



ScratchThat Podcast Episode 30: Perception is Reality

Emily: Hey, I'm Emily Chenevert, advocacy nerd, Peloton enthusiast, wife, and mama to two and CEO of the Austin Board of REALTORS®. Every day, real estate is changing. So we're taking it to the experts to unpack major topics that you need to know about to be successful in this business. Scratch what you think you know about this business, and listen up for a fresh take on an old industry. The death of George Floyd ignited the nation and the world to start having more difficult and honest conversations about race and the Real Estate community is non-exempt from those conversations. Even before the dialogue heated up this summer, the National Association of REALTORS® was working on a curriculum on implicit bias with the Perception Institute to address housing equity for fair housing awareness month in April. We asked the institute's Afua Addo to talk about how the curriculum they're creating might help REALTORS® unpack their own implicit bias, influence their actions and decisions, and share how REALTORS® might uphold their housing standards by being more aware of the biases they hold. I hope you'll join me to listen, learn and be inspired. As I started the conversation talking about the relationship between the National Association of REALTORS® and the Perception Institute. Why don't we start with the new partnership that you and NAR have established the kind of first tactical exhibit of that partnership was a 50 minute video released recently about implicit bias in our industry specifically, which was awesome. Awesome resource we'll link up to it in the show notes, we sent it out to our membership for sure. But what else should we expect from the partnership that you guys have established?

Afua: We came on board with the National Association of REALTORS® earlier this year and in a proactive stance through NAR to really address the ways in which bias impacts the breakdown of relationship and impedes access for many underrepresented folks to home ownership and housing and livelihood stability. The new president, Brian Green was along with his team and staff and committee were just more enthusiastic about bringing the nation of REALTORS® onboard and real estate agents on board to tackle this really crucial issue, then the pandemic hit. And so we found ourselves troubleshooting in response to some of the intensified dynamics around trauma and coping relative to implicit bias and, and really harm against one another across lines of difference. So again, NAR was really proactive in working to establish fair housing equity in time and,

and almost ahead of fair housing awareness month in April. But once the pandemic hit and slowed things down then came the PSA and the 50 minute video that you all have an opportunity to access.

Emily: That's good to know though. That the relationship between NAR and the Perception Institute really had been established well before the conversation that we're having at a national level at this point.

Afua: Oh absolutely.

Emily: Was the timing of the video though, in coincidence to the George Floyd incident or not?

Afua: That was the universe bringing things together.

Emily: That's what happens, right?

Afua: Yes. Yeah. As we see, right, because we all were home or we all were shut in or shut in quarantine as we watched Minnesota unfurl. Right. And so we were in the process of filming the training video and training module, the longer version from the comforts of my staff and mine's home and doing the DIY version that we could. So to get out to you all in time for fair housing awareness. And so the incident in Minnesota erupted, we actually hit pause and worked with our team to create the most comprehensive, diverse, and thoughtful and intentional PSA around equity that we could, um, we could, we could create. And so that's the shorter version that you see. And then we went right back into the weeds, using the momentum of the moment to help craft out how to best translate what we refer to as the mind science of bias into proper curriculum for NAR.

Emily: That is the name of the game in 2020 is that our environment is shaping our strategy each and every day. You know, another spot on the bingo card is filled, and then we're trying to figure out how to respond. You guys did a beautiful job of it with the initial video launch. So how much more curriculum can we expect for as a result of this partnership, what more is to come?

Afua: In addition to the video, we take the video and kind of pull that apart and intersperse our virtual training and the adult learning modules. So that there's a more interactive activity, facilitated discussion and group work, right? That we can all break out into virtual chat rooms and then infusing aspects of the video throughout the training and really kind of pulling on participants' experiences as well, to help drive that training. In addition to that down the line in NAR we'll also be incorporating some train the trainers. So individuals from among the national experts in real estate will have an opportunity to step forward and acquire additional knowledge so that it can be shared throughout the organization as well.

Emily: That's awesome. You know, I think both you and I would probably agree that the impact our industry has on our ability to change the name of the game in this rhetoric is so powerful. Housing is a wealth building activity. It's an anchor culturally, it's so important in prescribing who you might be when you evolve from your childhood home even. And

so I think doing this work with our industry is really, really important. I want to try to break it down a little bit so that we simplify some of what we're talking about. So how do you describe what an implicit biases versus an explicit bias?

Afua: So explicit is what we saw on television, right? That was the murder of George Ford and subsequent right. Um, state sanctioned, you know, responses to people of color, men of color, um, women of color trans folk of color and those overt symbols or, or expressions of racism of sexism. Oftentimes aren't caught on camera. And when they are oftentimes are contextualized so that they make sense to the viewer. The implicit bias simply is considered the brain's unconscious association with stereotype around a group or a person. It is also just the brain's bias against, aversion to, or preference for a certain person, right? Based on ideas, schema and stereotype, as well as attitude. And that's it. We have biases towards individuals. We have biases toward products. Capitalism in America is kind of built on, uh, you know, gauging ones, you know, bias and or preference for one dynamic over the other. However, interpersonally our interactions as human beings are really important, right. And have, and we know because we're bonding via zoom, but this is a moment between the two of us. We are relational beings. And so the interpersonal experience is so important. And if we're not aware of the biases we have around or toward, or, or to people, it will impact not only the relationship moving forward, but it may have long lasting impact on the person who has experienced the harm or the transgression or the offense.

Emily: Yeah. And I think that kind of speaks to where we have been versus where we're going. Implicit bias could be considered passive, but that doesn't mean that you get a pass, right? Like it's still there and it's still done harm for a long, long time. In fact, in some ways it's probably done more harm in the sense that it's still unrecognizable because it's become such a part of who we are as an economy, as a community. And so I think it can be hard to detect and understand which means you have to take deliberate action to do so.

Afua: And I'm glad you mentioned that because the ambiguity of implicit bias actually is what exacerbates its presence in our lives. And not in the way that you might think actually, studies show that individuals who observed explicit bias can of course call it out. Particularly if they are white, particularly if they are male, um, and, and women as well. I mean, they're... I wish I could pull my graph up and show you, but there are indicators that show across racial lines that white individuals obviously react to the overt expressions of racism. And I think that is what we saw on May 25th, right out of Minnesota. The more ambiguous, covert, implicit bias is, you know, while it is experienced by individuals who are being harmed or being offended and then also not readily acknowledged by those individuals. So it's almost as though you just anticipate it's going to happen and you just kind of fold it into the experience in, in certain contexts for

Emily: The giver and the recipient have become so accustomed to what we're a part of that. It just like we're on the hamster wheel and we keep turning.

Afua: Right. Or some would even say, it might look like someone picking and choosing the battle, right? Like I'm just not going to combat that, but it's, it's still making impact. It's

still harming the individual. And so what's amazing about this, this discipline. Is there a constantly intersections, right? The multiple concentric circles, when I'm talking about bias, I'm talking about this moment, but I'm also thinking about trauma, which is real too. And even though all traumas are not ginormous trauma, a trauma is simply a threat to, or the fear of harm or, or fatality. So, just having that fear, that deep seated fear is a trauma agitator. And so that is why we are conscientious in how we talk about who's experiencing the harm and what's happening in that moment. And I don't mean to confuse you. And oftentimes I tell people I have a jazz brain. So, I go all over the place.

Emily: I think you're saying a couple of important things that I want to highlight for our listeners and members is one, is those experiences that occur for the recipient and implicit bias are traumatic. They are trauma. And it's really, I think it's super important that we recognize them for what they are. They are not just small circumstances that, you know, people let go or don't let go. They are truly traumatic, especially when compounded over a lifetime.

Afua: With a case. And I don't mean to jump in. That's one of the reasons why we have a hard time humanizing or centering bias in people's lives. Because if you think about trauma for a second, you're in a sitting in Austin and I'm sitting here in New York. Right. But say, for instance, just for the sake of this experiment, a random like wild animal just kind of crashed through the window right now, as in both of our rooms, right. Oh my gosh. Here comes a big bird. You know, I know, I think I know my trauma response is to flee. I'm always running whenever something else has happened. And I don't know yours might be to sit still and, and freeze fight it. Okay.

Emily: Probably a runner. I'm probably a runner like you.

Afua: Yeah. And then in any instance, when we, if we have loved ones in our lives and this same thing happens tonight, they get home and they tell us that this wild animal came in and we'll go ask, you know, what did you do if they sat still and froze, we probably respond with what is wrong with you. Right. And if they ran and it's, you know, a bear and they're on a out jogging and then they take off running, we probably would also say, what's wrong with you. And then if they fought it, you know, they said, well, I don't know what it's something took over me. And I just wrangled this Tara-dactyl down out of the window. We'd also respond with what's wrong with you. What the point I'm trying to make is we oftentimes categorize people's reactions to trauma. And that is what we've been seeing with the protests. People's natural trauma reactions, boom, fight, flee, or freeze look very different on very different identities. And so I often say if we were all standing on the town square and allowed, you know, boom went off and we all took off running for our lives, you and I look very different running for our lives and how we then are engaged by the people who are positioned to serve, protect, help, support us is very different. And it's really more so, um, navigating, mitigating what we're seeing in the country right now. And that's really why it's important to work with NAR because the opportunity to acquire residents and home ownership does seem like a universal right, and universal privilege, universal access of opportunity. But we know that the construct of race in this country has shifted that platform and everyone does not have equal access. And so I'm sorry if I went in and answered a couple of other questions.

Emily: No, no, no, no. I mean, I think you're absolutely right. You know, the basis for the partnership is one that is rooted in the history of our industry, which is a history of an American dream that was not readily available to everyone all the time. And so with that, we, you know, we grow through that. There there's a reason we have a fair housing law and it's because those rights were not being extended under equitable terms. So it's let's talk a little bit about their housing and talk a little bit about how REALTORS® can use what they're going to learn through the curriculum that you guys are helping partner on in their everyday actions, as they become more aware of bias that they may hold or, or actions that they've taken, even that maybe weren't right. And now they feel differently about them. How do they do better moving forward? What should they be doing today?

Afua: So, I'm going to come at this from two of two minds, and I'm going to speak from my perspective first as a, as a trauma specialist. And that is sure. I often time try to build out some space for compassion when we learn the new information and realize that the old guard may not have been working in manufacture of harmed people. And sometimes when you learn that new information, that in that gap, you tend to blame herself or you'll cower or say something like I'm never going to get it right. So why would I even, you know, even try? So we need some grace as far as learning goes. And as far as this transformation in this country goes The transformation in this country. I describe it as new shoes, right? They're beautiful. And, and moving in a direction where everyone has access to, um, equal rights protection is a beautiful thing. And one that many of my, you know, like my mom, I don't know that she ever thought she'd ever see that in her lifetime, but it's going to also like new shoes be uncomfortable for many. So, as we shift into a new era and a new world of how power is distributed and worked with therein lies, uh, the ways in which these workshops and this training will impact the lives of real estate agents, because it's not a one size fits all remedy and you can't take one workshop and remove all your biases. So two that you must first acknowledge your bias and you don't have to declare it and call up everyone that you offended in the past and apologize. But moving forward in educating yourself is, you know, working towards some luck, some significant accountability, establishing yourself as, as a new, a new student, so to speak. And a lot of us don't think of ourselves as students when new information pops up. We just think of ourselves as who we are learning new information, but we must become students because we have as a nation, been grossly miseducated and under informed as to why, uh, demographics are the way they are as to why real, you know, real estate looks the way it does, um, or schooling looks the way it does. And so we look to the research and the data, and it tells us that children thrive and learn and grow best and are socialized best in diverse environments, both across racial gender, sexual expression lines and across ability lines. Right? And so with this information, REALTORS® really should take that as an impetus to informing themselves and looking within their own network and their own lives and ways in which they may not have a very diverse lived experience. Those biases come from a lack of genuine encounters and genuine interpersonal engagement that has very little to do with the characteristics of identity that, that separate, you know, separately,

Emily: Right? If you haven't had those experiences or you don't have a diverse sphere of influence, and it's difficult to feel like you're engaging in a new way as you're trying to exercise these new muscles. Right.

Afua: Absolutely. And if they're not healthy experiences, right, if you just get those messages from television or just get those messages from video games or certain school curriculums, then they're not genuine. And so the mind science workshops, the train, the trainer workshops, the ongoing facilitated conversations, encourage individuation de biasing. They encourage a look at the ways in which racial anxiety pop up and create a, a barrier, um, to establishing a trusting and lasting relationship. They look at the ways in which stereotype type threat might rear, you know, show up and impede someone from confidently asserting themselves or, or even advocating for themselves. If in any situation, these workshops, again, start the individuals on a journey of how to look at themselves and how to talk about what used to be challenging topics to talk about.

Emily: It's an interesting concept, expanding your sphere of influence for realtors, especially because your SOI, your sphere is everything from a business perspective, it is what drives your pipeline. And, you know, in thinking about it traditionally from a business development standpoint, you would purposefully and deliberately enhance or amplify that sphere with people that look like you feel like you do the things that you do, because you have shared experiences in that that's, you know, what leads to easily generation, and it led to a pipeline of business that was good for them, but it also leads to an narrowly experienced set of understanding. Right? And so I think what you're calling on is for REALTORS® to think about sphere of influence in a different way, one that is not just associated with business development, but also re be really deliberate about expanding that sphere in a way that it's purposeful so that you are rounding out your experiences.

Afua: Absolutely. And also in the process, you will learn too, that it is oftentimes will come bring you right back to your, your, the root circle that you were looking at, right. Financial or social.

Emily: Right? Yeah. I'll listen, REALTORS® will always bring back business, which is great. That's, what's awesome about them, but, but you can, you can work in that sphere in a way that's also growing you on a human level and not just on, on one associated with visits. And I think that, I think that's powerful when partnered in parallel with the kind of curriculum that you're talking about and that self-awareness, and, you know, doing a little bit of work with yourself at the same time that you're expanding these experiences can be a great thing.

Afua: And in the midst of this global pandemic, we're talking about building a human connection and yeah.

Emily: In a whole new way.

Afua: Yeah. And still struggling with that because the grace that we require and learning new information oftentimes is not there. What also exacerbates bias and discrimination and bias attitudes and behavior is time pressure. And so oftentimes we don't slow down enough to ask into, you know, intentional questions or realize that someone isn't just the sum of the, the group that we lump them all into, that they may in fact have more in common with us than we both we thought. Then we perceived, you know, stepping into that interaction. And so that is, is crucial to keep in mind, it's, it's salient to the work we

do across many disciplines work with healthcare. They are under tremendous pressure, uh, time pressure with large case loads. And we look at the outcomes of that time pressure being significant racial, racialized healthcare disparities in the wake of COVID. We see that with infant mortality, heart disease rates, and so on and so forth. So many other indicators. Um, and so really the first Jim is slow down individually and get to know one another on a, on a real level.

Emily: Yeah. If your interactions can be deep, a level deeper than the veneer of a person, then you'll probably enhance that experience more powerfully, but also actually know the person and knowing them is different than interacting with them quickly.

Afua: I often say, or we often say there's a difference between nice and kind. And if they were the same, same word, but a lot of people say, well, what is the difference?

Emily: Ooh. In the South, that's very clear. I could bless everybody's heart, but that's not the thing. Same was really caring for them. Yeah. Yeah. So no we've got you, but I know what you mean. I mean, it, you know, I can be pleasant and that's very different than being deliberately kind. So that, that takes action and effort. Totally.

Afua: We do it all the time. What we used to when we were flying, right. Remember going through TSA and if you gave your documents over and they handed them back and they'd say, well, thank you, have a nice flight. And you say, Oh great, thanks. You too. And they're not going anywhere. Right. Gained. Right. Like if you really kind of cared, right. You walk up and you're like, how's your day to day. I'm sure you've had a lot of people. I'm sure this is the ton of time you're answering that question. When they hand you your documents and say, have a nice flight. You say, maybe I'll see you on my return or you too. I hope you get a break at some point. And so that's, that's the snapshot difference between... the two and how to, uh, not fill in the answers with what you think, um, or, or have your brain kind of fill in those answers quickly so that you can be on your way. It's really pausing in that moment to establish a genuine relationship.

Emily: So, as I'm thinking about diversifying your sphere, creating more meaningful relationships through your experiences, one of the things that is apparent in our industry from an association leadership perspective, in terms of the leadership running, many of the large franchises and brokerage firms is that there's a lack of diversity at the top tiers. That's not unusual or specific to real estate, but it should be a part of the conversation. If we're embarking on this partnership, how do we from an organizational level create space for that change?

Afua: Another attribute of the interventions that we offer is also replacing stereotype and seeing new, seeing people in positions of power and authority that have not traditionally been placed in those roles. And that's one of the reasons that we struggle with seeing women at the top across so many different sectors, knowing farewell, right. That they are just as, and even sometimes more qualified, shifting the gender binary, right? Like looking at the ways in which those power dynamics play and, and racial dynamics played, um, really kind of harking back to, to access to power and how, again, who we see and deem as powerful. This work requires us to see people in new light this time in America, this transformation that we're going through is going to shift all of our

focus. And we frame a lot of how we tell stories about one another, how people are captured on television and radio and a narrative, and also who then deserves access, right? Like who deserves a home who deserves to own, who deserves to sit at the helm of a board who deserves to sit in the big corner office and it will not be just about who deserves it, but who deserves to be in that position, right? Like who do we need to see so that our children see that our models, again, go back to the children and think about that diversity, the impact of diversity. They also need to see diverse leadership. They also need to see diverse authority because they will become better players, uh, throughout their growth and development as well.

Emily: You know, I have always thought that and understood the concept that if you see it, you could be it, but that hits home differently in the context of my own experience. And I'll just say it this way. My children have never seen the way that I work. I intentionally separated that from my home life. I went to an office and I did the things and I traveled. And then I came home and I was mom and just mom. But I know that in watching them and hearing them talk about what they see demonstrated every day with, with us being homebound, they have this different understanding of what has been modeled for them and what it looks like to work. Cause now it looks like talking on video calls all day. Mom, are you recording something? And mom, who are you talking to? And I really kind of, I think we've all had this change in our understanding of what they can perceive and how that will change their thinking for a long, long time.

Afua: Absolutely. And how we see and perceive ourselves, right? How the value in someone like yourself, moving up the ranks, the value in mentoring you, the value in supporting you the value in returning a phone call or returning an email, right? That we know implicit bias has bias implicit or not. Right? It's impacting how people respond to people, how people read correspondence and email, and that that all has impacted how people are able to access again, power control in their own lives and in their professional lives. And so for the boys, right, to see mom in a position of power, you're socializing them, not only to see you in a position of power, but also to see you platonically even right. And that, that is a gift for so many young developing children to develop perceptions of boys and girls across lines of gender platonically, right? That then shifts the emphasis on sexualized experiences ever at young ages before children aren't even ready for that. Um, and it helps them be, keep maintain friendships. It helps them, you know, become better digitally, better people if they can really have friends with all because they saw you working in your full capacity at home.

Emily: Well, God willing this experience won't completely ruin them. It will result in growth. That will be powerful for them.

Afua: These 2020 kids are going to be strong.

Emily: Oh, they're going to be special. Let me leave it here. Before we run through a lightning round, I want to know, just based on your experiences, your expertise, who you are, do you have hope for what our future looks like with this conversation?

Afua: Wow. That almost sent chills through my body. I've not been asked that question and I really appreciate it. I do. I do have hope I'm someone who myself does not have children

and always am infatuated by the youth. I find them incredibly hopeful and aspiring and inspiring well, and so yes, that's where my hope lies that the youth are savvy. They're almost too savvy.

Emily: But they're quick. They're quick.

Afua: Um, I oftentimes, when I'm talking about the U S I mentioned that I learned about the civil rights movement when I was about six or seven years old, my mom had like video footage and cause that was her childhood experience. And a lot of people would often say, aren't kids too young to see that information or to see what's happening on the news. But you know, it was the youth that carried the civil rights movement at some point because their parents had to work. And so they said, well, we'll just go down and we'll sit at lunch counters and we'll get on those buses or in won't get off. Um, Claudette Colvin was 13 years old when, you know, months before Rosa parks, you know, enacted her, her, her stance. And so, yes, my hope lies in the youth and, and also in us, listening to them, I would love to see us really turn, um, to them for some kind of guidance. You'd be surprised how much they've been paying attention. As you say, your boys have been.

Emily: Well, that's often that that's a high note to end on. Let's talk about some fun, not hard stuff. Just to wrap it up with some, with a fun round. What is your favorite guilty pleasure TV theory. So you've been watching what you've been stuck at home.

Afua: Ooh. I don't know that. I can say those lines because it's really, you know, people would say really trashy, but it's lots of copious amounts of Say Yes To The Dress.

Emily: Oh yes. That's healthy. Yes.

Afua: Fashion and you know.

Emily: Yeah. But do you get mad? She picks the wrong one. Cause that's where I'm like, that's not okay. Yeah.

Afua: I almost completely offended by ugly wedding dresses.

Emily: Yeah. Well, especially when she had that other beautiful option, right?

Afua: Yeah. No, I'm not happy.

Emily: What is your, so you went on a quick little trip. What's your favorite road trip song in the car.

Afua: Oh, wow. Only because I heard this yesterday. I really liked seeing It's Raining Men.

Emily: Oh yes. That's a good one.

Afua: Yeah. They, at one point they were two tons of fun and then they were, Oh, I'm Martha wash

Emily: An appropriate follow-up to Say Yes to The Dess is It's Raining Men. So there's a theme.

Afua: So not, you know, I don't know. But I love just disco, actually I used to sing in a disco band. So yes.

Emily: Fun fun. Who is your favorite author right now?

Afua: You know, we work with the mind science out of the belonging Institute and Stanford university. Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt's book Biased is absolutely one of my favorite. Um, I reference it all the time and I, I actually enjoy her in interviews as well. I'm just talking about this work. And so, yeah, Jennifer, Dr. Jennifer Everhart, she is open at writing about bias.

Emily: Awesome we'll link up to it. That's great. Thank you so much for your time and for your energy and commitment to this partnership. We're so, so appreciative to have you.

Afua: Thank you. Likewise. You all have a wonderful, wonderful day. Wonderful week.

Emily: Thanks for tuning in. Like what you hear, let's continue this conversation. Give us some love by leaving us a review on iTunes and let your friends know about this show by sharing this episode on social media. You can also follow along and tag me @EmChenevert. That's E M Chenevert. Until next time.