CASAT Podcast Network

Hello and welcome to season three of CASAT conversations.

I am your host, Heather Haslem.

This season, we will explore the weighty topic of health equity within each conversation.

We will discover insights from researchers, practitioners and experts on this complex and important topic.

We hope you enjoyed today's conversation today.

We are excited to welcome Brandon Jones.

Brandon is the executive director for the Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health.

Welcome Brandon, Happy to have you here today.

It is a pleasure to be here.

I'm looking forward to today's conversation.

Thanks.

So, as we get started, I'd love for you to tell us a little bit about yourself and what inspires you to do the work that you do to promote health equity.

Good question.

So, I'm Brandon Jones born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, also known as the other half of the twin cities, we are the twin of Minneapolis, which most people know about.

I am a black male.

I say that because when I used to tell people where I was from, they didn't think that black people lived in Minnesota, but we actually do.

There are black folks here in the north.

Um, and my upbringing was interesting.

Um, you know, my upbringing is directly tied to the work that I do today.

Um, a lot of people know me for a lot of the trauma work that I do and I grew up as a young person who experienced trauma in my family.

The most traumatic thing that experience was domestic violence in a lot of domestic violence as a kid.

You know, one time is more than enough and I've seen way more than just one incident of domestic violence and growing up and seeing the things that I've seen.

I always had this thought in the back of my head that um that that life can be better than what it is.

Um and that there are people who have it worse than me, which is always, which is an interesting thought when you're a kid, like I know that things are bad, but there are worse things out there.

Um and I always thought that, you know, if I ever get the opportunity to get out of this situation, I would do my best to get out of it.

Uh and tried to bring as many people like my siblings or my mom with me.

The abuser was my stepfather.

Um and I was just kind of kept in the back of my head and I had this epiphany in college talking to my roommate where um I had a few people who just kind of disclosed to me that they've been sexually abused and I didn't know why they were telling me this.

And I asked my roommate and said, hey, why do people keep telling me these deep, dark secrets about themselves?

And he said, well, you know Brandon, you know, you're really cool dude, like you're calm, you listen to people and you give good advice and that's why people talk to you and he said you should become a therapist.

And I was like, what?

At the time I wasn't even considering becoming a therapist, but that always that that stuck with me and I was like, you know what, maybe I should now, I went to school originally to be a dentist That obviously did not work out very well.

Um so I made a shift into sociology which ultimately led to psychology and I've been doing trauma in therapy work now since 2000 and 2011.

So yeah, so that's the fast forward version of who I am and how I got to this place and point in my life when it comes to mental health.

That's awesome, thank you.

Um Throughout your career, I know you've worked quite a bit as an advocate for Children and families who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, You talked about really what fuels you there, um can you please share with us some of the insights that you've had from all of the experience in your career to date?

Yeah, absolutely.

I think the biggest insight is that the trauma that we experience should not captivate us and it doesn't define or define who we are or doesn't become our core identity.

Unfortunately, a lot of people who do experience trauma or some type of adversity, they hold it almost like a badge on their shoulder and they become victimized completely by it and you are a victim of the circumstances, but that doesn't mean that your life is over or that you can't find different ways of healing to just persevere through some of the trouble that you've been through, that's been the biggest learning and it took me a long time to really understand that both professionally and personally, um, you know, I would say that um and this is one of the reasons why I got away from talking about being healed and as people in the helping profession therapists, case managers, various different levels of counselors, educators, we talk about healing especially as we get more trauma informed and things of that nature.

We talk about the term healed, you hear a lot of people say we need to heal the pain and I kind of cringe when I hear that because I'm like, you know, that's kind of a setup for people to believe that the pain is going to stop at some point and that's not true for most people and unfortunately what ends up happening is we have to learn better ways to cope with the things that we've gone through over time and that the pain that we experience at one point in time may feel different as we develop and grow and advance in our lives.

And I learned that firsthand personally and I talked about the professional part next personally when I became a father.

Um I had a lot of childhood trauma that was around like dad identity.

You know, unfortunately I will have fall under the statistic of a black male who didn't grow up with a father and I had a stepfather um who was abusive, but he was in and out of the house a lot when he was in, he was terrorizing things and maybe these moments where he was just gone.

Um, so it really felt like I grew up with a single mom And and then I learned that my stepfather wasn't my biological dad, which was a huge revelation.

I was like, Whoa, like my whole life turned around at that point and I was roughly 12 years old.

And um, so I had this idea and this concept that I cannot trust men and I cannot depend on and I need to be very suspicious of them, not just any man, black men and more specifically.

And I carried that thought process with me until I was about maybe like 23, years old.

I'm out of college right now and I'm still with the same kind of pain and trauma and I decided to go through therapy myself and I thought I dealt with all my daddy issues.

I thought I did everything I was supposed to do.

I did, you know, I did like eight months of therapy.

I did, you know all the CBT worksheets and everything that you can think of and I thought I was good to go, but I was healing from a place of hurt as a single, fresh out of college, very green in a career young man?

And then, you know, I fast forward from that time to about three or four years later I get married, I become a husband and then we, and then we decided to have a child right away and we end up having end up having a daughter.

And I remember like that first month I was an emotional wreck, like, this is supposed to be one of the happiest moments of my life and every time I'm holding my daughter, I'm like at the brink of tears because I'm like, what the heck am I doing here?

Like I was literally father ring without a foundation and then my, me and my wife had a conversation and she said, I think you need to go back to therapy and I said, I think you're right.

And what ended up happening was, um, I discovered I rediscovered that all that pain and stuff I thought I dealt with I did, but not from the, not from ever thinking of myself as being a dad and not and not understanding what that means to me having my own child and not knowing what to do or thinking about those moments I want to have with my daughter that I never had with my dad.

Um, you know, and, and even to this day and I learned coping skills and ways to deal with that to this day.

But even to this day now my daughter, she's almost nine years old and you know, she's, she talks to, she asked me like, where's your dad?

Like, why don't I have a grandpa on your side?

And um, so she's curious and wants to know and, and I, and I do tell her things.

I said, you know, my dad's still alive, I just don't have a relationship with him.

And you know, some, you know, some people don't have relationships with their parents, like, you know, and then there's people, you know, in her school, some of even her friends have split homes and things.

I can use the real life examples, but even still, like I watch commercial, I'll see a dad and a kid throwing the ball in the backyard and I'll get a little teary eyed and have to turn the channel sometimes, you know, and that's a reality.

So, you know, even though I've done a lot of the work I do this work, I help people, I'm still in the healing process myself.

And I think that that's one of the biggest lessons we can learn on a more professional note.

Um, I've learned this by always understand by assisting my clients to understand that the pain that they feel or that they go through.

Um, they have to always be working on it.

A lot of people go to therapy and they want the therapists or the counselors to fix them.

I've had people literally tell me this, I'm here so you can fix me.

And it's like, no, no, no, no, no, that's not what we're here to do.

We're not here to fix you, we're here to help provide some skills, some tools and some different ways of thinking to help you keep moving on in life.

And I think shifting that mentality, I believe I've been able to help hundreds of people um kind of move forward instead of setting them up thinking that they're going to hell, make it to this destination and things are going to be okay.

Mhm.

I am struck by um really this layers of trauma that people experience and as you think about the course of a lifetime and all of these different transitions, right?

Marriage becoming a new parent, how it's like this new layer of dealing with the trauma that you thought you had dealt with.

And I feel like we hear that so often like, oh man, I thought I had already done the work here and yet there's just there's this new depth and this new layer that we're presented with.

Mhm.

Absolutely.

And a lot of it has to do with brain science.

You know, when we experience trauma, those experience go deep into our subconscious and you know, it right now, we say, we only know about what 10 or 11% of what the brain actually does.

I think trauma trauma works, really highlights the epa genetics of things and um, and and really makes us kind of get more curious about how deep does this trauma go for us because I I honestly thought I dealt with all that stuff, I was just happy and ready to go.

And next thing, you know, I'm literally just like at the brink of tears just holding a baby and I'm like, what's wrong with?

I don't know what's wrong with me.

And it's these deep down beliefs and these deep down emotions and feelings and even thoughts of what I did not have or what I cannot provide due to the pain that I've experienced.

And I think a lot of people go through that.

Um I think that's one of the reasons why things like um, you know, chemical dependency and relapses so common is that a lot of times when you get sober, when you are in recovery, new things pop up, we didn't talk about those things in group.

You know, we, I got I know I'm going through the a a meetings and I'm doing the things that I need to do as a person in recovery, but then that new thought comes and it's like, whoa, that's a scary place to go.

You know, oftentimes people talk about like the fear of success, the fear, the fear of being healthy for some people is just as damaging and just as scary and that's why a lot of people choose not to do it because they don't know what's on the other side of actually having a healthy lifestyle because being unhealthy is very predictable and I control what I do, I control what goes into my body, I control the interactions in my relationships, even if they're unhealthy, it's very comfort, comfortable and predictable.

But when I'm healthy, I don't know how people are gonna respond to me, I don't know where I'm gonna be, I don't know how I'm gonna feel.

And that's a very scary place to be for some people.

Sure, I mean, the brain is wired for certainty and to want to understand how people are going to receive us.

And so it would make sense that all of a sudden that unpredictability um and changing those patterns, right, that changes how people interact with us, the situations we find ourselves in uh can be scary.

Absolutely, yep.

So, another important area of focus for your career has been helping people to heal from historical and intergenerational trauma.

I'd love for you to share with us the impact of historical and intergenerational trauma.

Absolutely.

A lot of times people's trauma starts before they were even born and that can be a revolutionary thought.

That could be a very scary thought for some people, but really it's a, it's a thought for people to really just um enhance their awareness of how things happen and how they impact who you are today, when it comes to historical trauma for folks who are not familiar may give a brief definition of it.

Historical trauma is a, is a form of collective trauma that happens to a group of people in a specific time period, um, that unfortunately what ends up happening through what's called transmissions theory and or intergenerational trauma, that trauma is passed from one generation on to the next.

So we've seen this with indigenous folks, native american folks uh, through various different things throughout the history here and what we now know as the United States from, you know, um, just being, you know, treaties that haven't been, um, you know, upstanding uh, a boarding schools, literally just massacres of people.

We see that with people who now are called african americans who are once enslaved Africans through slavery in this country.

We've seen this in the holocaust with people from jewish descent.

We see these historical trauma, you know, pinpoints of what happens to collect in groups of people.

I don't know if there's a group of ethnic group that hasn't had a historical trauma point not to get into, you know, the trauma olympics and comparing groups, but a lot of folks throughout history have definitely had versions of trauma show up.

And what that does is those groups of people learned who survived, learn how to cope and move through the situations that happened and they build culture and that culture ends up being passed down now, the intergenerational trauma is when there is a threat present or there's fear or uh, there's protective measures that are put in place, those things are passed on from one generation on to the next.

Even when that threat is not present anymore.

And you see this end up happening with a lot of groups who have cultural customs or behaviors or thought processes that at one point in time serve them for their survival.

But in today's world might not be necessary anymore because things change over time and you know, and sometimes that trauma looks different or things get more refined.

Like we talked about like racism or white supremacy and things of that nature, Like it's very different than it was 60 years ago, which is very different than it was 120 years ago.

Things of that nature.

Um, but some of the thought patterns and some of the responses and things may remain the same.

So the intergenerational trauma unfortunately, you know that passing on from one generation to the next, if there is never any intervention, um to update or to modify what's going on with the, with, you know, with the particular group, things could turn out to be like self defeating behaviors and, and that's, so when I've done this work and help people understand who they are, where they come from or whether people come from.

Um, and why they are feeling that pain today.

It's really almost doing like a family lineage or family tree exercise or Jenna Graham for folks who are in the counseling space to really help people understand where have your folks come from.

Uh, and it's, and it's always interesting doing those types of exercises because a lot of people have no personal history in their own lives.

A lot of people struggle with just, you know, dating back generation to generation, which says a lot about where we are and our ability to heal from historical trauma.

Because I think a lot of times and I'll talk more specifically about african american folks.

A lot of times we take that collective pain that we hear from in text books and movies and stories and we don't know our own personal histories, which I think is a much more revolutionary healing process is just nowhere your own people come from what they, what they've gone through, but we just take the, the collective pain and just associate ourselves with that.

And that might not be the one that, that might not be the full story of what happened.

So when we talk about healing those pains, it has to be personal, which means we have to talk to other folks in our, in our families, we might have to do some digging and you know, record books and things like that.

But we have to have a multigenerational response in order to understand what has taken place.

Well that takes me back to what you talked about when we first started is not allowing trauma to define us and yet with epa genetics and um this lived experience of the trauma in our bodies from the moment we're conceived, you know, through our lives that we have to first understand who who we are, where we came from in order to move forward and not allow that trauma to define us really from the perspective of awareness of, oh, here's my lived experience and then how how do I want to move forward?

Absolutely.

And with that too, um we have to want to move forward.

I think a lot of people, they want to know what happened and then that's it, they just stay right there and I think, you know, sitting in that that past that you can't change um that you're getting, you know, just pieces of really what happened.

I think that there's a there's a level of hurt there that can take place as well.

And that can also be just as traumatic if you're not willing to take that awareness and move with it and move forward with it.

Um and I don't know if we can get into this now or we get into this later.

You know, one of the strategies that I I've, you know, taught people to do is something that I call the A.

B.

CS of resiliency, the first the A is what we call adaptive awareness, which is exactly what you just talked about.

It's like now, you know, something you have to adapt to it.

Like they got to do something what you know the B.

Is for balance and boundaries.

So now that you know this what boundaries do you need?

What things what do you what do you need balance in your life?

Right time and energy, compassion and accountability.

What I give to others versus what I give to myself.

Like we need to seek balance in several areas.

And then the sea is what I call constructive consecutive constructive choices.

So now that you know these things that you set up your boundaries now that you know what balance you need for yourself, what actions are you going to take and make sure that those things work for you um and make sure you're doing them for you.

So healing is kind of selfish.

And unfortunately a lot of us don't know how to be selfish when it comes to taking care of ourselves and we try to help everybody else first before we secure our own mask uh to make sure that we're safe.

Mm hmm.

Yeah.

That ah misnomer really in my opinion that healing is selfish.

Yet healing is what allows us to show up more fully.

Mhm.

And so it's just such an interesting piece of this conversation, especially as we talked about healing in the beginning.

Um and that people come to you know a therapist like yourself to like I want to be healed or I've I've worked in primary care as well and people go into primary care like stop you're going to fix me.

Right?

And yet it's outside of these spaces of healing, right?

Healing and quotes here, um, that the healing actually takes place.

So it's just again, multiple layers.

Yeah, it's a, it's a what I call a united independent effort.

If we're all doing the things that we need to do to take better care of ourselves collectively, we will be better, like in theory, in theory.

Right.

Um, if we, if we all are taking the necessary steps individually now, this kind of excludes little kids.

They're dependent on adults.

But guess what little kids model what they see.

So if they see adults taking care of themselves, they're gonna assume that those are the appropriate things to do as well.

So it's really a united independent effort when it comes to healing.

I love that.

I'd love for you to also tell us, um, you know, as we look at historical and intergenerational trauma, what are some ways that we can break these cycles?

And I'm also curious.

I'm going to give you another part of this question is like, where are the places that you think we get stuck also?

Absolutely.

Um, let's start with, where we get stuck first.

We get stuck where we feel most betrayed.

Um, so when it comes to historical trauma, So using them.

Um, let me use it more.

Not personal example, but very common one that I've seen in counseling and in my own family where there may have been, let's say abuser in the family, sexual abuse and people get stuck in not to abuse the action just itself, but the lack of protection or the betrayal of, of, of adults who knew and didn't do anything about it or the lack of someone reporting the abuser, um, that's where people get stuck.

It's like, You know, one another concept.

One of the things in the theory of therapy that I come from, it's called add larry in therapy.

And Adler has this concept that he calls the, what he calls kind of a universal goal.

That's what I call it, the universal goal.

So he says that everyone seeks these things.

Everyone seeks security significant and belonging when when these significant traumas happen.

If someone feels like one of those three desires is not met, that's where they get stuck.

So if a young person has been abused, let's say they're 22 years old and they they've been sexually abused by a family member, they don't feel significant because, and no one's ever done anything about it.

People knew, but no one does anything about it in the family.

So this person is seeking out therapy.

Now let's talk about security.

Never felt safe.

You know, family gatherings, it could be this person's birthday, Everybody's going to the birthday party, they're celebrating this individual knowing that I have been harmed and hurt, right?

So they don't feel safe.

They don't feel comfortable around the person significance.

I don't matter.

The person who harmed me told me I tell anybody that, you know, my life would be over.

They won't believe you.

Anyway.

So now I have low self esteem or you know, or I came in and I disclosed what happened to me to a family member and they said that person would never do that to you.

You're nobody right significance hits the tank, right?

Just like there's nothing there and then belonging.

These are supposed to be my family members.

Like if I can't feel safe around these folks who cannot feel safe around, I'm supposed to trust these people.

That's where people get stuck when, when, when, when, when our core things that we feel as human beings, when our humanity is not being validated by the people that we love and care about.

That's where we get stuck in these things.

So you're set, your first question was how do we break these cycles?

Because that's a hard thing to repair.

One of the biggest things we can do to break these cycles is we have to be honest about the things that we have gone through are currently going through the things that we experienced a lot of people, when it comes to trauma.

We deny a lot of the truths.

A lot of our truths, we deny them to make other people feel better about it.

And so that we don't have to actually address what has happened.

We will in that denial, we would do things like projection, We will, you know, say that somebody else did something or put emotions that we truly have for ourselves and other people.

Um, we will avoid things or keep things at a distance.

We will isolate, we will do a lot of things not to deal with that pain that has gone on because it's scary.

It's harmful.

It's hurt.

You know, it's very, um, you know, it hurts us and if we don't have people to support us and especially the people that we care about, that's a very lonely thing to go through by yourself.

And that's a scary place for us to be.

So in order to break those cycles.

One, you have to be honest about it two, I think that you you have to find, um, you have to build healthy enough relationships to do something about it, whether that's professional or through a partner or a collective group of support.

Um, as human beings, we are social people, Even people who are introverts are social.

Uh, and we need to connect with folks.

And I think that when you are suffering in silence, it makes it very difficult to break these cycles.

And then the third thing is very simple is you have to just not do the things that have been done to you.

And and that's easier to say hard to do sometimes for some depend on the circumstances, but trying to avoid doing those harmful actions that happen to you don't repeat them to anyone else.

That helps to break the cycle.

Uh, doesn't mean that it's going to take the trauma or the pain away, but hopefully it doesn't, it doesn't get replicated onto someone else.

And a lot of times that someone else are the Children that we bring into the world or that we take care of it.

We just try to make sure that they don't have the same experiences as us.

And that's what I've tried to do in my personal life.

Like I have three daughters.

Um, and I'm proud to say they have no idea what domestic violence even is.

Like.

If you ask them, they would know they, they've never talked, no one's ever talked to them about it.

They're not old enough in school to even come across the concept.

Um, they don't have a clue what that is.

By the time I was, you know, five years old, I knew very clearly that this was not the right thing to do.

Like this is not, this is this household is in chaos.

Something's going, something's not right here.

My Children don't know that because I've made a collective decision to never raise my hand and really not even my voice at my wife.

Have we been in arguments before.

Absolutely every relationship as, um, but when we do get into our little tiffs, we make sure that the kids don't get exposed to it, we'll talk about, let's talk about this later or you know, the moment is just too tense, I'm going to go take a walk or do you need some time and being able to have that level of communication first before we get into the ugly details of what our disagreement is about.

It's something way different than what are both of our parents, my parents and her parents have experienced.

Um and I think that that has help break the cycle for us just in our own family dynamic.

Mhm Thank you.

Um you know that really focuses on now, I don't want to use the word healing, but healing is a good word.

He'll he'll kill is the word we have to avoid healing is a process of healing.

Healing is a journey.

Hill is like a destination.

Like we're always on this journey.

Thank you for that distinction.

So as you know, this is really looking at healing trauma within family units and not passing um down violent behaviors to our Children, right?

But then I'm also curious like where you think we get stuck more collectively with these bigger topics such as racism and how can we heal from this historical trauma that has happened, um more collectively collectively.

Absolutely.

When it when it comes to racism, I think we get stuck with the brutal of the brutal truth of how it's shown up and how it's still practiced every day.

And I think one of the biggest uh kind of hurdles in the road, so to say because I think it's something we can get past is that the collective identity of white folks has been, has been standardized where white people don't even see whiteness as a culture.

Um, I live in Minnesota, I'm around white folks all the time.

And one of the things I often hear is I'll ask them, what is your ethnicity and they'll say, well, Brandon, I'm a mutt, I have irish and polish and italian and it's just all mixed up.

And then I say, what's your race?

And it gets quiet cause they're like, I'm just white, I guess I'm just whatever, it's just white.

And I say that's your culture too.

And then they said we don't have culture because culture has been presented to white folks collectively as like patterns that people have.

Like if I say Aztec culture, you have an idea in your head, oh, Aztecs have these patterns and these colors and they do, you know, sweat lodges and all these things like you have this kind of idea of what culture is outside of yourself instead of internal.

That's one of the ways that we get stuck with it because what ends up happening in the context of racism and I'm using this more in the United States context because outside the US people.

I mean there's racism, but it's way different than what it is here.

It's more around like ethnicity sometimes around colorism and things of that nature.

But it's not necessarily like american racism here in the United States were so race focused.

Um, and we don't understand that when people come here, most immigrant folks, people that are usually of color, some who are not some white immigrants as well.

They're all trying to subscribe and assimilate to what white culture is that standard?

But white folks don't realize it's like a fish and water that your, your culture is the standard.

That's where we get stuck because now, especially after the death of George Floyd and all these organizations and agencies institutions are like, all right.

We got to talk about racism.

Now then it just went forward just like, you know, pedal to the metal, uh, sometimes, you know, in un constructive ways they said, alright, white folks, we're going to look at your culture and white people are like, whoa, what my culture, what are you talking about?

Like?

And now you're telling me I'm a racist and I did, I didn't do anything.

Like I just grew up in my community.

I went to school and I got to try to get a good job and live a decent life And now you're telling me I'm a racist, which is like the worst thing you can call a white person ever, right.

And, and that that is not the right approach to really dealing with this issue, it's hard to come in and say, hey, you've been harming me.

Um, but but it's not even said like that, it's just like, hey, you are a bad person and you need to stop doing this and these are the things that you do and that is very off putting, like I would never walk into my home and say to my wife, like, you know what, you're an awful wife, you need to do this, you're cooking trash, you don't do X, y and Z.

Like if I came in there, my wife would be like, who the heck are you?

Like, I would get kicked out the house.

That's been the approach to dealing with racism, It's been this very hardcore everything you do is wrong.

I don't want to hear what you have to say, shut up and get out of my way type of approach.

I don't think that that's constructive, I think we need to have some honest conversations and talk about some of the things that have happened, but if it's going to be completely coming in, drop kicking white folks about white culture and not really examining what it is and how it functions and pointing out, okay, this is how it's oppressive and this is how you benefit from this, then that then if we don't do it that way, you're not, you're going to turn so many people off, that we're not going to make any headway and it is going to be explosive and this is why we get things like the national um kind of pushback from critical race theory.

Like that's been a big thing over the last two years and it's like we haven't even delved into what critical race theory is because the current, you know, social climate is just so toxic that we can never get to it.

And there might be something even better than that that we can probably talk about.

That integrate if we had a better approach to actually dealing with some of these truths that go on in society.

So um I definitely think that there's room for us to grow in this space.

And I think that really one of the biggest things that we have to do is we need to be honest about it though.

I'm not saying like come in with kid gloves, but we but we also need to come in more humanistic and not just blaming everything on white devils and things because that's how it gets approached.

And I don't think that's right.

I um I'm thinking back to your ABC's of resilience to and so it seems like that can really be applied here as well, adaptive awareness.

So first we have to have awareness of that, we are swimming in the sea and we don't see the culture.

Um and to have these honest sometimes challenging conversations that might make us feel uncomfortable um to be aware of that and um this balance and then moving forward with being constructive and like how do we take um actions that benefit everybody versus just that coming in?

Like blazing forward.

Yeah, it just turns people off.

Yeah.

And it's, I'm curious what you think, but I think so much of it is based on um judgment and this like protecting like who I am right, Like, well no, I'm not racist.

Uh and so that just comes from this judgmental attitude that you're talking about in a way even though it's very unclear where that judge mental attitude comes from.

Like sometimes it's the media, sometimes it's, you know, there's so many different places.

But yeah.

Yeah.

And I think one of the bigger opportunities and a better approach to the conversation is to talk about, how do we talk about culture and how do we have, what's been the standard culture which is white culture and all these additional cultural groups uh coexist sounds really weird, but it's like the best thing that's coming to mind right now, but kind of function collectively together where the, where the non white cultural groups don't feel like they have to give them parts of the give part of themselves to fit this white cultural dynamic and then the white cultural dynamic actually says, hey, we do have a culture because again white folks just are living white folks lives and not realizing that everybody else is attempting to try to be white when it comes to race and that and that is a, I think that's really the biggest opportunity for us is to look at it more culturally instead of just racially well.

And I know you do a lot of work around cultural competencies.

Um so I'd love to hear more about that.

I um Mhm.

Cultural competency is something that's being, it's kind of that buzz word that it's kind of all over the place.

And when somebody takes a cultural competency training, I now ask them like how was that?

Like what did you learn?

Because I think it's sort of like the latest soup de jour for training and I wholeheartedly believe in it.

But I question whether about whether or not we're going about it in a way that is constructive.

So I'm really curious kind of your thoughts on cultural competency training and like what are the elements of that that you think are important?

Yeah, good question.

Um well 1st the work competence really like stings people for some strange reason and I often hear people say I'm not competent in my own home, I'm not competent, my own culture and things like that.

It's like, okay, I get it, but we need to make an attempt towards understanding this, this new push that we're asking people to do in spaces that we have traditionally not asked them.

Like if you think about it, a lot of this is happening in schools and in workplaces and traditionally we've been told not to talk about race, sex, money, politics, all these things at work and now you're expected to show up and it's mandatory or you could literally lose your job.

Like that already is like putting people on edge right there.

So when it comes to cultural competence to me, I think of cultural competence is really just setting up the mindset for what we're actually talking about here.

We're looking at gender expression and sexual orientation and racism.

Were looking at those.

Those are the big three.

When we're looking at those three, like that's just the mindset of the competence what I want to move us to.

And this is where a lot of people kind of make this bridge between what's called cultural humility.

Cultural responsiveness.

I think that's a bridge to something that's called cultural intelligence and that's what I talk about.

So the humility and the responsiveness is just how do we accept the competence piece?

Like how do we get there?

Can we be, Can we have human like uh acceptance and connection to people that we just don't share backgrounds with?

I believe we can write, Can we have responsiveness to people that work with people that just have different cultural backgrounds.

Yes, but what does it look like?

How does it function?

That's the intelligence piece and then if I'm someone who doesn't have any experience with this group, how do I function with them?

I need to have a motivation number one.

Number two, I need to figure out what information I need to connect with these people.

So my motivation might be because you know, right now I'm the only person in my workspace that looks like me.

That could be my motivation.

Everybody else is a different cultural background.

Next I need to understand, okay, what one?

Maybe I don't understand why am I the only one here or I might need to understand, okay, how do these people look at this job, you know differently or or education differently?

What cultural information do I need?

And you know, one of the craziest things when it comes to doing this cultural work and people, I laugh at this point when I do the trainings.

Um and people kind of giggle to, as I say, you can go to the biggest university in the world that doesn't give out degrees to find out about culture.

It's called Youtube because people are on there talking all the time about their personal lives about their culture.

Language.

Like you can learn so much on Youtube about other cultures if you just type in a few words and searches the second biggest search engine in the world and most people don't utilize it that way.

And I'm like, you can learn so many different cultural backgrounds just on Youtube.

So I just send people to Youtube, type in if there's a group like here in Minnesota, we have a lot of um Somali folks who come here from Somalia and they live here in Minnesota, you know, so there's been a lot of cultural competence training and things on those folks and I'm like, do you know how many Somali folks are on Youtube talking about their life here in Minnesota that you can learn from.

Like literally you can just type it in and they're just blogging and vlogging and talking about it.

But most people don't think about it like that.

So there's a database right there that you can go to plus other things.

You go to cultural events, you can read books, you can watch documentaries, you can listen to podcasts, like there's stuff out there for you to get information.

You can actually have a conversation with someone who doesn't look like you.

That's another thing that we can do then from there then from there from once you get your data, then you have to formulate a plan, How do you want to integrate this information into your work?

How do you want to connect with these people?

How do you want to show up as a person?

Right.

Do you, do you want to make sure that the customs that you may do that you may do just normally aren't offensive.

Um, and then from there implemented, put it into action, test it out and know that everything you do is not going to work and that doesn't mean that you're racist or that you're a bad person or that you're an idiot.

It just means that you just missed.

I mean you just missed it didn't work.

And then how do you analyze what worked, what didn't work and how do you just keep doing that until you get comfortable enough to engage with other people And this is something that I've had to try myself.

Um even as a therapist I had to do this.

Um I've had, there was one point in time in my career where about 40% close to 40% of my quote unquote caseload uh where people from the LGBTQIA+ community, I didn't grow up with folks from that community.

A matter of fact, when I went to undergrad, I remember taking sociology classes and on the textbook it was Glbt like the the acronym has completely changed just from the first two letters and beyond.

So my my frame of reference is from education.

It was way different.

And then here I am a school based therapist and I had 11 student from that community come to me have a good experience and guess what they did.

They went and told everybody else in the school and they all came to a counselor.

Brandon to figure out what was going on and now I'm dealing with trans youth.

I'm dealing with have one student who was Spanish speaking?

They were bilingual but their parents were Spanish speaking only.

I literally almost no english.

So that was already one barrier and this person is transitioning from a female to a male and their family does not know.

And now I'm holding this secret plus the language barrier and I got to help this student.

Like that was probably the hardest client I've ever had.

I mean we made it work out as best as I could, but like those are the things that showed up, I had to be culturally intelligent in those cases where I had to translate things.

I had to get interpreters when I could, I had to hold this person's identity switch over the name.

You know when I'm talking or when I'm communicating with the parent, you know, using one name versus when I'm engaging with school staff and with the student another name like that was very hard.

But guess what?

I didn't say I'm not doing this, this is silly.

You're you're a girl, just be a girl.

I didn't do that.

I accepted this person for whom they were as a young person to, I showed up for them even though I was getting paid to do it as a counselor, I still showed up for them because how many other people were going to do that and then I and I was consistent and I was really, really key as I was consistently showing up for them.

And guess what?

I made mistakes?

You think there are times where I slipped and called the student the name that I'm reading every day in my documents because that's what we have to use the, you know, the legal name.

Yes, I did those things.

But at the same time I made an effort to clean that up and they continue to get it right until I did.

And it wasn't a problem.

That's the difficult work that we have to implement in order to be more culturally intelligent.

It's going to take deliberate action and it's not easy.

Mm hmm.

I love this re really calling cultural confidence really shifting to how can we be more culturally intelligent.

It takes some of that judgment and like, you know, I'm going to fail at this if I don't do it correctly.

Um to, okay, this is a learning process that I'm going to do over time and that sometimes I might have a misstep and then that will help me to course correct and learn for the future.

Right.

Exactly.

So I'm curious, you know, we've been talking a lot about cultural competence.

How do you think that we can build a more culturally responsive or more culturally intelligent?

I should say mental health system.

Yeah.

I mean, it's it's similar to what I just said.

I gave the reference more in a individual level, but on a more organizational or even bigger than an institutional level is implementing those same things.

What is our motivation for advanced in this field?

Well, the United States demographics are changing quicker than we expected.

Um you know, we need to have more bilingual um you know, counselors, we definitely need more counselors of color, so they need to be strategies in place for that, Right?

So we need, that's the motivation.

We just need more of this field.

We already don't have enough mental health practitioners, especially since covid the demand is extremely high right now.

And the supply is that we don't have enough people.

So we need to think more creatively on how we get more people in here.

So that's the data we have, right?

We know that we don't have enough, you know, we need more people who are of color and are bilingual.

Um, we know that we need different methods of therapy.

Traditional talk therapy is not the only way that people can heal and that should be okay for us to accept.

Um There are other ways and other methods that we can implement to help people therapeutically kind of move through things now if they have a serious per state mental illness that changes a little bit.

But for the most part, most people are coming in with issues that can be addressed and we should try to figure out ways to kind of help them do that.

So that's the strategy, right?

How can we help bring people in?

Well, you might need to do some recruiting.

Um, so for those folks who are undergrad or even sooner get to high school, get to middle school, you know, talk about the profession, talk about what it takes to get here.

We might have to change a little bit of the requirements.

So when people get their master's degrees, instead of taking two hours, two years to get, you know, so many hours to get licensed, maybe it's six, maybe it's like a year or 10 months or something, and then we have a different type of program.

Um, so we have to change our strategy a little bit as well and then implement it, test it out, see how it works.

Are people getting better, etcetera.

But ultimately, that's what I believe.

I think that um, it's it's a very similar framework to doing it, but it takes a lot of intentional action and asking questions what do these communities need if they know what, what would they like to see?

Because everyone who looks like someone might not be the best counselor for them just because they look the same.

Like that's to me that's a very elementary judgment that we're making to just assume that, you know, because people look the same way they're going to have better therapeutic relationships.

That might not be true if you have high quality services, you should be able to serve anybody period.

So what are we doing as a field that is blocking the opportunities for so many other people to hell.

Maybe another place for us to start looking and thinking about and getting more creative.

Mm hmm.

Yeah.

I I love this idea of even just thinking about education.

You know, starting younger in telling people that here's an option for you.

This is what it takes to get here.

But also looking at how we're doing um training in higher education for these fields and doesn't make sense the way that we could have been doing it for so long.

Or are there ways that we can rethink how we're training students?

Absolutely.

And a lot of undergrad degrees are transferable in the counseling space but people don't think like that.

They just think I didn't get a sociology degree or I didn't get a psychology degree.

So I'm gonna stay away from that.

Um But some people can, you know actually do counseling probably more effectively than some people did get those other degrees.

But they just didn't figure like that was a career path for them.

Mm hmm.

Absolutely.

So as we wrap up here, Brandon, is there anything else you feel is important for our listeners to know?

Um I think I shared a lot of heavy concepts.

So just know that the things that I the things that I have stated today um are digestible to take some time with them.

And healing isn't as hard as we expect.

But it does take time.

It can be exhausting, but you have to be intentional with your actions and um and when it comes to healing, it doesn't mean that things are going to go away.

It just means that you have better skills to address them in the moment, so you can keep moving forward.

I'm a big proponent of helping people look you know, down the road instead of behind them.

Um so don't, again don't let your trauma captivate you and keep you stuck.

And the last thing that I'll say is it's always better to look in the mirror than out the window.

We spend a lot of time analyzing what other people are doing and how awful their lives are.

And then we look in that mirror, we don't want to spend that much time looking at ourselves and saying what we need to do or what we can do or even checking in with ourselves and how are we doing?

So, always look in the mirror before you look out the window.

Thank you so much.

You've given us so much to digest today and I really appreciate all of your time and your expertise and everything you've shared today.

Thank you.

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