

EMPOWERING LANGUAGE: A KEY TOOL IN COUNSELING

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Empowering Language: A Key Tool in Counseling

- ▣ What brought you here today?
- ▣ What brought us here today?

What have we learned about the use of language in our counseling training?

- Example of use of ability-derisive language
- “So lame”, “Blindsided”, “Turning a deaf ear”

What makes language empowering?

- ▣ Person-first approach
 - Disability => All
- ▣ Equitable in weight and use
 - He/she, her's/his, ze/hir
- ▣ Inclusive
 - Spouse v. partner
- ▣ Collaborative with communities, bridge-building
 - Self identifying; PC vs. Correct

What makes language empowering?

- ▣ Narrow vs. Broad Language
 - ▣ Parent vs. caregiver
 - ▣ Marriage & Family vs. Relational Systems Counseling
- ▣ The creative use of language
 - ▣ Ex: TQQ; Ze/hir; accessible parking
- ▣ Taking back power in language
 - ▣ Ex: “Hermie”; Queer, Deaf/Disabled
 - ▣ Other strategies?

Tensions Around Language Use

- ▣ Fear of being “right” is less important than ongoing, open, and transparent conversations about language
 - Being willing to be called-out on better language use vs. “shaming” the privileged status
- ▣ Preference for English (discomfort with other languages)
- ▣ Hushed tones
 - What are the words that we are comfortable using and what are the words that we are less comfortable using with diverse groups of people?

The Relational Nature of Language

- ▣ Language is never within ourselves. It is always relational and contextual.
- ▣ As we change and develop in language use, it ripples out.
- ▣ Within our relationships: The benefits of the ongoing process of developing empowering language use.

Agent & Target Statuses & Language

People with Target Status

- ▣ Members of social identity groups that are disenfranchised, exploited, marginalized, victimized, and made powerless in a variety of ways by oppressors and the oppressors' systems and institutions (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Young, 1990).
- ▣ They are subject to exploitation and containment, maintained in situations that keep their choices and movement restricted and limited.
- ▣ They are seen as replaceable and expendable and lumped into narrowly defined roles of their prescribed groups where they exist virtually devoid of individual identities.

Agent & Target Statuses & Language

People with Agent Status

- ▣ Affiliates of dominant social groups privileged from birth and/or attainment, who deliberately or unwittingly exploit and gain unfair advantage over members of people with target status (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).
- ▣ They do not need to intentionally oppress others in order to be agents.
- ▣ People with agent status are not inherently oppressors of people with target status, but are in position to be oppressive, both intentionally and unintentionally.
- ▣ They are also in a position to advocate for others.

Agent & Target Statuses & Language

- ▣ **Agent Status Biased Language**
 - is communication structured to emphasize the relative privilege of people in agent statuses in contrast to people who have target statuses. (exclusive, judgmental, etc.)
- ▣ **Target Status Empowering Language**
 - is communication structured to create increased equity between people who have target statuses and people who have agent statuses. (inclusive, labeling the “normals”, etc.)

Targets & Agents

	AGENT STATUS	TARGET STATUS
Race and Ethnicity	People who are White	People of Color
Gender	Boys & Men	Girls & Women
Affectional/Sexual Orientation	People who are Heterosexual	People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Omnisexual
Religion/Spirituality	People who are Christian	People who are Jewish, Muslim, and Other Religious Minorities
Physical/Psychological/ Developmental Disability	People who are Abled	People who are Disabled/ Differently-abled
Class (S.E.S.)	People who are Middle Class	People who are Poor & Working Class
Age	People who are Middle Age/Adult	People who are Young & Elderly
Sex	People who are Males & Females	People who are Intersex
Gender Identity	People who are Cisgender	People who are Transgender
Education	People with a Bachelors Degree or above	People with Some college or below
Size	People who are of average weight & height	People who are "Overweight," "Underweight," "Tall," "Short"
Relationship Status	People who are Married & Couples	People who are Single
Beauty/Attractiveness	People who are "Attractive"	People who are not stereotypically attractive

Group Discussion

- ▣ Can we move beyond the use of agent-biased language to target-empowering language as counselors?
- ▣ If so, how?
- ▣ What are your next steps in exploring language use in your setting?
- ▣ One is that *one* thing you might shift/change/explore?

Thank you! Chukria! Gracias! Mahalo!

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