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## Making the Non-apparent, Apparent

### Shedding Light on Hidden Disabilities in the Workplace

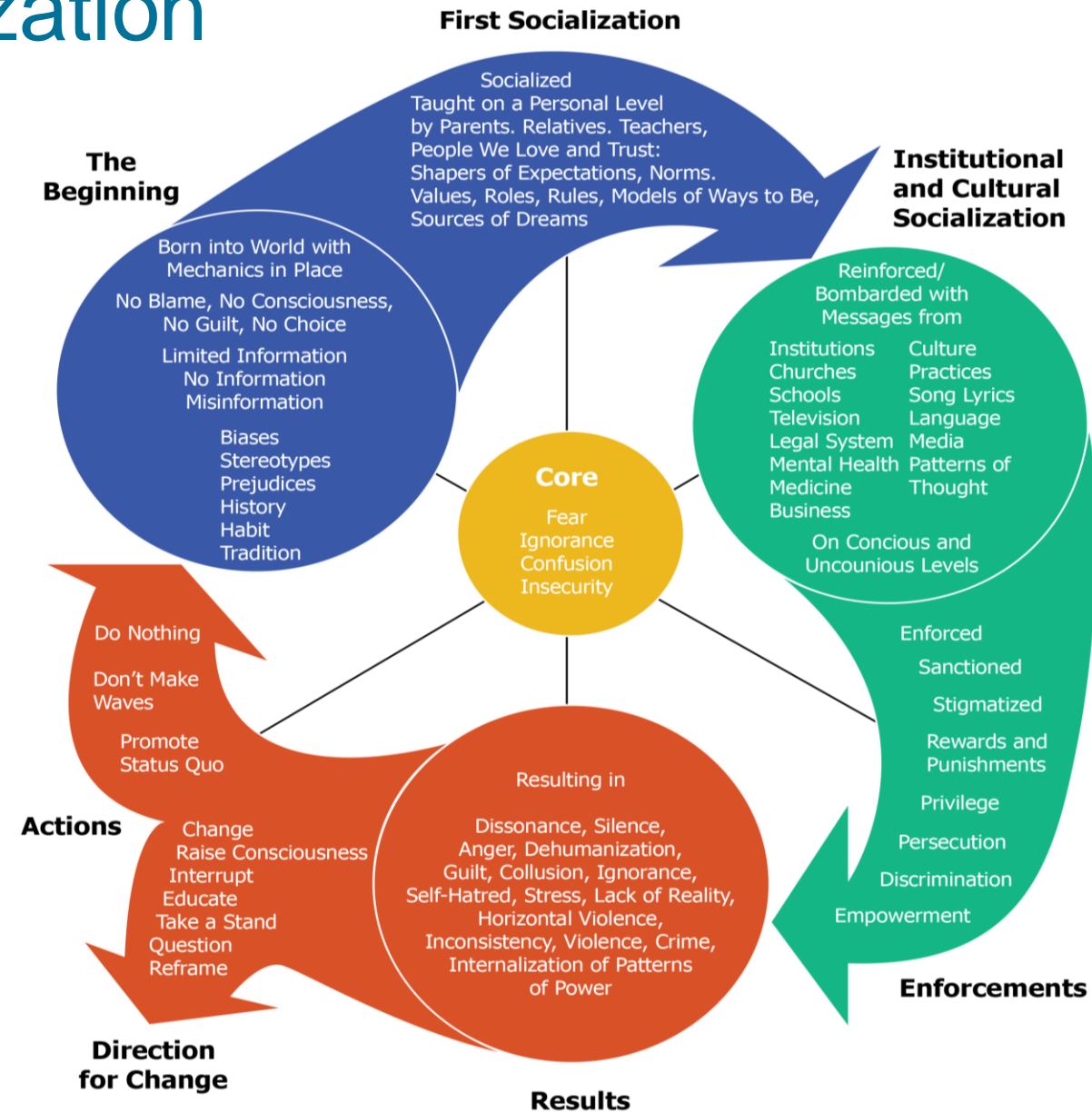
Dr. Victoria Verlezza (ver-LEZ-uh) she/her

Head of Employee Experience

How have you been taught to  
think about disability?

When you think about disability  
what comes to mind?

# Cycle of Socialization



“There is no such thing as a single issue struggle because we do not live single issues lives.”

~ Audre Lorde

# Ableism

- A term that emerged out of disability rights movement; **ableism** refers to bias, prejudice, and discrimination against people with disabilities. It hinges on the idea that people with disabilities are less valuable than nondisabled people.
- At its core, **ableism** is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability.
- **Ableism** is discrimination and prejudice against people with disabilities, though that's not quite enough to convey its full weight.
- “**Ableism** is attitudes, actions, and circumstances that devalue people because they are disabled or perceived as having a disability” (Nario, Redmond, M.R., 2020).

# Disability

- A physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain task or actions or participate in typical daily activities or interactions (Webster).
- Can be both apparent (visible) and non-apparent (invisible).

# Other Non-apparent Identities

## **Non-apparent (invisible) disabilities**

- Chronic illnesses
- Covid and long Covid
- Neurodivergence
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health conditions

# Dynamic Disabilities

# Barriers to Inclusion

# Barriers in the Workplace

- Treating neurodivergence as a brokenness or something to be fixed
- Blaming the neurodivergent for conflict/misunderstandings
- Ideas and practices which do not allow a space for multiple perspectives
- Not checking non-disabled (able-bodied) privilege
- Use of inappropriate, derogatory or outdated language
- Expectations of folks to complete certain tasks without modifications
- Lack of recognition of disability culture

# Barriers in the Workplace

- Stereotypes
- Monitoring thinking and behaving patterns
- Judging someone else's way of getting things done, their thought process, work habits, and even productivity
- Shaming folks who don't fall in line with typical behaviors
- Normalizing ableist slurs and using them
- Demonizing or pathologizing folks, especially neurodivergent Black, Indigenous, and other non-Black people of color

# Areas Affected

- Day-to-day interactions
- Hiring
- Feedback, both informal and formal cycles
- Retention
- Promotions
- Evaluation cycles

# Strategies to Counteract

# Strategies

- Shift thinking from DEI to allyship
- Mitigate bias by checking it continuously through accountability and self-education of awareness gaps
- Are there barriers that you notice for folks?
  - Unspoken rules or culture within individual groups/offices/teams that are perpetuating ableism?
- Think about your own assumptions about someone else's workflow
  - Are you silently judging when and how someone gets something done?
  - Why is your way the only way to get from A-Z?

# Strategies

- Use the “*working with me document*” provided to get to know your team better
- Consider how you supervise and run meetings
  - Do you provide agendas ahead of time?
  - Do you provide multiple ways to get information?
  - How long do you pause after you ask a question?
- Analyze your hiring practices or interview questions
  - Are they accessible?
  - Do you ask 4 questions in one?
  - Can you provide written questions to candidates beforehand

# Strategies

- Consider access needs to programming and meetings
- Challenge personal language use
- Do a 21-day challenge to raise consciousness of ableism
- Seek out learnings and opportunities
  - Disability Pride Month (July)
  - Disability Employment Awareness Month (Oct)

Moving Forward

# Action Items

How can you start to incorporate a more conscious awareness at work regarding disability?

What areas can you start to be more reflective in when it comes to disability?

Where can you continue to grow regarding disability and neurodivergence?

# EVERYONE HAS DIFFERENT NEEDS



I NEED CONSTANT  
LOVE AND ATTENTION.



I NEED A LOT  
OF ALONE TIME.



I NEED  
CONSISTENCY.

@WORRY--LINES



I DON'T KNOW  
WHAT I NEED BUT IT'S  
DEFINITELY NOT THIS.

# Words Matter

## Instead of...

- × Normal, regular
- × Differently abled, handi-capable, handicap(ped), special needs
- × Afflicted by, suffers from, victim of
- × Flippantly referring to self as a neurodivergent label

## Try...

- ✓ Nondisabled, able bodied, does not have a disability, neurotypical
- ✓ Disability, disabled
- ✓ Has a disability, is disabled
- ✓ Consider the impact

# Additional Resources

- [SourceAmerica Employment Inclusion Survey Reveals Nationwide Desire for More Employer Support for People with Disabilities \(yahoo.com\)](#)
- [Neurodiversity in the workplace: Here's how to make it more inclusive \(usatoday.com\)](#)
- [How to Be a Good Ally to Your Neurodivergent Employees and Co-Workers | Specialisterne USA](#)
- [How the Best Bosses Interrupt Bias on Their Teams \(hbr.org\)](#)
- [Why Your Autistic Coworkers Don't Bend Rules the Way You Do | Specialisterne USA](#)
- [Disability progress is real but so is intense ableism](#)

“I did then what I knew how to do.  
Now I know better, I do better.”

~ Maya Angelou



# Thank You

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[www.fando.com](http://www.fando.com)

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