# Stories of Belonging (or Not) from College Students with Intellectual Disability

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# Once Upon a Time…

- Inclusive College Program for Young Adults with Intellectual Disability
  - What are their social, academic, and career experiences and outcomes?
- "Tell It Like It Is" Project
  - What everyday campus experiences shape students' perception of belonging, inclusion and  success ?
- Engaging a New Group and a New Lens

# A Big Question

- What can we learn about access, inclusion, and belonging from the stories that college students with intellectual disability tell about experiences of micro-aggressions and -affirmations?

# Why?

- Belonging in College
  - Enrollment, Performance, Retention

- Campus Climate
  - Stress, Well-being

- Racism / Ableism / …ism
  - Environments, Systems, People
  - Explicit, Implicit

# Micro-aggressions

- "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial, gender, sexual and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue, 2010, p. 6)
  - **Assaults**
  - **Insults**
  - **Invalidations**

# Disability & Micro-aggression

- Denial of Personal Identity
- Denial of Disability Experience
- Denial Of Privacy
- Helplessness

- Secondary Gain
- Spread Effect
- Infantilization
- Patronization
- Second Class Citizen
- Desexualization

(Keller & Galgay, 2010)

# Micro-affirmations

- "apparently small acts, which are often ephemeral and hard-to-see, events that are public and private, often unconscious but very effective, which occur wherever people wish to help others to succeed" (Rowe, 2008, p. 46)
  - **Recognitions**
  - **Validations**
  - **Transformations**
  - **Protections**

# Storytelling Project – Intellectual Disability

- Storytellers
  - 9 students enrolled in a college program for students with ID
  - 2 white females, 7 males  (3 black/African-American, 4 white)

- Story creation
  - Qualitative, narrative interview
  - Transcribe
  - 1st edit (Participant words only)
  - 2nd edit (Story format)
  - Participant review and edit

# Listening to Stories -- Analyses

- Micro-aggressions
  - Sue et al., (2007) -- 3 broad categories
- Micro-affirmations
  - Jones & Rolon Dow (in press) -- 4 broad categories

- Disability micro-aggressions
  - Keller & Galgay (2010) -- 10 types
  - Ryan & Scura (2015) -- college students with disabilities

- Interpersonal and Institutional

# Micro-insult Example

Isaiah: …she was like, "Wow, you don't seem like you have a disability" and "It's great that you're giving your presentation."

I think that if you're considered a regular undergraduate it might be easier. And, I think that even if I had a disability, but identified as a regular undergraduate student and not with the program [for students with intellectual disability], then I probably would have got in to a fraternity a little bit easier, because everything would have been open to me.

*(Patronization; Second Class Citizen)*

# Micro-invalidation Example

Zach:  Just like, when I was in high school with the kids with disabilities in a group. I had people at school that knew I was with them. So, I would get worried about what they would think of me. I ended up not really liking the experience of being in classes just for people with disabilities.

I hang out with a lot of people that have disabilities. But I also know a lot of people that don't have disabilities. I've tried to teach both; just making sure everybody understands. Nobody really says much to me about my disability, like judging. It's more like myself and how I feel sometimes. Sometimes it can get in the way of me hanging out with people.

*(denial of personal identity / disability experience)*

# Micro-assault Example

Daniel: I've been picked on at school ever since I was a kid because of being African American and having a disability. I had to deal with that kind of diversity and adversity all my life as a child. From the fifth grade throughout high school, I was able to get through the type of abuse that I could go through without letting it get me down."

*(second-class citizen)*

# Micro-recognition Example

Rick: I have felt included on campus, because you can join clubs and go to classes. It doesn't matter that I have a disability or that I am a black man. ... I think it is important for people to reach out to other people whether you have a disability or if you are black or white. Your race, your ethnicity, whatever, it doesn't matter. People should reach out and involve others.

# Micro-validation Example

Fred: When I'm at work, my boss and coworkers respect me consistently. They give me good eye contact. They talk to me as if I'm an adult… Yeah, and I feel like they give me the time. Like if I'm talking to them, they'll give the time to actually listen and hear what you have to say to them. I'm appreciating that my boss and coworkers see me as an adult instead of looking at me as my disability. They see the real me.

# Micro-transformation Example

Daniel: Doing the tour with the Center for Black Culture made me feel like I was welcome and included. It represents my culture as a Black African-American male. And it makes me feel like I could do something more and greater; that I could be a future black leader as a writer someday.  My main goal, after I finish college and become successful in my career, is that someday I want to find a mate.  After I take the time to get to know her as a friend, then I could settle down.  That is something I've been wanting to do for a long time. Being welcomed on the tour made me think that maybe my goals are possible.

# Some Initial Reflections

- Variety of stories
  - interpersonal and institutional
  - respect, inclusion, belonging
  - denial of personal identity, infantilization, second class citizen, patronization, spread effect

- Similar, but not identical, to other social identity groups
  - infantilization
  - program identity

- Story framing
  - personal history
  - other social identities, erasure?

# How Does This Story End?

- In what ways are these stories like those of other groups on our campus and at other colleges?

- What are implications for building diverse campus communities inclusive of students with intellectual disabilities?

# References

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