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Why Words Matter: Addressing Microaggressions to Create a Welcoming Environment

An Interactive Discussion and Webinar

Presenter:

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IL-NET is a project of Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) in partnership with the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL), and Utah State University Center for Persons with Disabilities (USU-CPD)

INTERSECTIONALITY CHECKLIST

- IL-NET adapted the Intersectionality Checklist developed by IGLYO, the International LGBTQI Youth and Student Organization (with headquarters in Brussels, Belgium) which incorporates items addressed during the IL-NET Disability, Diversity, and Intersectionality webinars presented in 2018-2019
- Use this checklist to carefully examine how your center addresses the needs of individuals including those with multiple diverse identities. “We need to recognize that we – in all our diversity – should enjoy respect, and celebrate all the intersections of our identity. And by doing this we can truly say that ‘all means all’.” ~IGLYO

WHO IS IN THE ROOM?

- Board Members?
- Executive Directors?
- Senior Management?
- Line Staff?
- Consumers?

Why Disability Diversity and Intersectionality

“...The HHS Advisory Committee on Minority Health has described living as a member of a racial or ethnic minority group with a disability as a “double burden” due to the added sociopolitical challenges encountered” (p. 1).

(US Department of Health and Human Services, as cited in Blick, Franklin, Ellsworth, Haverkamp & Kornblau (2015))

FINDINGS IN US CONGRESS SECTION 21 REHAB ACT

SEC. 21. TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS.

(a) FINDINGS.—With respect to the programs authorized in titles II through VII, the Congress finds as follows:

(1) RACIAL PROFILE.—The demographic profile of America is rapidly changing. While the percentage increase for white Americans is 9.7 percent the percentage increase for racial and ethnic minorities was much higher – 43.0 percent for Latinos, 12.3 percent for African-Americans, and 43.2 percent for Asian Americans and other ethnic groups.

FINDINGS in US CONGRESS:SECTION: 21 REHAB ACT (cont.)

(2) RATE OF DISABILITY.—Ethnic and racial minorities tend to have disabled conditions at a disproportionately high rate. In 2011-

(A) among Americans ages 16 through 64, the rate of disability was 12.1 percent;

(B) among African-Americans in that age range, the disability rate was more than twice as high, at 27.1 percent;

(C) for American Indians and Alaskan Natives in the same age range, the disability rate was also more than twice as high, at 27.0 percent.

FINDINGS in US CONGRESS:SECTION: 21 REHAB ACT (cont.)

- (3) INEQUITABLE TREATMENT.—Patterns of inequitable treatment of minorities have been documented in all major junctures of the vocational rehabilitation process. As compared to white Americans, a larger percentage of African-American applicants to the vocational rehabilitation system is denied acceptance. Of applicants accepted for service, a larger percentage of African-American cases is closed without being rehabilitated. Minorities are provided less training than their white counterparts. Consistently, less money is spent on minorities than on their white counterparts.

FINDINGS in US CONGRESS:SECTION: 21 REHAB ACT (cont.)

- (4) RECRUITMENT.—Recruitment efforts within vocational rehabilitation at the level of preservice training, continuing education, and in-service training must focus on bringing larger numbers of minorities into the profession in order to provide appropriate practitioner knowledge, role models, and sufficient manpower to address the clearly changing demography of vocational rehabilitation.

Section 725. Standards and Assurances for Centers for Independent Living.



(C) ASSURANCES.—The eligible agency shall provide at such time and in such manner as the Administrator may require, such satisfactory assurances as the Administrator may require, including satisfactory assurances that—

...(10) aggressive outreach regarding services provided through the center will be conducted in an effort to reach populations of individuals with significant disabilities that are unserved or underserved by programs under this title, especially minority groups and urban and rural populations;

(11) Staff at CILs will receive training on how to serve such unserved and underserved populations....

What You Will Learn

- Micro-aggressive behavior is a form of aversive racism, ableism, and other “isms.”
- The real-life effects of microaggressions on those who are the target.
- The classification of microaggressions as microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults.
- How to handle micro-aggressive behavior if you are the target.

Microaggressions Defined

- Subtle, verbal and nonverbal slights, and insults based on gender, ethnic and other stereotypes.
- Communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative viewpoints.
- Can be intentional or unintentional.
- “micro” applies to the subtlety not the impact.

Microaggressions Defined, cont'd

- Microaggressions goes beyond race and touches all marginalized populations including:
 - Race
 - Gender/Gender preference/Sexual Orientation
 - Ethnicity
 - Disability Status
 - Labor Roles & Social Class
 - Age

Microaggressions Defined, cont'd

- “Racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggressions are active manifestations and/or a reflection of our worldviews of inclusion/exclusion, superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality, and desirability/undesirability” (Sue, 2010).
- **Internalized racism** – acceptance by those stigmatized of negative messages about their own abilities

“There needs to be a realization that good intentions are simply not enough.”

-Unknown

Terminology

- **Self-Identity/Self-Concept** – collection of beliefs about oneself (includes personality, skills and abilities, occupation and hobbies, physical characteristics, etc.)
- **Racism** – “a system of power, a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based upon the social interpretation of how someone looks (what we call “race”). Unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, while unfairly giving advantages to other individuals and communities” (Jones, 2003).
- **Labels** – represent a way of differentiating and identifying people that is considered by many as a form of prejudice and discrimination.

Terminology, cont'd

- **Intersectionality** – “interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise” (YW Boston, 2017).
- Intersectional occurs as a result of the individual’s multiple groups and may influence the intensity or frequency of microaggression

Stan's Experience

Affirmative action?



Interactive Discussion: Your Turn

- Think of a word you've been called that you didn't like or offended you
- How did it make you feel?

Classification of Micro-aggressive Behavior: Microassaults

- **Microassaults:** Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a white person before a person of color in a restaurant (Sue, 2007).

Classification of Micro-aggressive Behavior: Microinsults

- **Microinsults:** Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity (Sue, 2007).
- An example is an employee who asks a colleague of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

Classification of Micro-aggressive Behavior: Microinvalidations

- **Microinvalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. (Sue, 2007).
- For instance, white people often ask Asian-Americans where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Examples of Microaggressions

Theme	Microaggression	Message
Ascription of Intelligence	“You are so articulate”	It’s unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.
Color blindness	“When I look at you, I don’t see color.”	Denies a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences.
Denial of individual racism	“My best friend is Black.”	I’m immune because I have friends of color.

Wing et al., 2007

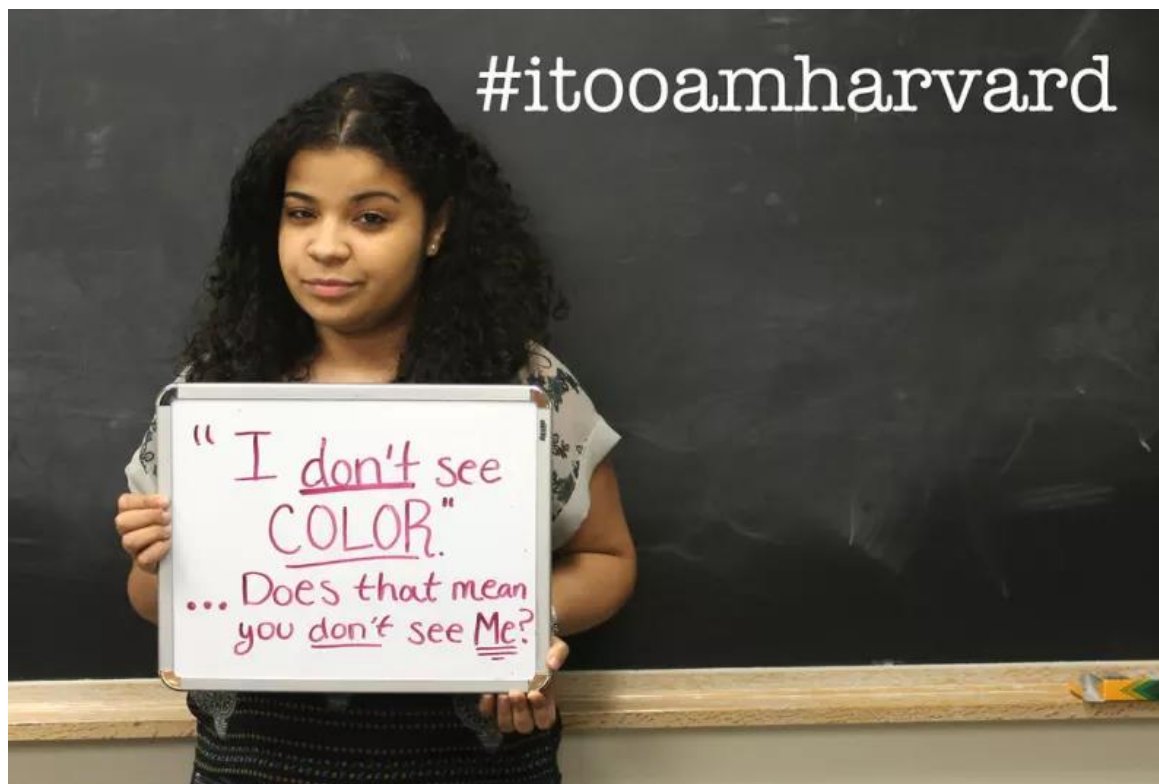
Examples of Microaggressions, cont'd.

Theme	Microaggression	Message
Sexual Orientation	“So who’s the man in the relationship?”	Implies that a relationship must involve a man and a woman
Disability	Without being asked, a man helps a disabled person board the train.	You can’t function independently.
Class	“That’s ghetto.”	Being poor is associated with negative/undesirable characteristics.

Wing et al., 2007



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Interactive Discussion

- What do these messages convey?
 - “No, you’re White!”
 - “You people.”
 - “But you're not gay gay”
 - “What she’s trying to say is...”
- What could be said instead to avoid microaggressions?

The Impact of Microaggressions

- Internal dilemmas
 - What did (s)he mean by that?
 - Should I say something?
 - Did I interpret that correctly?
 - How should I respond?
 - Will this affect our relationship?
 - If I don't respond, does it convey I accept their statement?
 - Will I regret not saying something?

The Impact of Microaggressions

- Psychological Consequences
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Helplessness
 - Diminished confidence

The Impact of Microaggressions, cont'd

- Health Consequences
 - Minorities experienced elevated levels of trauma and depression
 - Depressive symptoms were the link in the relationship between racial microaggressions and thoughts of suicide in study of 405 undergraduate students
 - Creates lack of trust in service providers and caregivers

(Torino, 2017)

How should microaggressions be addressed systematically?

- Involves monitoring for inequities in exposures and opportunities, as well as for disparities in outcomes
- Involves examination of structures, policies, practices, norms, and values
- Requires intervention on societal structures and attention to systems of power

How should CILs address microaggressions?

- Starts with leadership and a welcoming organizational culture
- Foundation of accountability and personal responsibility
- Ask people how they want to be communicated with.
- Avoid environmental microaggressions
 - Buildings named only after White, heterosexual, upper class males
- Formalized training
- Continue (or start) to have conversations

How should individuals address microaggressions?

- When you're the target
 - Attack the comment and not the person
 - Educate/inform
 - Speak up
 - The worst response, is no response!
 - People who witness a microaggression can be affected by it even when the target isn't affected

How should individuals address microaggressions? (cont'd)

- When you're the micro aggressor
 - Addressing microaggressions is not only the responsibility of the target/marginalized group
 - Don't dismiss the experience of the microaggressions as an isolated incident
 - Apologize and reflect

Interactive Discussion

Share your experiences or ask the presenters questions



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CIL-NET Attribution

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Part Two DDI Activity – Action Planning

- Part Two will consist of Group work
 - a) Groups at Each table will actionable items to create a best or best practices in the following areas;
 - b) GOAL: MAKING NEW FRIENDS AND PLAYING WELL WITH OTHERS**
 - c) GOAL: CIL INFRASTRUCTURE – POLICIES, PROCEDURES, BOARD, STAFF**
 - d) GOAL: RECRUITING, WELCOMING, AND SUPPORTING NEW CONSUMERS AND COMMUNITIES**

Part Two DDI Activity – Action Planning

- Open Discussion;
- How can NYAIL facilitate ongoing training to assist Centers to become more inclusive and embrace DDI as part of their organizational fabric?

FOR MORE INFORMATION



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