We create opportunities for independence for people with disabilities through research, education, and consultation
Why Words Matter: Addressing Microaggressions to Create a Welcoming Environment

An Interactive Discussion and Webinar

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May 23, 2019

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)
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, microininvalidations, 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.

• Microaggression 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. 2

• “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).

**Intersectionality** occurs as a result of the individual’s multiple groups and may influence the intensity or frequency of microaggression.
Stan’s Experience

Affirmative action?
Brooke’s Experience
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Microaggression</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ascription of Intelligence</td>
<td>“You are so articulate”</td>
<td>It’s unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color blindness</td>
<td>“When I look at you, I don’t see color.”</td>
<td>Denies a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of individual racism</td>
<td>“My best friend is Black.”</td>
<td>I’m immune because I have friends of color.</td>
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Wing et al., 2007
Examples of Microaggressions, cont’d.

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

Wing et al., 2007
Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Interactive Discussion & Q&A

• 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, cont’d.

- Psychological Consequences
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Helplessness
  - Diminished confidence
The Impact of Microaggressions, cont’d. 2

- 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 microaggression is not only the responsibility of the target/marginalized group
  - Don’t dismiss the experience of the microaggression as an isolated incident
  - Apologize and reflect
Interactive Discussion and Q&A

Share your experiences or ask the presenters questions

[Image of a person holding a sign that says "insert [M]icroaggression here"]
References


Final Questions and Evaluation Survey

Any final questions?

Directly following the webinar, you will see a short evaluation survey to complete on your screen. We appreciate your feedback!

https://usu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4GbiAKGNEnQXvWR
CIL-NET Attribution

This project is supported by grant number 90ILTA0001 from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.