



# Culturally Relevant Transformative Practice:

Considering the Impact of Neuroscience and Culture Within the Field of Mental Health



# Overview

- To explore both the unconscious (implicit) and conscious (explicit) influences on how we think about, feel about, and behave toward others based on group membership and culture, especially as it relates to social and mental health treatment decisions.



# Unconscious Bias

An evaluation, both positive or negative, about other people, groups, or situations, based on and confirmed by our past experiences.





# Unconscious Thought

How much of what you see, hear, feel and experience are you consciously aware?

How much of what you do is under conscious control?

How accurate is your judgement of what you see, hear, feel and experience?

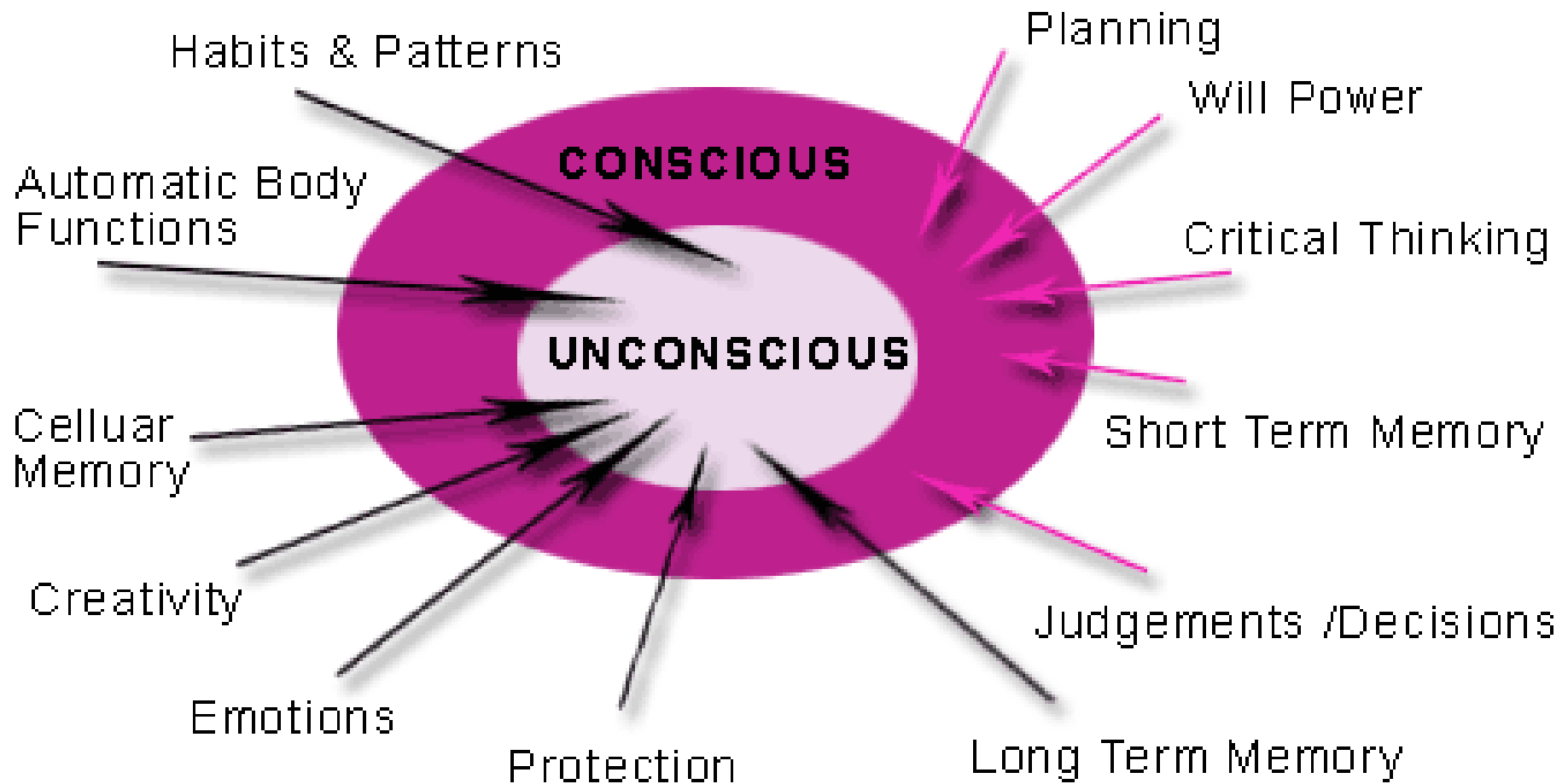


A conceptual illustration of the mind as an iceberg. The top part of the iceberg, representing the conscious mind, is above a horizontal line. The much larger part of the iceberg, representing the subconscious mind, is below the line. The background is a dark blue sky with stars and a rainbow. The entire image is set against a teal gradient background.

Conscious  
12%

Subconscious  
88%

## CONSCIOUS / SUBCONSCIOUS (Unconscious) MIND





**Cognitive scientists would suggest that: “Humans don’t think very often because our brains are designed not for thought but for the avoidance of thought. Thinking is not only effortful, but it’s also slow and unreliable.”**





FINISHED FILES ARE THE  
RE SULT OF YEARS OF  
SCIENTI  
FIC STUDY COMBINED  
WITH  
THE EXPERIENCE OF  
YEARS



A  
BIRD  
IN THE  
THE BUSH

# The Brain's Ability to Process

Your Brain has a  
Mind of its own

- We grow up thinking that we control all of our thinking, or that we have the right perspective, or our way is the right way of doing things.

Neuroscientists  
proport

- The human body sends **11 million bits per second** to the brain for processing, yet the conscious mind seems to be able to process only **50 bits per second**.

Mental  
Shortcuts

- Therefore, since your brain cannot process 11 million bits of information a minute, it takes mental shortcuts













“

"The images, assumptions, and stories we carry in our minds - often untested and unexamined - will influence the decisions we make, the priorities we set, and how we fulfill our responsibilities"

**SENGE ET AL., 2000**



# Brain Processing and Judgement

## Frontal Lobe

slow  
effortful  
infrequent  
logical  
calculating  
conscious



## Limbic System

fast  
automatic  
frequent  
emotional  
stereotypic  
subconscious





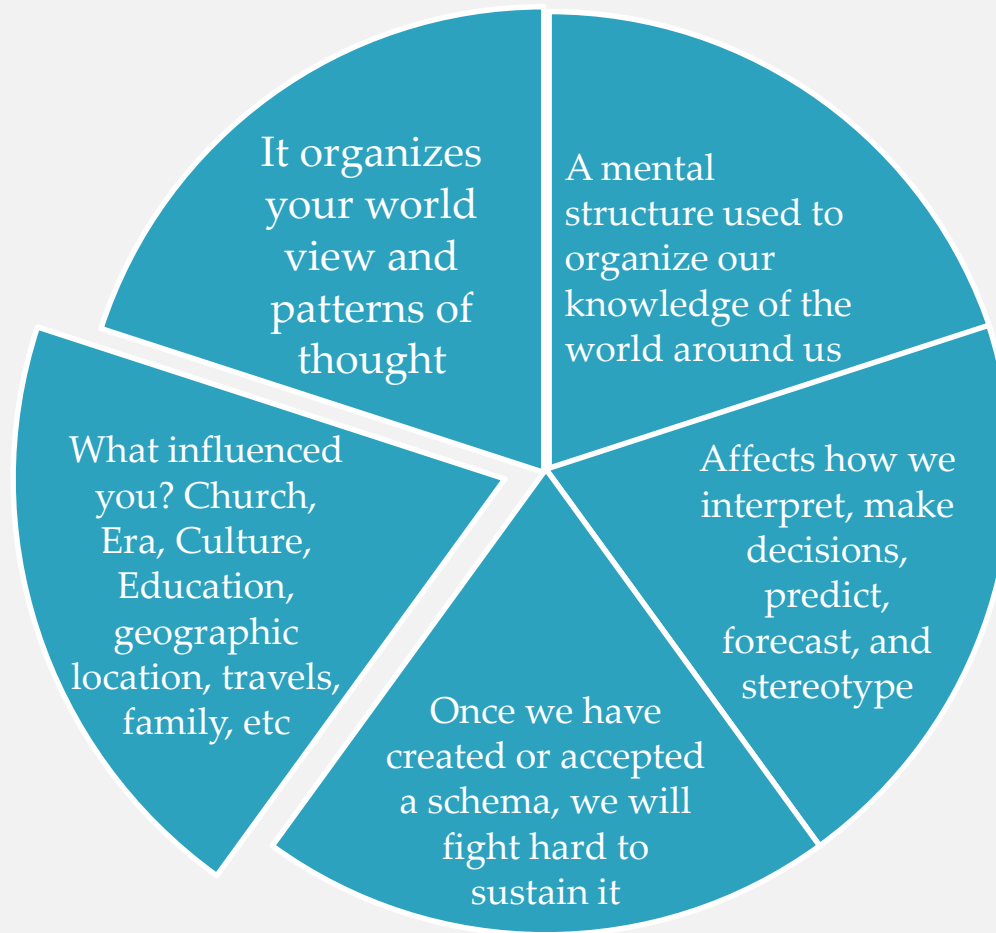
# Infallibility is a Myth

There are aspects of ones own contents of consciousness about which people can be mistaken (e.g. when failing to spot errors in texts they are reading).

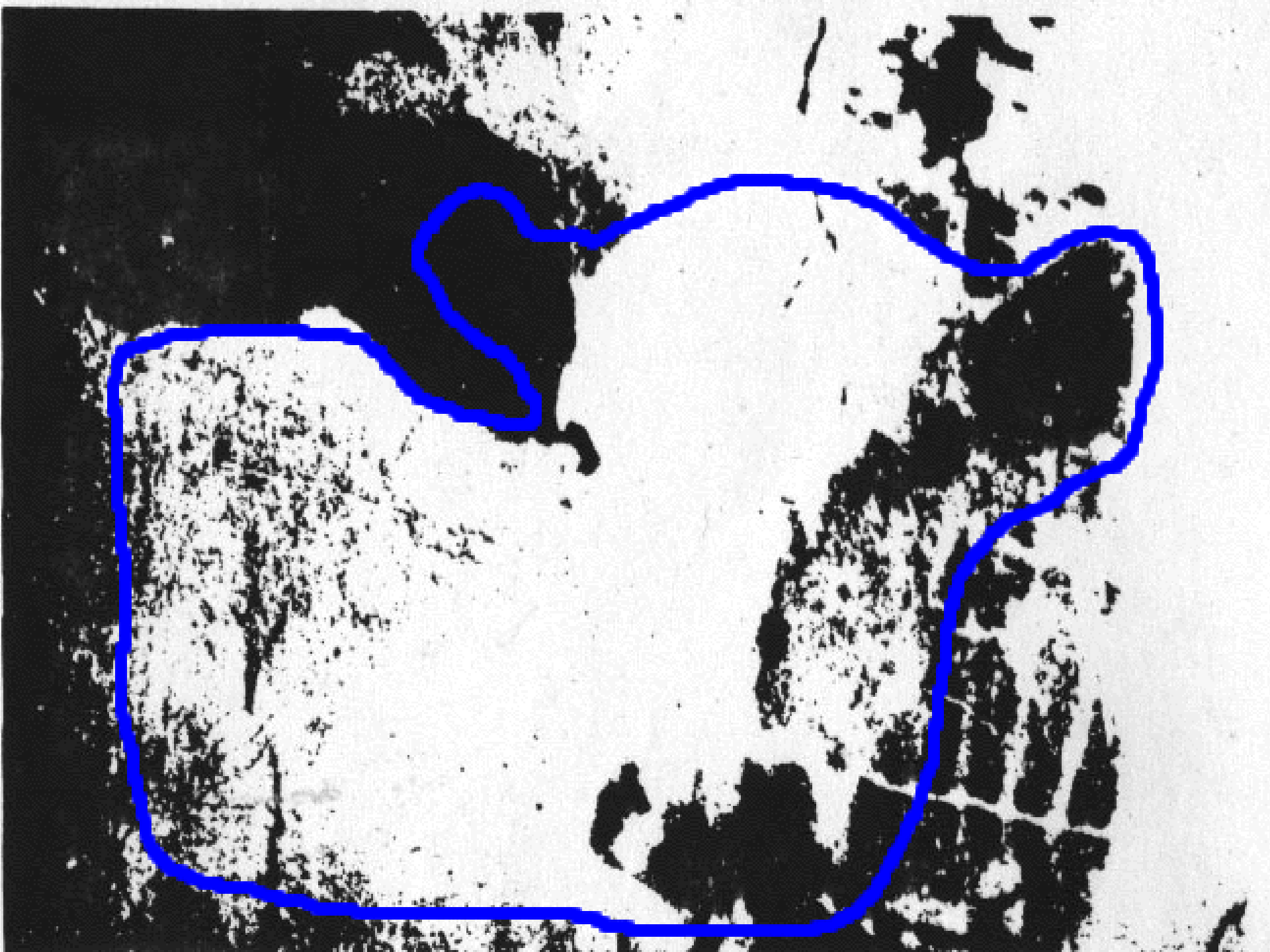
We often believe our consciousness to be infallible – “I cannot be wrong about how things seem to me.”



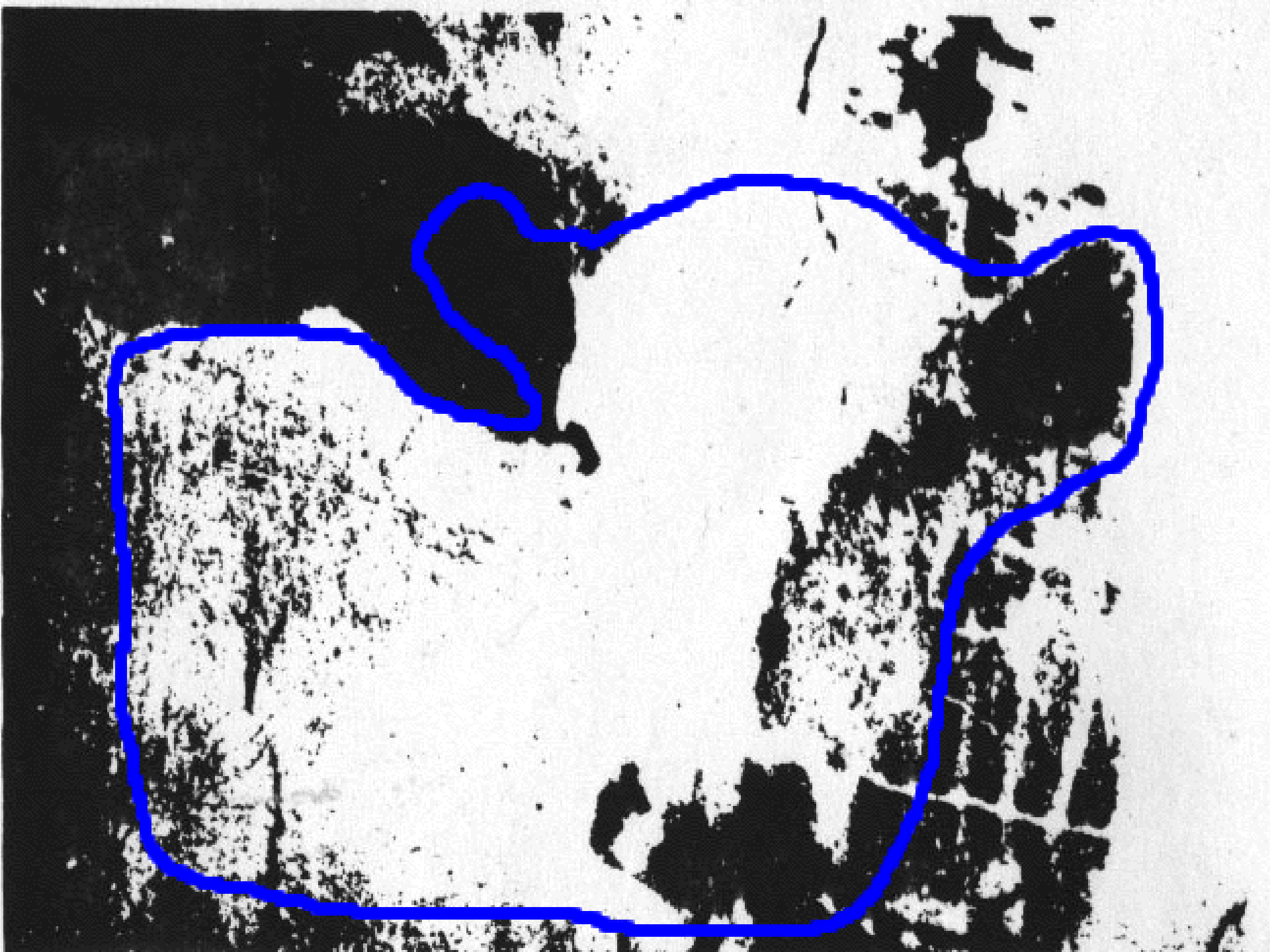
# People's Minds Operate Through Schemas

















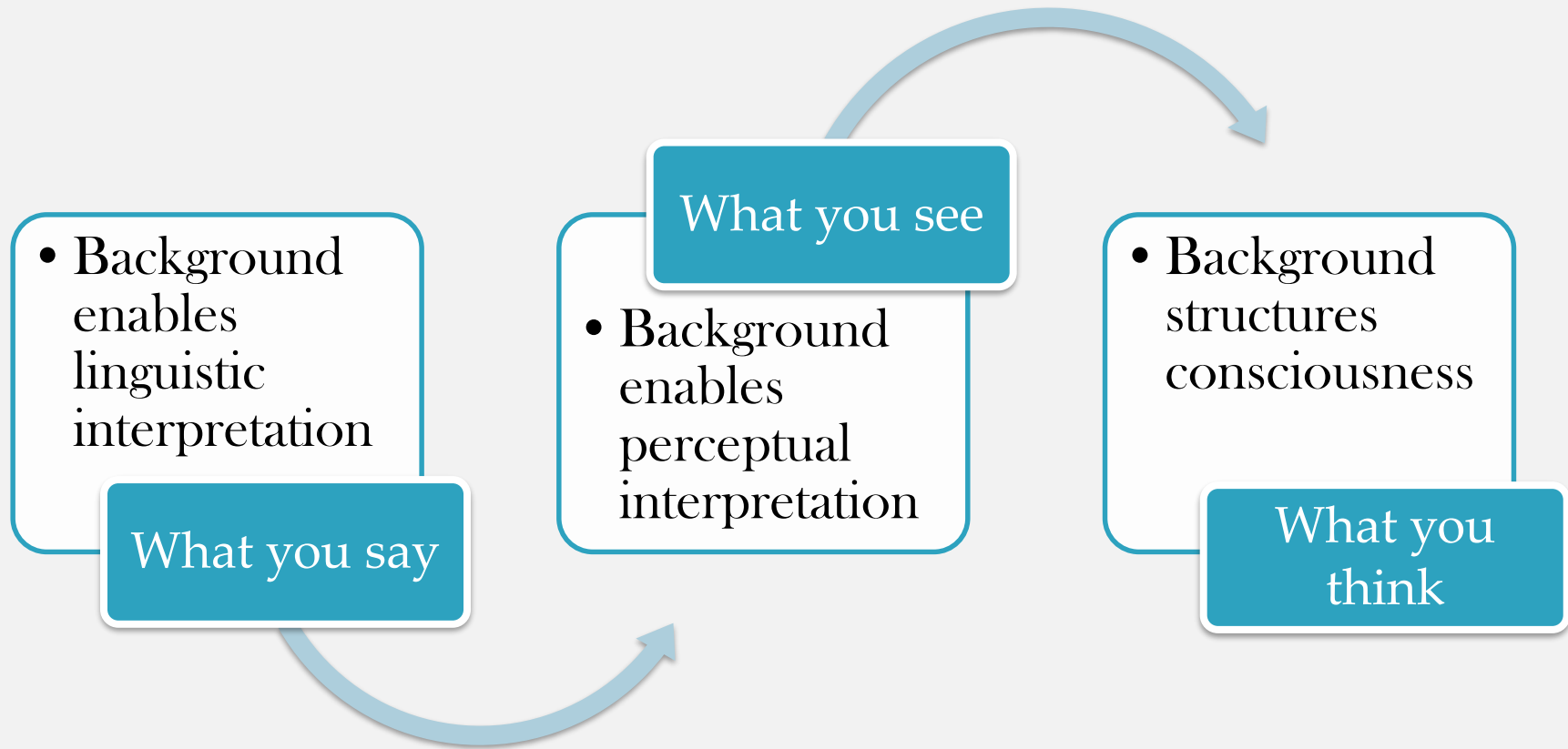




**Who you are informs  
who you think I am**



# Background Matters





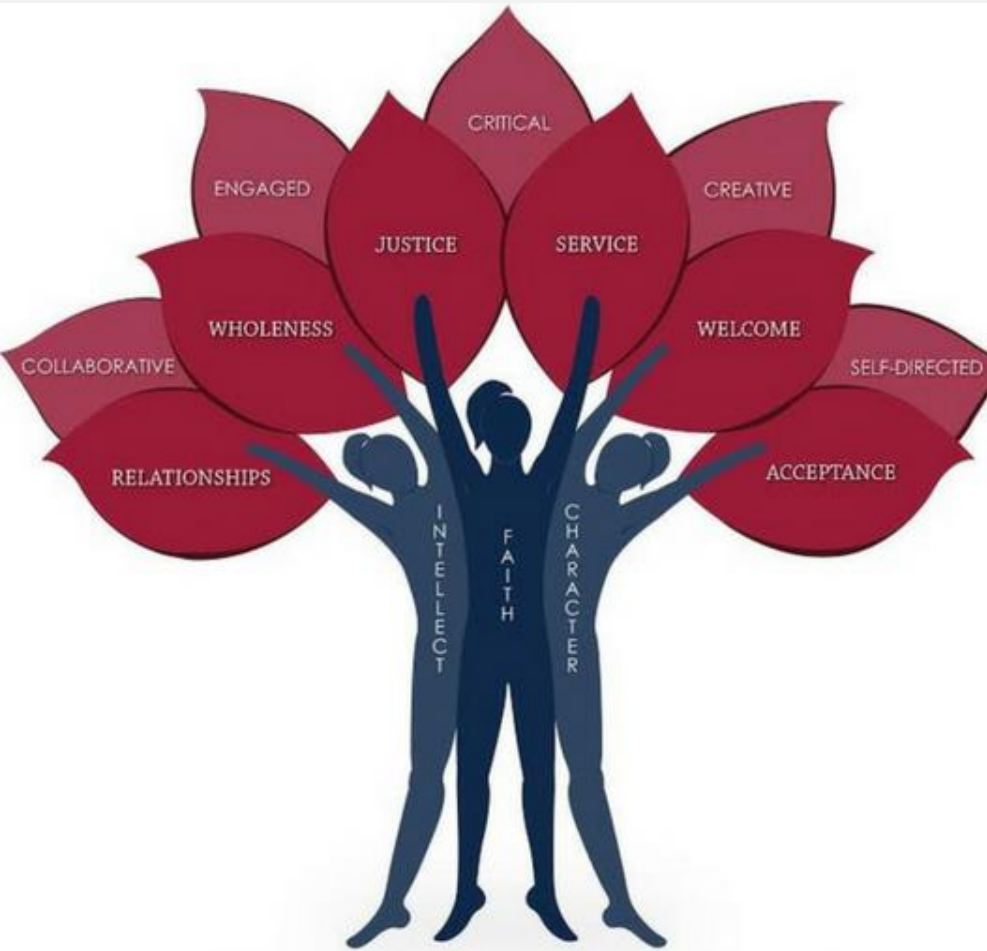
# Culture is Made Up of...

What's  
Important  
(VALUES)

What's  
True  
(BELIEFS)

What's  
Perceived  
(NORMS)





*Are values  
individually chosen  
or are we taught to  
accept certain  
values?*





By Example

- Teachers, historical leaders, contemporary athletes

Rules and Regulations

- Punctuality

Persuade or Convince

- Respectful discussions with reasonable arguments

Appeal to Conscience

- You don't really believe that do you? Moral pressure to reject an unacceptable point of view

Limited Choices

- Either you agree or you will not be able to...

Inspiration

- Motivational speakers, films, activities designed to have emotional or spiritual impact

Religious Dogma

- To accept beliefs without questioning them...

# Unconscious Thinking

- Human Values are the main causes of human action
- “Every voluntary act and/or decision by an individual or a group inevitably is governed, overtly or implicitly, by value priorities. In essence, what a person or society values determines what it does.”

What can  
be done to  
improve  
our  
individual  
and  
collective  
practice?



| Ethnic Background | Out-patient Care   | In-Patient Care  | In Addition...  |
|-------------------|--|--|---|
| African-American  | Underrepresented – type of provider and source of payment. Largest difference in private financed care | Overrepresented – in psychiatric care – double that of Whites. | Mental Illness is higher among AA. The difference is due to SES differences. More likely than Whites to use the emergency room for mental health problems |
| Hispanic-American | Similar to Whites  | Similar to Whites  | Depression higher in Hispanic women than men.   |
| Native Americans  | Underrepresented due to financial and diagnostic factors.  | Overrepresented  | Depression is a significant problem. High suicide levels.   |



| <b>Help Seeking Behavior</b>  | <b>Mistrust</b>  | <b>Stigma</b>  | <b>Cost</b>   | <b>Clinician Bias</b>  |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>“Minorities” are less likely to seek outpatient treatment - Due to Language, economics and accessibility differences</p> | <p>“Minorities” are less apt to seek help – lack of time, fear of hospitalization, and fear of treatment. Mistrust stems from segregation, racism, and discrimination. Overdiagnosis of Schizophrenia and under-diagnosis of depression.</p> | <p>Rate is not significantly different than Whites. AA tend to deny the threat of Mental Illness. Cultural factors tend to encourage the use of family, traditional healers, and informal sources of care.</p> | <p>“Minorities” are less likely than Whites to have private health insurance,</p> | <p>Experts assert that bias in clinician judgement is one of the reason for overutilization of inpatient treatment by African-Americans. Since diagnosis is heavily reliant on behavioral signs, clinician judgement plays an enormous role in diagnosis</p> |

# Cultural Humility



## CULTURALLY-COMPETENT SERVICE

– Compassion and Sincerity – Most “Minorities” have developed a sharp sense often detecting condescension, manipulation, and insincerity. There is no substitute for compassion and sincerity for carrying out services.

- Respect – Withholding ethnocentric judgements about the cultural practices of others.

## CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SERVICE IS NOT

– Color Blindness–

“I have not noticed that you are different. We are all humans. We all have the same feelings. I don't care if you are pink, green or purple”

- Memorizing Cultural Idiosyncrasies – A stereotypic approach to any Child is obviously simplistic and harmful.



# So What?

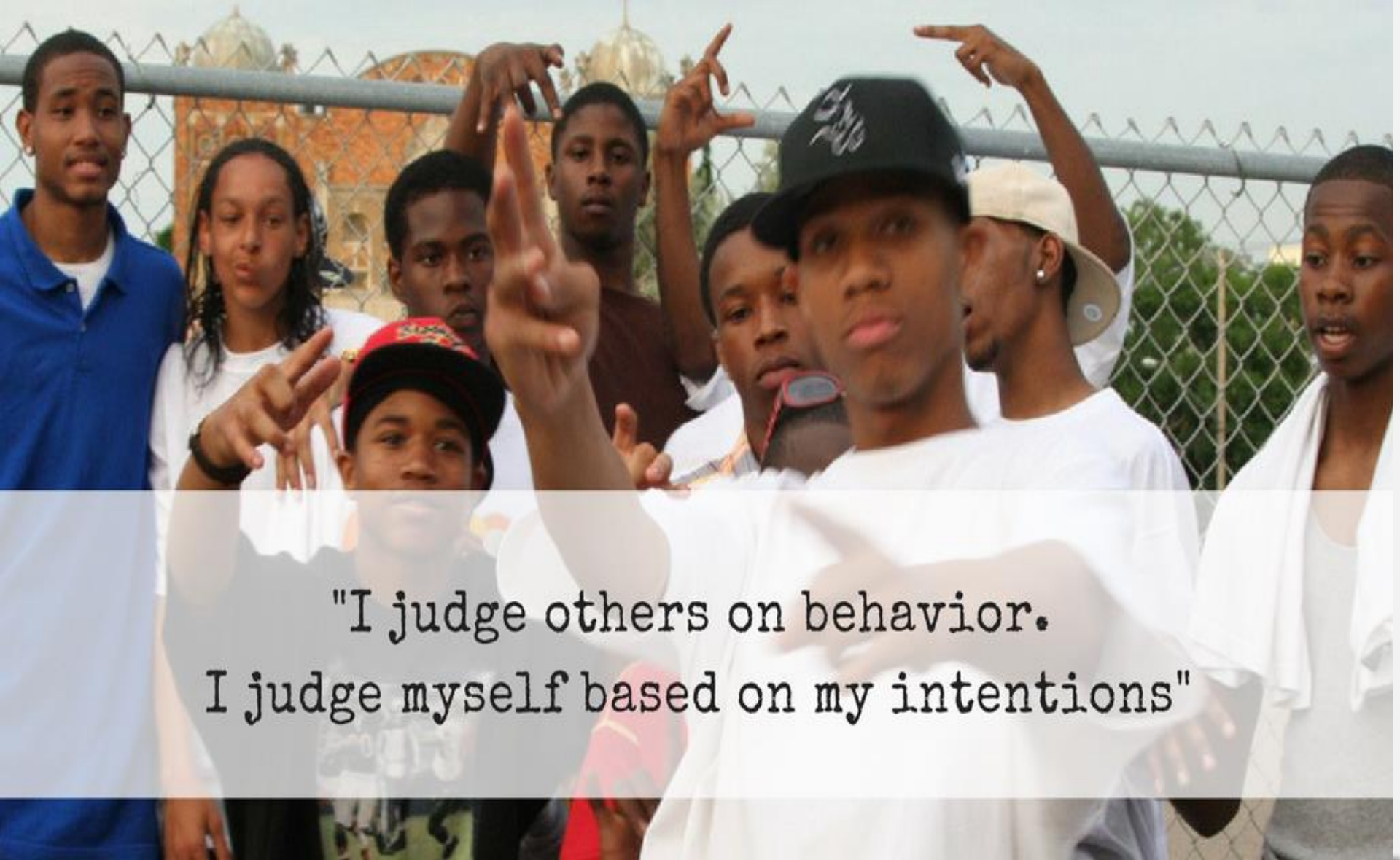
Section 8.4 Non-Discrimination It is the policy of the Grayson County CPMT to ensure **that services are provided to all identified children and families without regard to sex, race, age, religion, socio-economic status, handicapping conditions, sexual orientation or national origin.**

The Grayson County CPMT will act in compliance with all applicable State and Federal Statutes regarding the non-discriminatory provision of service.

# Overcoming

1. Remember you have bias and so do I
2. Develop the capacity to use a flashlight on yourself (mindfulness)
3. Develop an practice “Constructive Uncertainty” (Assume Positive Intent)
4. Get feedback an data about your bias and the bias of your team
5. Investigate the disproportionality and create a plan to address
6. Operationalize our decision making. That means anything we are looking at we must take into consideration race and bias. Use the racial equity toolkit ([racialequitytoolkit.org](http://racialequitytoolkit.org))
7. The way we see the world determines the way we will respond to the world – The best way of challenging this, is to be aware of what is in your head.





"I judge others on behavior.  
I judge myself based on my intentions"



# Questions?

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# Culture



Is

- Learned and passed on through generations
- Responsive to experiences and environment
- Dynamic and evolving




Influences

- Norms, Values, Behaviors
- How people understand, interpret, and respond to themselves and others
- The way people understand and name reality



# Consequences of Cultural Misunderstandings



- Racial stereotypes and negative images can be internalized, denigrating individuals' self-worth and adversely affect their social and psychological functioning;

- Racism and discrimination by societal institutions have resulted in “minorities” lower socioeconomic status and poorer living conditions in which poverty, crime, and violence are persistent stressors that can affect mental health and

- Racism and discrimination are stressful events that can directly lead to psychological distress and physiological changes affecting mental health



# Individualism vs. Collectivism

## Individualism

- Child as individual
- Independence
- Praise (to promote self-esteem)
- Cognitive Skills
- Oral expression

## Collectivism

- Child as part of the group
- Helpfulness
- Criticism (to achieve normative behavior)
- Social Skills
- Listening to authority





Actively challenge stereotypes and assumptions;  
support challengers of exclusionary behaviors;

Ask questions to gain understanding before  
disagreeing or defending;

Use privilege/access of your Dominant group  
memberships to create greater inclusion for  
Subordinate groups

Get feedback re: impact of your behavior and style  
from D/S members

Challenge yourself to learn more about the  
subordination experience and its impacts;



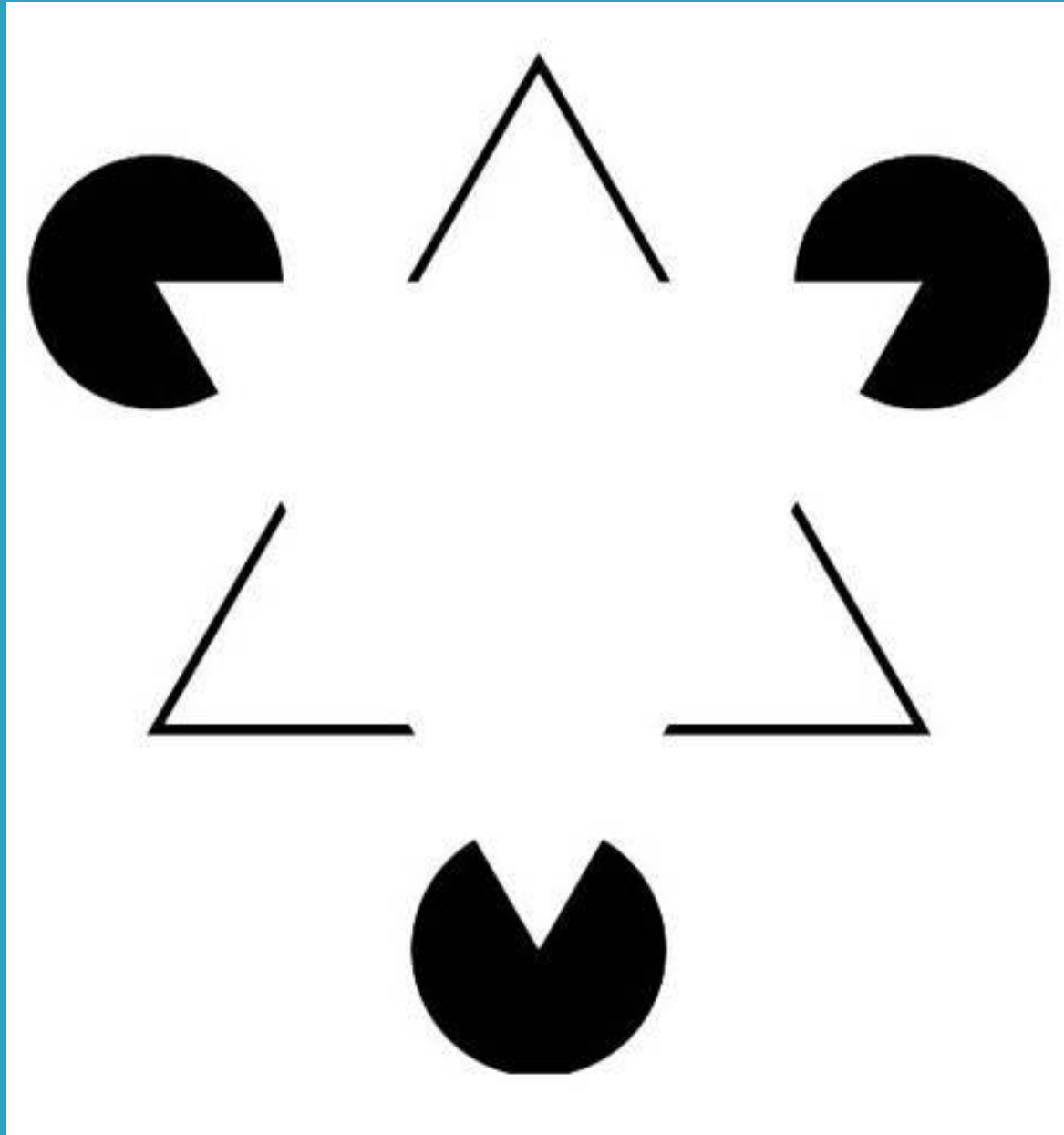
# Mental Shortcuts

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly  
Uesdantnrd waht I was rdgnieg. The  
Phaonmneal pweor of the huamn mnid!  
Aodccrnig to rsceearch at Cmabrigde  
Uinervtisy, it dnsoe't mttar in waht oredr the  
Ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt thnig is  
that the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit  
pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you  
can still raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is  
bcuseae the huamn mind deos not raed ervey  
lteter by istlef, but the word as a wlohe.

Azmanig huh?



# The Kanizsa Triangle



# DEPTH AND BREADTH OF CULTURE



# Culture Defined

A system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts society uses to understand their world

Important Survival Strategy passed down from one generation to another

A type of road map that serves as a sense-making device that guides and shapes behavior

“It’s the way things are done around here”



# Depth of Culture

**Concrete** – This is the most visible and tangible level of culture, and includes the most surface-level dimensions such as clothes, music, food, games, and so on. These aspects of culture are often those which provide the focus for multicultural “festivals” or “Celebrations.”

**Behavioral** – This level of culture clarifies how we define our social roles, the language we speak, and our approaches to nonverbal communication. The Behavioral level reflects our values. Aspects to be listed in this category include language, gender roles, family structure, political affiliation, and other items that situation us organizationally in society.

**Symbolic** – This level of culture includes our values and beliefs. It can be abstract, but it is most often the most important level in terms of how individuals define themselves. It includes value systems, customs, spirituality, religion, worldview, beliefs, mores, and so on.



**YOU MAY KNOW ME...**

**BUT YOU HAVE NO  
IDEA WHO I AM.**



# Special Issues for Consideration

## Cultural Identity of the individual

- Note the ethnic or cultural reference groups. Also, individualism vs. collectivism, etc.

## Cultural expectations of the individual's illness

- Note the symptoms of distress. Nerves, possessing spirits, somatic complaints, inexplicable misfortune.

## Cultural elements of the relationship between the individual and clinician

- Note differences in culture, and social status between each.



# Points to Reflect Upon in Providing Service

No one is just what we label or classify them.

Case managers and counselors must be aware of the cultural context of the child. Continually assess the adequacy of communication and counseling styles and methods, and be flexible enough to make adjustments as needed

Who we are is inseparable from our racial and ethnic backgrounds but not strictly determined by them.

All children receiving services deserve to be treated as individuals even as the nuances of race and culture are recognized