Mental Health and Intersectionality: Gaps and Opportunities in Serving Youth

CMWS December 2021
Agenda / Call to Action

- RECOGNIZE: It’s not a bootstrapping thing
- IMPACT: Common triggers, feelings
- REACT: How can you proactively support mental health needs of youth?
- Resources
- Q&A
“It’s a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself up by his own bootstraps.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.
Introductions

Which of these speak to you because of your experiences or those of the youth you serve?
In a survey of African-Americans:

- 63% of the respondents viewed depression as a “personal weakness”
- 30% reported that they would deal with depression themselves
- 33% only a third of the respondents reported that they would accept medication for depression if prescribed by a medical professional

Furthermore, another survey found out that

- 92% percent of depressed African-American males do not seek treatment

"I want to talk about my thoughts and feelings"
It’s not a bootstrapping thing

“All bad behavior is an unskilled expression of an unmet need” – Shola Richards

When people feel safe and accepted in being their authentic selves, they have more secure mental health.
Does Mental Health Affect My Community?

Mental health affects everyone regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

**Percentage of Adults with Mental Health Conditions by Race (2012)**

- Hispanic: 16.3%
- White: 19.3%
- Black: 18.6%
- Asian: 13.9%
- AI/AN*: 28.3%

At 28.3%, American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest rate of mental health conditions among all communities.

**Rate of Suicides in the U.S. by Age per 100,000 People (2007)**

- 0-18: 7
- 19-29: 8
- 30-44: 6.4
- 45-59: 4
- 60+: 2.6

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth.

LGBTQ individuals are 2 or more times more likely as straight individuals to have a mental health condition.
RECOGNIZE: It’s not a bootstrapping thing

- All people struggle and have access to traumatic experiences
- Subpopulations who have been historically marginalized may find it more difficult to access positive childhood experiences
- Even people (ex. mentors, staff) who mean well may not create positive impact with their intentions (intention ≠ impact)

4.5% OF THE US IS LGBT

(THAT’S NEARLY 15 MILLION PEOPLE)

OF THEM, 1/3 EXPERIENCE A MENTAL ILLNESS

(60% MORE THAN HETEROSEXUALS)

AND ARE 2–3x MORE LIKELY TO HAVE LONG-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

REGULARLY FACING PREJUDICE, HARASSMENT, & DISCRIMINATION

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE ATTEMPT SUICIDE 9x MORE THAN THE ENTIRE US POPULATION,

LGBTQ+ ADULTS ARE 56% MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP AN ALCOHOL USE DISORDER,

AND ALMOST 3x AS LIKELY TO DEVELOP ANOTHER SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.

WHICH CAUSES SERIOUS ISSUES WITHIN THE LGBTQ+ POPULATION...

SOURCES:
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10508-014-2805-y
RECOGNIZE:
How might these factors be influenced by intersectional identities?
adults with autism

Adult life—with its bosses, coworkers, roommates and romantic partners—can be tough enough. Then add the hallmark social and executive-function challenges of autism spectrum disorder.

- An estimated 5 percent of adults with autism have ever been married.
- More than half of young adults with autism remain unemployed and unenrolled in higher education in the two years after high school.
- An estimated one in four to one in five is unemployed.
- Many young adults with autism don’t receive any healthcare for years after they stop seeing a pediatrician.
- As many as one-third have epilepsy.
- Most young adults with ASD live with their parents.

Depression affects an estimated 26 percent of adults with autism, 3 times the U.S. average.
RECOGNIZE:
How might these factors be influenced by intersectional identities?
**Aggression**
Behavior is carried out with the immediate intention to cause harm to a person motivated to avoid the behavior.
- Intentional
- Hostile
- Verbal or non-verbal

**Micro Aggression**
Indirect, sometimes subtle, put down toward a person from a marginalized community, often disguised as a compliment.
- Brief
- Common
- Hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to target a person or group.
"She won't be able to travel for outings."

"I don't see color."

"No, where are you really from?"

"You don't look disabled."
You speak English very well
You communicate effectively.

I have lots of black friends
I have a diverse group of friends.

I don't see color
I treat everyone the same.

What do your people think about this?
I'm interested in your perspective.
Common triggers, feelings

- Dysmorphia, Dysphoria
- Undeserving of love / enough
- “You’re exaggerating” / “I don’t see differences like that”
- Center of attention / anxiety / “othering”
- Microaggressions
- Availability of services / role models / media
- Here’s everyone else like you that I know! / I’m just like you / Do you know all these other people?
**IMPACT:** Common triggers and feelings

"I feel" statements (?)

- I feel comfortable in my own body.
- I feel worthy of love.
- I feel I belong most places I go.
- My mentors / counselors understand where I’m coming from.
- I feel like I can be anything I want to be
- I see examples of people like me in popular culture
- My country’s laws are set up to protect my rights / help me be successful
Ways people choose to react

Let it go.

Leaves feelings of why it happened, questioning their right to feel offended, reinforcing beliefs that they are not safe.

Respond immediately.

Risky and can be left feeling like they "lost control", did show their best self, labeled as overly sensitive.

Respond later.

Address it privately, explaining why it was offensive. Can be the cause of gaslighting. (deemed petty)
What to do when you've committed a microaggression.

Resist the urge to react defensively.

Accepting criticism is hard! Especially when you're being criticized for something you were unaware of. Take a deep breath and...

Sincerely listen with an empathetic heart

Avoid saying anything similar to "I didn't mean it", or "I was just joking." Strive to understand their perspective. Keep in mind your intentions don't matter only the outcome matters.

Verbally acknowledge your impact

This can be as simple as saying (and meaning) "I have heard what you've said, I recognize it caused you pain, and in the future, I will be more thoughtful of what I say because of what you've shared with me."

Apologize and Ask questions

It's always a good idea to apologize when we've hurt someone, even when we may not be forgiven. If you have a relationship with the individual, you may want to ask question about their experiences with micro-aggressions.

REACT: Proactively support mental health
# Examples of People First Language

*By Kathie Snow; visit www.disabilityisnatural.com to see the complete article*

Remember: a disability descriptor is simply a medical diagnosis. People First Language respectfully puts the person before the disability. A person with a disability is more *like* people without disabilities than different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Say:</th>
<th>Instead of:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities.</td>
<td>The handicapped or disabled.</td>
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<tr>
<td>He has a cognitive disability/diagnosis.</td>
<td>He’s mentally retarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has autism (or a diagnosis of...).</td>
<td>She’s autistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has Down syndrome (or a diagnosis of...).</td>
<td>He’s Down’s; a mongoloid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has a learning disability (diagnosis).</td>
<td>She’s learning disabled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a physical disability (diagnosis).</td>
<td>He’s a quadriplegic/is crippled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She’s of short stature/she’s a little person.</td>
<td>She’s a dwarf/midget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a mental health condition/diagnosis.</td>
<td>He’s emotionally disturbed/mentally ill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She uses a wheelchair/mobility chair.</td>
<td>She’s confined to/is wheelchair bound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He receives special ed services.</td>
<td>He’s in special ed.</td>
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**DON’T**
- Assume
- Ask / googlify
- Tokenize
- Talk down

**DO**
- Get to know people. Find out their stories
  - What do you need / don’t you need?
  - Be willing to share what your preferences are / teach young people to be confident in sharing that
  - Just because you get to know people doesn’t mean you have to like them.
- Be patient and create the space that people want to come into
- Understand that language matters
- Person-first
- Recognize other intersectional identities
- Take a request for help seriously
- Speak openly and accept your imperfections; acknowledge you’re going to screw up
  - How do you respond when you screw up? How do we work through it?
  - Recognize that it takes courage for someone to call you out; see it as an opportunity to grow with them
- Take away power
- Overcompensate
- Be defensive
- Minimize
- Use their story to promote yours
Unconscious Bias

Guess what... if you have a brain you have bias.

- Accept that we all have unconscious bias
- Make considered decisions
- Monitor your own behavior
- Widen your social circle
- Set ground rules
- Avoid making assumptions or relying on gut instinct.
- Speak out
- Apologize
Be a Champion

Speak Up

When you see a microaggression unfolding speak up and intervene professionally.

- What makes you say that?
- Why do you think she/he’s the right person to do <some lower level or administrative task>?
- We don’t do that here.
- I don’t get it. Can you explain the joke to me?
- Wow, that was awkward.
• Rosenberg self-esteem scale
• Harvard Implicit Association Test
• MENTOR: NMRC Resources on LGBTQ+ Youth, Youth of Color, Immigrant and Refugee Youth, Youth with Disabilities, and more
• MENTOR: Past CMWS webinars on mentoring young men of color, youth with disabilities, rural youth, those involved with the juvenile court system, and more
• National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): People with Disabilities, Double Discrimination, how COVID is impacting Latinx mental health, How School-Based mental health providers can help Latinx Students, Family Rejection and Transgender Suicide attempts, and more
• Youtube: The biology of toxic stress, Coca Cola’s “Remove Labels”, Understanding microaggressions
Mental Health and Intersectionality: Thank You

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