

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** This is Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke, your host for the American Counseling Association's 2015 podcast series. Today, we are speaking with Tony Spann to discuss counseling African-American male clients post-Ferguson.

Tony Spann works full-time in Federal Law Enforcement and is a Doctoral student at Howard University. He is a licensed clinical professional counselor in Maryland and DC, and a nationally certified counselor. Tony is the owner of You in Mind Psycho Therapy and Consultation with two occasions in downtown Silver Spring and Largo, Maryland. Tony is the Maryland Counseling Association's President for the 2014-2015 term, and is an adjunct professor at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology teaching emerging counselors. Throughout the years, Tony's desires have always been to turn his raw passion for helping others into a professional art that maybe beneficial to the public at large.

Welcome, Tony.

**Tony Spann:** Thank you for having me, Rebecca.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Okay. Now before we get started, would you mind giving us your initial perspective as an African-American male working with African-American male clients?

**Tony Spann:** Yes, I would love to. We're going to last several decades, African-Americans have had a shift in the pursuit of therapy. As an African-American male counselor, I've worked with men of color and experienced my own level of understanding, shared experience, and admiration for African-American males who show resiliency when faced with adversity. However, I observe the acute and chronic effects of racism, oppression -- integrated oppression. My perspectives discuss a qualitative observation which show themes of my progression, personal and cultural values, and understanding African-American males' identity while navigating a law enforcement and pursuing a place within society, community, and the world.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Let's dive into the question. When speaking with clients of colors, specifically African-American male, what are their perspective on the recent violence experienced in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Florida, and Ferguson?

**Tony Spann:** And thank you for asking this question, Rebecca. This is really something that's near and dear to my heart, and I think also for the clients that are African-American males that I've been working with within the last several years. And if we look at a lot of the cities and locations that you named, these have all been recent events that have happened within that time frame. For a lot of my African-American males, especially my youth, it's a troubling experience, one because they look at "I've done so much right or I'm trying to do so much right but am I still in the wrong?", if that makes sense. "Thinking about just because of my color, my skin, my gender, how our society

views me, if I still do all the right things, am I still wrong?" And I think that kind of thinking it's at a place of lose or as we've talk about that learned helplessness. Wondering, "Where do I find my value?" And a lot of times, that's one of the areas that I work with, that is knowing your worth and knowing that you have value, regardless of how society sometimes views individual African-American males, you still have value and that's something that they have to remember.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Is one of those feelings of loss, does this have to do with the loss of at least of fairness or the potential for fairness?

**Tony Spann:** Yes, and you bring up a good topic or a good question, it is. Feeling the fairness, we have the judicial system and we have what we consider justice, what is the right and the wrong within the court system but however, when individuals talk about what's fair, when they see the court proceedings and they see the final outcomes, and wonder was that a fair proceeding, was the justice served. And I think, a lot of times, the message that has been sent through media and this message that is sent through the judicial system, it affects them, and the overall effect can be lasting, wondering, "Is this going to be my situation and how do I need to act in the streets? Or how do I need to act within society and making sure that I do walk a line and make sure that I'm not a victim?"

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** You know, it's interesting because Dr. Oliver, one of the people I've interviewed about Ferguson, he said that he felt that there was kind of a reticence on his part, even as a grown man with a doctoral degree. He felt like there was a reticence on his part to call the police no matter what happens because he grew up in the Ferguson area, and he feels like even now, he feels like somehow it'll get worse if I call the police.

**Tony Spann:** I can understand totally how he's feeling and wondering if I involved authorities at the same time as I'm involving authorities either as a victim or I'm involving authorities because I know something's wrong happening. However, how would the authorities view me in the situation? Will I also become a victim? And it's a place of unknowing and being unsure about how to involve the individuals that are supposed to be serving and protecting. However, I do believe that that is the right thing to do. I believe that police law enforcement and other individuals are there to support.

Now, how in every situation works out is not the same and how every individual in law enforcement or just in a position of authority, views and perceives other individuals the same or in the right way. So, it depends on the nature of the situation.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes. The slogan "Black lives matter", what does this mean to you within your practice and what is your understanding of the perspective African-American males in your practice have of this slogan "Black lives matter".

**Tony Spann:** I'm glad that you asked that, Rebecca. The whole slogan "Black lives matter" even for when I first saw it, I wondered and I thought about it. For me, I felt all lives matter, just as well as black lives matter. So, I'm definitely under the auspice that all lives matter. However, in looking back at that slogan, and then having that slogan come up in my private practice, I thought about it a little bit more and I had to really think, "Well, what's going on with that? Why are we saying black lives matter?" And it comes out of that whole theory that how do people perceive black men or how do people perceive black lives, and I think it just comes from this whole standpoint and certain people have talked about it where Africans or African-Americans and how the tolerance of pain or the numbness of feeling and/or how do we perceive our lives or how other people perceive African-Americans or black people's lives.

And so, within the private practice, a lot of my youth and I'm going to speak youth for right now because these young men and understanding their lives in their perspectives, when we go back to the values, I think that's what it comes to, is that understanding that they have value and having society realize that there's value in black men, and that black men aren't all doing bad, and all black men aren't all doing good, but that's any society, it's any race, it's any person, and that black men are doing things that are important. We have contributed to history, contributed to society, and still are contributing. However, I think sometimes with stereotypes and how society views people, it impacts them. And leading into the private practice, a lot of my young men and the ideals that they have and ideas that they have stem from how society perceives them.

When we talk about going to high school, going to college, how important is education? And education is very important for my young men in my private practice. We talk about what's next for them and they have a lot of high hopes. However, there's also this place where they feel like there's a ceiling and how devalued they are within society. And a lot of times, there's self-esteem that we have to work on. We have to talk about what are goals and maturity in addition to any other clinical diagnosis or issues that are going on. We still have to remember that there's the social and environmental as much as we have to talk about what is the mental health or the emotional. So, coupled with all those things, I do find myself still having to talk about what's reticent and familiar within the community.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** With some of the young men in particular that you work with, is there a stigma to coming to counselling in that set of culture?

**Tony Spann:** And I'm glad that's a really good question, let's talk about them.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes.

**Tony Spann:** There still a stigma and the stigma, although things have definitely changed within African-American community, I can say I've definitely seen more people coming into my private practice, people of color. I would say about 90-95% of my private practice is families and youth, and those of the people of color. However, what I do find for the youth that there's still this whole feeling on what is a therapist and what is a counselor and although the terms are interchangeable, a lot of time people feel that, "Okay. Am I "crazy"? I don't want people to think I'm crazy." And I generally tell my young men and women, "This is a private thing. This is not something that everybody has to know. However, you coming here, it's not about being crazy, it's about getting help. Maybe your family feels you need help but is there something that you think you need help with or something that you just like to talk to?" And I think, generally what I put in the frame of reference where they get to know Mr. Tony and they just realize that, "Hey, he's just another person that wants to talk and I get my chance to get my feelings out." A lot of times, we figure out that there's some aggression, some hostility, or some emotion, or some sadness. There's a gambit of things that come out but when I let them know that it's not about being crazy, it's not about the stigmas, but it's more about getting help and having a chance to talk, they open up, they realize that, "Hey, therapy is not that bad. Counselling's not bad and Mr. Tony's not bad."

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes. Tony, you're a federal law enforcement officer, during your conversations with young African-Americans concerning perspective of police and justice, what are your thoughts and I'd also like to know an additional question to that one, which is how is it for you inside? Do you feel like you're constantly bridging two worlds?

**Tony Spann:** Yes. I do believe that and I wanted to say, just this past week, was actually law enforcement week where here in the District of Columbia, we had a lot of officers coming to celebrate and just acknowledge that field of work. And if any officer is listening, I want to say thank you for what you're doing, for serving and protecting.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes.

**Tony Spann:** It's a difficult place because one, you're human so you do have those emotion and feelings, and then two, you're human so you do make error and it's not the easiest thing to do, always being out in a hype situation. So, I say that and to tying it all together and being a law enforcement officer myself, working with my own population, there's so much emotion that comes from you; one, in hoping that this individual is going to do the right thing, at some point become a productive citizen, however at the same time, knowing that I'm serving and protecting the community and that if I'm not doing my job then somebody else could get hurt in the process. I say that, and speaking about the private practice where I do have to switch my hat, one from law enforcement officer then back into being a therapist, I do think about what are my youth doing. Are they in the community doing the right thing?

I hope that they're being safe and at the same time, if they are in trouble that they meet up with the law enforcement officer that's going to do the right thing by the law but at the same time, make sure that this youth understands that if you've done something wrong, that you have to be enforced. But at the same time, within the practice, when I take that hat off I think about, at the same time I am a law enforcement officer but I'm also a therapist right now for this client and I know that this youth that talks about something that they've either done that may not have been the best or the positive or may have been involved in a crime that although it's not the best thing that they've done but at the same time, they're not in here looking to be punished, they're looking for understanding and emotional guidance. And so, there's this place where I'm always in my head having to think about what I do as a 9 to 5, but then also making sure within my practice that I'm thinking about things that could be helpful to help them navigate law enforcement and make sure they're doing the right thing when it comes to an officer, but at the same giving them the support that they overall need to make sure that they have that space to talk.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** And you personally providing this bridge or being kind of in these two worlds, do you feel conflicted at times, personally? Like perhaps, you were in a counselling session with a young male who is very angry at law enforcement and is really feeling safe that he can really get all those feelings out, is that hard for you to hear?

**Tony Spann:** At times, it can be. And I always have thought and this is what I tell my emerging counselors, you know, when these biases or these feelings or thoughts come into your head, acknowledge it then let it drift away. And that's the most that I can do within the counseling session because as an officer, I know something that we either said or done which are probably not the best choice, especially as being either a citizen or being in the community. However, after I acknowledge it and think about and there's the conflict, the incongruency, but then I realize, "Hey, this person took the time to share it with me.

That means that there's something important with what they just said and that they are looking for somebody to either support it and in some ways, get a little guidance and say, "Hey, you know what, we just talked about this, you brought it up and let's process this, but I feel like there's something that you're saying that either you want to make a change or you're trying to do something differently. You know, let's work this out." You know, just doing a little bit of that CBT and making sure that you have to move away from some of this behavior and thinking because, ultimately, where is it going to lead you to? Is it going to lead you into a life that you don't want or that you didn't foresee for yourself? And then, are you going to get involved in the system and where the system ultimately is just going to be a spiraling effect if you're not careful.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** And all of this leads to the next question, which is when speaking to young African-American males, what transference or counter-transference do you experience in the room?

**Tony Spann:** And this is probably the more emotional part for me. Just because being an African-American male myself, I'm not too far in age from a lot of my youth. In a lot of ways, that's why some of the parents do come to me, because they say, "You know what? Your experiences probably have been very similar, and not too far ago, and they aren't." And as being a counselor myself, and being an African-American male, I think about my past, I think about how it was for me to grow up as a young African-American male, and my own experiences with racism, my own experiences with growing up in the south, my own experiences from seeing my mom and dad, and in hearing their stories and stories from my great grandfather.

And I realize that this world, although it's evolving and changing, there's still certain things that are in place that affected me, and listening to my youth I hear their stories, that narrative, and in listening to their narrative, a lot of times I said, "Your story was just like mine. We're really not that much different". And I know the pain, I know the frustration, I know what it is when you're growing up in a school system, and you're wondering why the teacher may treat you a little different from another student, or wondering why you may get singled out from another individual, or when you try to do the right thing, you're still looked upon and you can't change the reason because you can't change your skin.

A lot of that does happen. What I do love, is that in the transference, sometimes these young males/these young females, people of color, do see me as an older figure, and they're able to have that connection and feel that I am able to give guidance a lot of times where they weren't able to get the guidance, and they were searching for that. And then the whole counter-transference is just saying that I see a lot of myself, I see a young person that wanted the guidance; somebody that needed somebody that looked like them, that talked like them, that knew the struggles. And I could clearly say, "You know what? You're in the right place. Although I am the same color as you and I am a male, and I have all these other qualities, I'm still a counselor. And as a counselor, I'm going to use all the tools and techniques to make sure that whatever I can do by the end of this hour, that we're doing therapy and there's some help coming.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** I love that. Throughout your own development, discuss your own personal experience with racism or micro-aggression, and what impact has this had on you while sitting in a counseling session with your client?

**Tony Spann:** I couldn't tell you. I lived in a military family. I was with a military family, and my mom and my dad, we moved all over. We moved to England, we moved to New York, to Louisiana, to South Carolina, and my experiences -- I will say this. I didn't realize what racism really was until I moved back down south, and from the north States

of America. It was alive and well living in Louisiana -- I could tell you, the Ku Klux Klan, still had parades and they still may have parades. I could definitely tell you, growing up in the classroom, I definitely felt singled out by my behavior. A lot of times, I felt like I didn't do anything wrong. I can tell you several times, on the campus of the University of South Carolina, I definitely heard racial slurs either directed towards me directly, or indirectly. And this was only about six or seven years ago where many things were happening.

A lot of times, it hurts. It just hurts. Because growing up as a child or a youth, you don't know what this means. You don't know where it comes from until you really start getting educated and understanding the oppression, the generational oppression that's happened for years. And you realize, "Well, I didn't ask for this. I didn't ask to be either this skin color. I didn't ask to be this race. This is what I was born as". And I'm proud to be an African-American male, but a lot of those racial slurs and the oppression that comes with it makes you question -- Again, it goes back to the value. Being an African-American male, being African-American, being black from the African diaspora, "Am I really valued in this world?" And I guess I question that a lot of times. I still do. I still question what is my value.

I think when I'm around my family, I think when I'm around my friends, with people that love me, and this is regardless of the person's race or gender. When they show me love, when they show me that I'm valued, and I realize that I'm valued it negates, all of that. However, my experience has been -- where even being born in the 80s, going into the 90s and in the millennium, still experiencing all these things up till now. Seeing what the President of United States has to go through, see what other African-American males go through, you realize that we still have a lot more to do in our work at this stage.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Understanding the impact of micro-aggression in black on black violence, how does this impact African-American males?

**Tony Spann:** I see it as -- and this is something from me, talking personally as well as just my own observation -- I feel that there can be this internalized micro-aggression. I feel that based off of what it is, then taken from the environment, from our community, slang terms, oppressive and derogatory terms towards African-Americans, that can be internalized into the community, which causes that intra-micro-aggression, where we may think terms of slang that may have been used to degrade an African in slavery, or an African-American male or female within the community. A lot of times, we don't think about the history of the N word. We don't think about the history of some of these terms that are being used, but we use it between each other -- which then, if we think about, we are no better than anybody else using the term.

However, there's this whole feeling of micro-aggression and racial epithets that are used within the African-American community. It's something that I think as a community, we're working on to try to improve. Because we realize, even if we try to take ownership over a word, the history is still there for words such as the N word. But I say that, in saying that -- just transitioning into the black on black violence, is something that as a community we have to think more about. Yes, we have these situations like Ferguson and Baltimore. Those are no better than the black on black violence. However, when we talk about making a change in our community, we also have to start with ourselves, as well as we have to deal with any other situation or system that is oppressing us. If we don't start working on how we are also oppressing ourselves, then it really would be hard to deal with any other system that's oppressing us. I think if we are divided as a community, then it doesn't really help us to strengthen ourselves to then deal with other systemic issues.

I think the African-American community has made a lot of strides. We have made a lot of progress. However, the black on black violence still is very heavy in the community, and it's something that as community with the black churches, with black Greeks, when we talk about leadership, NAACP. We have to deal with that, because -- and hopefully this all ties together, just as much as the systemic issues that happen outside of community affect the community, the issues within the community affect us, which also then lead to -- when we talk about oppression, depression, we talk about self-esteem, self-issues. We talk about trauma, we talk about all these things that lead to other psychological or emotional impact on individuals. So that bullying, that black on black violence where it leads to fatalities. All that has an impact on an individual, which can lead to long-term effects.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** I'm wondering, this is kind of a boots-on-the-ground counseling question I'm about to ask you, and that is -- A young man, a young African-American male comes in to a counseling session with you, and he's using some of the N word or other words that you consider derogatory to you and to him. How might you talk to that young man about that?

**Tony Spann:** I first would say, "I hear you using this word" and I will say, "Do you know the history of this word? Do you know where it comes from?" And they may or may not know, and then I ask them, "Do you know how this word affects another person?" And they may say, "It's a word that we use all the time. It's either in our community, the videos, or I hear somebody else saying it". But I would ask them, "What do you think this word really means to the next person, and how it affects them?" I think a lot of times what happens in society, is that we get numb. We get really numb to words and terms, and although it'd be a lot of educating, but I would like for that individual to understand what's the impact.

When we talk about our emotions and our feelings, you wouldn't want somebody to say something that affects your emotion or your feelings, and person probably would say, "Yes, you're right". And then -- let's think outside of ourselves. How will this word impact the person that you're either using it on, or if you're just saying it out? You may say the word out and you don't mean it towards anybody. However, is there an older lady/older woman that's listening, that came out of a generation where that word was negative? How would your parents, or how does Mr. Tony feel using this word? And I think once the person realizes that it's not just about self, and that I impact another person just like he impacts another person and how does that impact the next, and how does it go out as a wave or ripple -- and I think that's what I would want the young person to know, is that you have an impact just by the words that you use on the next person, which can impact the next person.

So instead of using words that come from a negative connotation, regardless of how we use in a positive spin, why don't we try to use some positive words, and how can that emotionally stimulate you to either look at using different words, feeling different, looking at things different, and then speaking into existence some other things that could be helpful for you.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** I can tell you've done this before. That's great. Some of the messages I think are almost subliminal. Hip-hop music for example, I think a lot of it is beautiful. It is poetry, and I have a lot of good things to say about a lot of hip-hop music. But some of it is also misogynistic and racist, and I think subliminally this goes into a young man's world view. What are your thoughts?

**Tony Spann:** I agree. I totally agree. I believe that the starting of hip-hop, the starting of rap, coming out of the Bronx, that whole rhythm, that whole being, that whole representation started a movement. I believe the moment's still strong. I believe it's still there. However, what was infused into the movement was also a lot of the anger, the attitude that was coming from African-American men and women of certain times, in expressing that there's some frustration here, there's some hurt here. And I think from that movement, there's just been this total change on what is either being said or what is being taught, or even as you said Rebecca, subliminal message.

So unfortunately, there are certain artists, there are certain types of rapper, music genre or hip-hop, that sends a message that is not positive at all. And it's hard for me to see that or hear that, because I am somebody that loves rap. I love hip-hop, I see it as an art form that stems back to Pan-African view points and storytelling. I feel that hip-hop and rap has made a change on our society and our world. However, going back to that moment where you said, "How much of a subliminal impact does it have?" I think it's great, and I think the impact is large enough that a lot of times this music has to be censored by parents, and you have to know what your kids are listening to.

Because half the time, what happens is that even the parents are listening to the music and not realizing what's being said until they listen to the words. A lot of times, just because there's certain slang in there or certain jargon that's either used by gangs, or certain slang that's used and the parents aren't really intuitive of it -- but if they listen to it and broke down the words, they may say, "You know what? That's not the best for you, and I'm going to have to censor this." But I would say the same thing for the youth. I would say, "You have to remember the words that you take in, especially the way the brain stores information and how it listens to it emotionally, the impact of the energy, you have to be careful of what you're taking in. So hip-hop and rap, it's not bad. However, the ones that have those subliminal messages, or the ones that have certain words, I want you to think about it because one, I would tell a young African-American female, "Value yourself. What is your value, and is this song devaluing you? And what is it portraying?"

Same thing with an African-American male. I would tell them, I've had a youth in my private practice, I'd tell him, "You cannot devalue an African-American female or women in general. You have to value your other genders, you have to value yourself, and you have to respect them. Now, if this thing, such as hip-hop or rap, is saying something that's devaluing to another person, you have to step outside of yourself and remember that that's not what you're supposed to be about. If you cannot value the next person, as the old saying says, if you can't say anything good, don't say anything at all.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes, and I think you made a good point that parents need to listen to the music or see the words. A lot of it, I believe, is incredible poetry and is beautiful, and then there's some that's not. And it's a good idea for that parent to really know the words to some of the songs, and that's a good idea.

**Tony Spann:** Absolutely. Just tying that to my own experience. My dad made sure that he listened to my music, and if he was playing something on a radio, he didn't like it, he said, "Nope, I'm not letting you be exposed to this, because I'm still an adult and I'm supposed to show you guidance." So if parents are listening to this, although we can't censor everything, but if you are in that moment, you're listening with your child or your kid, take that moment to say, "No, as the adult in the room, and I know what you're listening to right now. I'm not going to let you listen to that."

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** That's great. Okay, discussing trauma or PTSD within African-American community, and the overall impact this has on African-American males within the counselling session, what are your thoughts about that?

**Tony Spann:** I have big thoughts about that, Rebecca. Inside the counselling session, and outside the counselling session. I think for African-American males, the African-American community, when we talk about that whole transition, that whole being encaptured and enslaved from the beginning of slavery, that whole Pan-American, and then transition into America, there has been a devaluing of the African-American male

and his position within community, society and the world. A lot of that breaking a slave or breaking an African into what is the oppression and the trauma that we've experienced, or African-Americans have experienced for so many years within slavery. It just talks about how that affect -- And it's a term that's been used as the generational effect. A generational effect of trauma. The generational effect of oppression and how this has impacted the community. A lot of times, people look at the African-American community and say, "Well, why can't they get it together?" Slavery ended so many years ago, that's something that I look at other communities. They seem to be able to get it together. Why not the African-American community?

And the reality is that the oppression, the trauma, the effects of slavery have a generational effect. We're just not that far out of slavery if we look back in the amount of years. Although it seems like a lot of time, but it we're talking about hundreds some odd years, it's not that far ago. I can think about my great, great grandparents and it being passed down about how a family being in slavery back in South Carolina where I live at, I could go back to documentations on seeing my family being on a slave plantation in Hilton Head Island.

I can walk to the house which was the slave house that my great-great-great-grandmother lived in. So I guess we are seeing that the effects and the effects of the trauma, of the oppression, being sharecroppers, going through Jim Crow, going through the Civil Rights Movement, going through segregation. That's a lot of oppression. We haven't even talked about the effects that it has on an individual from externally to internalizing that, and what does it mean about somebody's value and having to struggle from day-to-day, just to be valued as a human being. We're not even talking about being valued as a citizen of America, but being valued as a human being; from taking documents or quotes from the Bible and devaluing an individual, all the way up until certain present day and still thinking that African-Americans came from what apes or how they're valued in their actual brain size.

So I think all I have to say is that, if you think about it, the effect that individuals have from being valued, the trauma, it can have a long-term or lasting effect. However, the last piece that I want to say, Rebecca, to that is the effect that it's had on the community, where certain communities have gone through that whole epidemic of drugs and crack. The whole epidemic of the community having to go through oppression and being segregated. I think there's a lot of inter-aggression and micro-aggression that has happened, that inter-aggression, when we're talking about violence, that violence has an effect.

There's also been research in showing that youth that have gone through the violence of a violent area, such as maybe gang violence, just community violence, and looking at a soldier that has gone through war, they show that the same effects in areas of the brain that are affected, such as a soldier, is the same area is that affected in those youth. And so, what I mean by that is that although that African-American youth in

general, or in these areas where there's a lot of violence, we don't look at it and say, "That's trauma" or "That's PTSD" or "They've been affected" and how does it affect them in school? How does it affect them emotionally? But when we look at the soldier coming back from the war, we'll acknowledge that. But what's hard for us to acknowledge for our youth, that they go through the same experiences, hearing bullets or seeing violence and homicide, they go through it.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** The next question -- I always like asking questions about resiliency, because it's fascinating to me that some people are almost born resilient, and some much less so. I've read a book on resilience recently, and this professor at Yale was discussing how some babies are born. And in the nursery, one is screaming and crying and everything's bothering it – and the other one is just there sleeping. And so, he discussed how sometimes we're born with a certain resiliency quotient. But anyway, as a counselor, I'm sure you noticed resiliency within the African-American community. How has this impacted the client?

**Tony Spann:** Greatly. And what I love about this, is that -- and talking about how the African-American community has been resilient, by having the black church, having that time to get together, having those leaders, having those moments where that communication, that coming together and celebrating -- families -- having these moments where we honor our path as well as look forward to our future, I think those resilient factors have really been important. So when we talk about the family, we talk about the black church, and we talk about that whole piece of staying connected. It's really important, and those resilient factors make a big difference. And those resilient factors, I believe, helped to make an individual resilient and bring resiliency to the individual. And I agree with you Rebecca, there are individuals that are born resilient. They have resiliency, and then I believe there are some individuals that -- it's not there. However, by having protective factors, having support, having those systems help to encourage the individual to be resilient.

Because a lot of my youth, when they come into my private practice, the resiliency seems to either be low or not there. Some of them are strong, some of them have really good resilience, and I pride them. I tell them, "Stick with that. Let that be your guidance" But for the ones that don't, I take them back almost retrospectively, and I let them look at how they've gotten to the point that they're at. So that whole strength-based approach, right? And I get them to see that, "You know what? You do have something. Here, we just have to start pointing it out, and we have to start looking at it and turning it into something that you can see it. Because I see it in you.

Now, if I can see it in you, now I got to get you to see in it you. And once you see it in yourself, I think now that's half the battle. We can start moving forward and you can start saying, "Hey, even if this is a day that I don't feel it, let me rely back on my past and I can say, "Hey, I had it then." So that means I still have it, I just don't see it today as much as I felt the other day." But how do I tap into that and use it today?" And so, that's

really getting them to use that and think about it, and be resilient. Be resourceful. I think that's something that's been in the African-American community. I think it's something that's definitely a part of the community, and I try to get my youth to see that. Because once counseling's over with, I want them to continue to rely on a strength-based approach, rely on some of the tools that they've learned, because that's how life works. Because life one day could be up, the next minute it can be down, but you have to rely on something that you have to keep pushing forward.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Right. Concerning the systemic and multi-cultural issues that are present in the sessions, what kind of techniques or style of therapy do you usually use when you're trying to implement a treatment plan, you're trying to get your client into movement? What kind of things do you find yourself using?

**Tony Spann:** And for me personally, as a counselor, I use Rogerian. I love looking at the perspective that the client has the ability to work through their issues, and having a respect for that. I look at it as -- looking from a strength-based approach, and I look at it from that perspective at least for me when I deal with my African-American youth, people of color, because I believe that there's a resiliency, and looking at all that we've been through, all that the African-American people been through, people of color. When we talk about people from Cuba, from the Dominican, we talk about those that are new immigrants that have come from Mexico, South America -- I look at that and say, "Wow, you've made it this far. Your people have made it this far; through oppression and struggle." I definitely come from a strength-based approach.

There's a lot of multi-cultural domains that I'll bring in an understanding at my end. I never try to be biased or have a stereotype. I remember that just because somebody's an African-American in front of me, does not mean that they've gone through the same experience, that they know exactly what I'm talking about, and that I know everything about them. That's the worst thing to do. Because when you do that, you're starting to approach it in such a way that may be so separate from what the actual client is going through. But that's one thing that I do. I definitely use a lot of what they have, and understand their experience and hear their narrative. In hearing their narrative and understanding their story, from there, I realize who's in front of me, who is this person that I'm working with?

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes. And Rogers -- it's interesting how I've done a lot of these podcasts, and people bring up Rogers again and again and again, because there's something foundational about what he gave us. There's something foundational, where I can look at you and I think, "I know you have the strength, and I know that you have the answers too. I'm just going to reflect and I'm going to gently bring you along." There's something very respectful about the Rogerian technique.

**Tony Spann:** And I'm glad that you said that, Rebecca, because the one thing about what I know about the African-American community, and in readings too, and knowing all these other individuals that have been prominent, is that the African-American community -- One, it's already difficult for them to come into therapy. It's already difficult to be either analyzed or diagnosed, because there's still a stigma there although shifting. They want to be respected and they want to be valued, and they don't want to be judged or looked down upon, because the history of psychology, the history of counseling, even social work, has been a place that -- Are these individuals coming into my life and judging me?

So still doing that in the session if you're not careful, will then make the individual walk away and not come back. And in addition to that, you are then perpetuating what the community may already be feeling, or that individual may be feeling. So I believe coming into a place where you respect the individual, where they're at, listen to their narrative and understand their story, helps them to realize that even if they feel this place of authority and looking at you as either the therapist/the clinician/the psychologist, that they realize that, "Hey, he's a human being, she's a human being and they value me, and I'm feeling respected right now. I can share my true story with you because I feel valued and respected" and I feel that Carl Rogers and the Rogerian style of theory in therapy does that. And it gives the respect to the client.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Absolutely. Let's see. Within the counseling field, what do you believe could be helpful for clinicians and emerging clinicians to know and understand to support the African-American males within the counseling process? That's one part of the question. The next part of the question is, I get lots of calls from people who are in rural areas, they're the only show in town. If you're going to a counselor, that's who you're going to. And so, let's say it's a Caucasian counselor who's seeing a young African-American male client, and is trying to understand what to do and what not to do to make this counseling session as successful as possible. Can you just comment on your thoughts on that?

**Tony Spann:** Oh, I can. And I'll start with the last one and build back up into the first one, because I think that's a good question and I don't want to forget that. There's an individual, and I think this is what we've all learned within our multi-cultural counseling courses or just in life. If it's an African-American male and you're not sure on either the resources, the techniques or the tools to use, there's so much guidance out there now. Even if you're in a rural area due to the world wide web, due to communication being connected, due to the American Counseling Association and the multi-cultural division, we have so many individuals out there that can be a resource, that you may have to do some research, you may have to do some calling, you may have to do some reading, you may have to understand, "What are the changing climates for African-American male youth?" You may have to even know a little bit of what's going on with hip-hop or what's going on within cultural or even in life.

Because a lot of times, when I make a connection with my youth, it is either by using humor, using something that's relevant and going on, and talking about cultural and style -- A lot of that helps to make that connection, because if my youth, even me being an African-American male, feel like I'm too disconnected, it's like, "Well, do you get me? Do you really understanding where I'm coming from?" And although I can't totally understand their process or understanding where they're coming from because I haven't lived their life, there's still a shared experience. But even in my shared experience, I'm getting older and I'm not as in touch as I used to be with certain things.

So I do research. I do look into things. I try to understand everything that goes with it. So in saying that, I would encourage the individual, maybe talk to certain communities. There's always Greek community. When I mean by that, there's fraternities, Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, those brothers or chapters in the area may be able to give you some information on mentoring processes. There's always the NAACP. They can probably provide information. The National Black Justice Coalition, even the churches in the area or the community may be able to provide information and resources.

So I think it's about reaching out, not just to the American Counseling Association, which is a great organization that has information, but maybe even some of your local places that talk about what it is to work with the black youth, and what are some of the challenges and some of the pros, and maybe even mentoring. That could happen outside of counseling. And just overall, and just thinking about the climate right now, just going back to the first question, the African-American community is ever-changing, ever-evolving. I think we're finding a place, we're getting our foothold, we're understanding who we are as a community. We've given so much to America from, I'm talking about Blues, Jazz. We're talking about our President, we're talking about artists, engineers. We've given so much as a community, and we're starting to realize that we have a place, we have value. We're establishing our self.

And then what we are today will not be the same as tomorrow, so I would tell any clinician, anybody that's working with this community as we're establishing ourselves from being negro to being black to being African-American, we have evolved and where we're at today, try to meet us there, try to understand our history and our progression, that what you may have realized about the community 10 years ago is not the same as this community is today. There's a lot of change that has happened, so try not to rely on your old textbooks, try not to rely on what you may have seen in the past. Try to understand what is the relevant climate now of the African-American community, to try to meet individuals where they're at.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Another Rogerian thought. Meeting individuals where they're at.

**Tony Spann:** Yes, you hear it. It always comes through.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** I know, it's amazing. It's amazing. Yes, okay. ACA now has over 55,000 members, most of whom are clinicians. Is there anything I have not asked you that you want our members to know?

**Tony Spann:** I would like for the American Counseling Association and members, to know that the African-American community, as well as African-American males, we are definitely present and we are looking for help. Although there has been this past history saying that we do not seek out help, we are definitely still searching out for the help and wanting it to happen. In addition to that, I think that when we talk about trying to call to help, hopefully we can get more African-Americans in the field of counseling, and this could be by trying to search on an undergrad, and search in the communities, and encouraging individuals to say that this is a profession that is valued, and at the same time it may not be how we have the lawyers and the doctors, and we talk about those other professions.

But if we start doing that, if we start saying that we need more counselors that are African-American, we need more individuals or people of color to also do the work in the community, I think people will ultimately do better. I think people will ultimately get into the field of counseling, and we can see more African-American males in counseling; see more people of color in counseling. And I think overall, it's a great field. However, I think as counselors I hope we can do more in encouraging people to get into the field, especially people of color.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Is there a book or a saying that you think about when you want to feel inspired? Is there some kind of -- What do you do when you want to feel inspired?

**Tony Spann:** For me, and it may sound for others a little silly, but I still go back to the Giving Tree. I love that. I love that book and I love that tree, because that book and that tree represented that -- always being a place of giving regardless if you get it back -- and I have to remind myself that I'm not always looking for something to come back to me. But at the same time, if I do give, regardless if I give it back, in the end I've helped somebody, and that's made all the difference.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** And sometimes, you don't even know when you're counseling someone, that you are making a difference. Sometimes, they call you 10 years later. I've been a counselor for 30 years, so this has actually happened to me, where people call you and say, "Even though I didn't understand at the time, it was wonderful when you accepted me as a person of color, as a gay individual," as whatever, whatever the marginalized group is. And so, sometimes you don't even know that you're helping, but you've planted a seed and the tree's starting to grow. Right?

**Tony Spann:** Yes.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Yes, absolutely. Okay, do you have any parting words before we end this podcast?

**Tony Spann:** Nothing. I would say is that, keep doing what we're doing, and this is to all counselors. And I was going to say, I just hope that as a field that we keep on growing and that we make sure that we understand the cultural experiences of individuals, and that each individual that comes into our sessions has an experience, has a narrative, and those narratives can make a difference. And that culturally, those perspectives, although we don't realize that they're in the sessions, they're there and that they make a difference on how somebody accepts counseling, and how they view counseling.

**Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke:** Absolutely. Well, thank you so much Tony Spann for joining us today to discuss counseling African-American males and others. To view links to this program, to write to the presenter or host, please go to [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org), and click on the podcast page. This is Dr. Rebecca Daniel-Burke, your host for the ACA 2015 podcast series, signing off.