and mark off what levels people have in similarity or difference. So the more similarity across some of these different areas within this grid one can get provide a sense of what might be some of the things that will help the comfort or that congruence or what might possibly get in the way of people feeling comfortable.

### **Slide 22: Therapist and Client Framework**

More on therapist-client framework-- factors which can enhance the credibility of the therapist with persons of color. One is the client's perception that the therapist has been an effective and trustworthy helper. And this can increase by the ascribed status. And this is what can be assigned by others to the therapist. Achieved status. This is when the therapist gains more cultural and racial-ethnic perspective and skills and knowledge. This could increase the perception of the patient, that the person has more status because there's more understanding of their cultural dimension. Giving. If the patient perceives that something was received from the therapy that can be seen as them having a gift. So there might be a perception that something was gained in that session that can help them feel comfortable in coming back.

### **Slide 23: Therapist/Client Interaction**

In the therapist-client interaction therapists maintain clarity about their own process as counseling unfolds, their feelings of comfort, security, anxiety, and guilt, being aware again of their own personal histories, events, biases, and beliefs, attitudes that can both increase or decrease comfort and effectiveness in the therapeutic process. And, being aware of their own counter-transference, their identification with the patients or their own cognitive distortion.

One of the things that therapists can be aware of is what if they're acting superior or treating the patient in a devaluing manner, expecting passivity from the patient and feeling threatened by assertiveness, differentiated from a verbally aggressive tone or aggressive stance or posture. So someone might be just being assertive but that can be perceived by the therapist as being aggressive and that can impact on the person feeling comfortable and really stating what's going on.

Support for the clinician to have self-observation of themselves and openness to exploring ethnic, racial gender aspects of their military and other experiences. Therapists need to be open to seeking consultation and supervision as needed to deal with issues that may come up in working with African American patients.

### **Slide 24: Therapist/Client Interaction**

More on the therapist-client interaction. Therapist's guilt in particular may contribute to certain behaviors including overly sympathizing and not really challenging questionable behaviors in the patient, increased anxiety, being more cautious, trying too hard or being overzealous, acting defensively, and attempting to prove that they are not biased like others from their cultural background.

The overall goal is to foster alliance and facilitate empowerment of the African American patient in a multi-ethnic society through assisting the client in addressing issues and feelings that are significant including any ethnic identity issues, facilitating a discussion of issues while acknowledging the effects of racism that they may have experienced or discrimination and challenging distortions and maladaptive coping. What's important here is the ability of the therapist to help individuals distinguish between situations and contexts that might be really having institutional racist or discriminatory elements and those that they may be distorted as having. So being able to have discrimination and separating those things out.

### **Slide 25: Patient Consultation Questions:**

So sometimes there are consultation questions that come up for therapists. And possible questions that can come up for many again involve the patient-therapist interaction, cultural issues, other clinical concerns, and other issues of how the patient and where the patient is stuck. These are some of the things that come up in working with various African American patients.

### **Slide 26: PTSD**

In the DSM-IV PTSD is characterized by re-experiencing of an extremely traumatic event accompanied by symptoms of increased arousal and by avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma.

### **Slide 27: PTSD Prevalence Estimates by Ethnicity**

With PTSD prevalence estimates by ethnicity were developed with the 1990 National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study or NVVRS. African Americans experience 20.6 percent. Hispanics 27.9. Whites and all others 13.7. So this is PTSD prevalence.

### **Slide 28: African-American Vietnam Veterans**

With African American Vietnam veterans Parson talked about the higher prevalence of PTSD, as examined on the previous slide. Also what's important to understand about why there might be higher prevalence of PTSD with the Hispanics and African Americans is that they fought in heavy combat and died in disproportionate numbers. Also important to understand, during that period of time in the sixties, early seventies there was ongoing sociopolitical factors both before, during, and after the military, including civil rights struggles, oppression, prejudice and racism and limited access to education and employment opportunities.

### **Slide 29: African-American Vietnam Veterans**

Also again with African American Vietnam veterans, there was ambivalence in fighting the "white man's" war as many say. And that contributed to disillusionment, frustration, alienation, and anger. So again, they are struggling within society and then they are drafted for the war and then they're feeling that they're fighting in a war that is not a war that they would have wanted to fight in. While many were there since they, themselves are persons of color, and the Vietnamese enemy are persons of color-- there was an identification with how the Vietnamese enemy may have been objectified and devalued.

In understanding many of these African Americans that are interfacing as I've been talking about, this intergenerational transmission of adaptation and coping or stress and trauma and imagery from previous devastating events and survival are some things that might be in their understanding or their difficulty in coping.

### **Slide 30: Therapy with African-American Veterans**

This slide is therapy of African American veterans and also looking at other war zone theaters including OIF/OEF. It is important for the therapist to develop I would say, "a transcultural experiential competence" in working with this particular population. What that means is looking at understanding both the cultural and military experiences and their interaction. Therapists can benefit from reflecting on their feelings and issues about the particular period that they're involved in, that can be Vietnam, from the past, or the current conflict with Iraq-- understanding whatever feelings and issues they're bringing to the table about people being involved in the war, their own political views. That can impact on how they're working the patient. And then also

how they understand the veterans who are currently fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan or veterans that have fought in the past in say Desert Storm, Vietnam, World War II or Korea.

Validating and addressing issues of racism and prejudice again that's what I've been saying all along, is very important because that may intensify their experience of PTSD and their cultural mistrust. Assisting veterans and assessing their misperceptions and distortion. That can intensify their symptoms and inhibit personal empowerment and change. This is what I was referring to earlier helping people to differentiate between what's more accurately racist or discriminatory, prejudicial issues or things that they are misperceiving and distorting that intensified their problems.

### **Slide 31: How Diversity Issues Impact Treatment/Rehabilitation of PTSD**

Interpersonal functioning of veterans with PTSD is often hampered by mistrust, distortions, and skill deficits. Interpersonal problems can also be magnified when dealing with people of another ethnic background, gender, or sexual orientation. For Vietnam veterans, trauma occurred in the context of racial tensions in the war zone and at home. For OIF/OEF soldiers and veterans limited employment opportunities may continue to exist as well as coping with prejudice, bias, perception of white privilege, and other cultural issues that may have, they may have with citizens of Muslim or and/or Middle Eastern decent that they may have perceived are functioning at a higher level then they are currently. So for many, as they come home, they're seeing Muslim or Middle Eastern individuals working in the society and maybe doing, in their own minds, better then they are. This can bring up many issues. Difficulty of cross-cultural issues overall, impacts on their cohesion and trust within the treatment context and interpersonal functioning in their daily life.

### **Slide 32: Cross-Cultural Group Objectives**

What we've developed here in the National Center is a group called the Cross-Cultural Group. And this was developed by myself and Fred Gusman and also a former social worker, Shirley Salome-Bale. In this cross-cultural group we have to examine the personal history of cultural attitudes and beliefs. We also examine adaptive cultural coping skills and practice adaptive coping skills. We increase their cultural tolerance. We develop skills acknowledging commonalities and respecting differences. We also explore identity development and the impact of bias and prejudice on self and others. This group tends to strengthen the trust and empowerment when disclosing issues in this multi-ethnic context.

### **Slide 33: Developing Cultural Tolerance**

So one of the important aspects of this cross-cultural group that we have here in our men's PTSD residential rehabilitation program is developing cultural tolerance. We help them to look at their levels of intolerance and tolerance that they come into the program with, and at this time, we help them to look at how they can increase their awareness and sensitivity of others that might be different from them.

### **Slide 34: Guiding Principles of Cross-Cultural Group**

One of the guiding principles of the cross-cultural group is that it's multi-cultural. It's inclusive. You're dealing with problems that they may be experiencing with separatism and divisiveness. It helps them to understand, because the group itself mirrors the real world, because there are people in the group from all different cultural backgrounds. So, it's an opportunity for them to interact with others from the different backgrounds.

### **Slide 35: Group Process: Impact on Social Functioning**

The group process itself and the impact on social functioning. Again it helps them to look at racial and ethnic identity issues, levels of mistrust to help to facilitate their empowerment in this multi-ethnic context.

### **Slide 36: Group Process: Therapist**

For the therapist in this group process, it's important for them to view the process as a means of challenging maladaptive behaviors and thoughts. The therapist needs to model openness and be non-judgmental and non-defensive and non-retaliatory if people begin to bring up their own biases and their own issues because this is what we are trying to help them do in the group-- to bring up their issues so they can begin to learn how to function in a more effective way. So the therapist needs to become non-judgmental and non-defensive in helping them to bring these things up. So the environment itself becomes a safe environment for them to disclose some of their prejudice. The therapist explores participant's levels of cultural tolerance and support for the self-awareness of their own process, beliefs, and reactions to be very, very much accounted for.

### **Slide 37: Example of Group Discussion Topic**

One example of a topic that can come up in cross-cultural group is, "How have your cross-cultural experiences in the military affected your life in a positive and negative manner?" This is the topic that helps them to go back and look at the things that they learned about themselves cross-culturally in the military and then how that effected their lives over the years. Culture itself can include ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion, associated economic status, race, education, disability, and age. These are some of the areas of culture that we reflect on during the process of doing the group and many of the men can tap into look at where their issues may be.

Military status is also something that we look at because many of them had issues in the military that have still—that have permeated their lives post-military. Within the military status we look at different branches of the military that might be concerning. We also look at military status itself, what level did they attain? Do they have issues with people that were in positions of authority with them? And also we look at the issues that they may have with people that are non-military persons and how that affects their ability to feel comfortable in talking about their issues.

### **Slide 38: Common Distortions**

Common distortions that many of the African American veterans and other veterans have when they're talking about cross-cultural issues are again over-generalizing, stereotyping, all or none thinking, mind reading and fortune telling, personalization, emotional reasoning, magnifying and labeling and mislabeling.

### **Slide 39: Group Benefits**

Difficulty managing cross-cultural issues can hamper interpersonal functioning of PTSD patients including Vietnam veterans and OIF active duty personal or veterans. The cultural diversity group that we're talking about can support PTSD rehabilitation with African American and others by addressing issues of identity and tolerance and respect and practicing a means of overcoming distrust and cognitive distortions and of personal skills deficits.

Clinical experience and data that we've taken in the group suggests that this intervention over time can significantly improve diversity attitudes among Vietnam veterans of PTSD. And we're also beginning to notice that other veterans and other soldiers who are still active duty soldiers who are coming in from current conflicts OIF and OEF are beginning to take the time to address their diversity issues and attitudes, and begin to give themselves opportunities to expose themselves to some of their problems in the community and talk about their issues with people say of Muslim or Arabic descent.

### **Slide 40: Summary**

In summary, as African Americans are being treated for PTSD and other issues, it's very important that people that are working with them take into account historical, cultural, and societal issues and personal beliefs or biases that may facilitate and/or hinder the therapeutic process. Overall, it's helpful to take into account your own understanding of the issues and to be able to consult with others that might help them be able to engage better and develop a better treatment in the lives of African American patients with PTSD and other issues.

Thank you very much.