USING HUMANIZING LANGUAGE IN THE SJC

Continuing the Conversation

February 24, 2020

SAFETY+JUSTICE CHALLENGE

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nexus COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Facilitators

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Audience Poll

- What are words that are overused?
- What words make us cringe when we hear them?
- What do we wish we had better words to express?

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Objectives

- Deepen our understanding of the use and power of language
- Share Philadelphia's journey in shifting towards humanizing language
- Learn about ways to begin shifting in your jurisdiction

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A few reminders from October…

- Language is an essential **resource** for our ability **to describe and relate** to the world around us.
- It is a human **universal** and a **social practice** that **shapes our cultures** as we know it.
- The culture-shaping and -shifting nature of language thus makes it **profoundly political** in nature.

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HUMANIZING LANGUAGE IN PHILADELPHIA

Story

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Philadelphia's Language Guide: Background

- How can we use language to reflect and reinforce our values and commitments through the reform effort?
- How can we use language to create a welcoming, productive space for community members to participate as **equal partners**?
- Development of Community Advisory Committee (CAC) provided impetus
- Guide covers language and imagery related to race and ethnicity, economy and class, immigration, criminal justice, gender and sexuality, disability, mental health, substance use, and community
- Intended to help shape verbal, written, and visual communication through collaborative, living document
- Language Guide available here.

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Key Principles

- Person-first language
- Intersectionality
- Self-identification
- Focus on systemic causes
- Shared values
- Active voice
- Asset-Based Approach
- Being mindful of jargon and acronyms

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Suggestions for Inclusive Language

Area	Recommended Terminology	Avoidable/Outdated/Less Specific Terminology
Criminal Justice	Person who is incarcerated, person convicted of_____ (e.g. "person convicted of a sex offense" instead of "sex offender")	"The bodies," offender, inmate, the incarcerated, criminal, felon, thug, robber
	Person who has been incarcerated, returning resident	Ex-offender, the formerly incarcerated, ex-con, ex-felon
	Person on parole/probation	Parolee or Probationer
	Children, young adults	Juvenile
	System impacted (can include loved ones of people who have been incarcerated)	

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Suggestions for Inclusive Language

Area	Recommended Terminology	Avoidable/Outdated/Less Specific Terminology
Race and Ethnicity	Use terms like “ethnic minority” or “linguistic minority” only when referring to numerical minorities	Minorities: Non-white groups are the majority in many U.S. cities, and the term “minority” can connote powerlessness.
	Reference specific racial and ethnic groups whenever possible (see “Best Practices on Ethnic and Racial Designations,” section).	Diverse: This is a broad term that we sometimes use when we really mean “non-white.” Additionally, a noun that references a solitary person, place, or thing cannot be diverse.
	“People of color” should be used sparingly and ideally should be followed by more racially specific data/examples/statements.	People of color: This term is overly general and can conflate multiple groups with specific needs and experiences. The term can also be a euphemism for a specific group (e.g. black, Latinx).
		Other terms that may evoke racial stereotypes: “those people,” “good kids” vs “scary kids,” “hardworking” vs. “lazy,” “entitled.”

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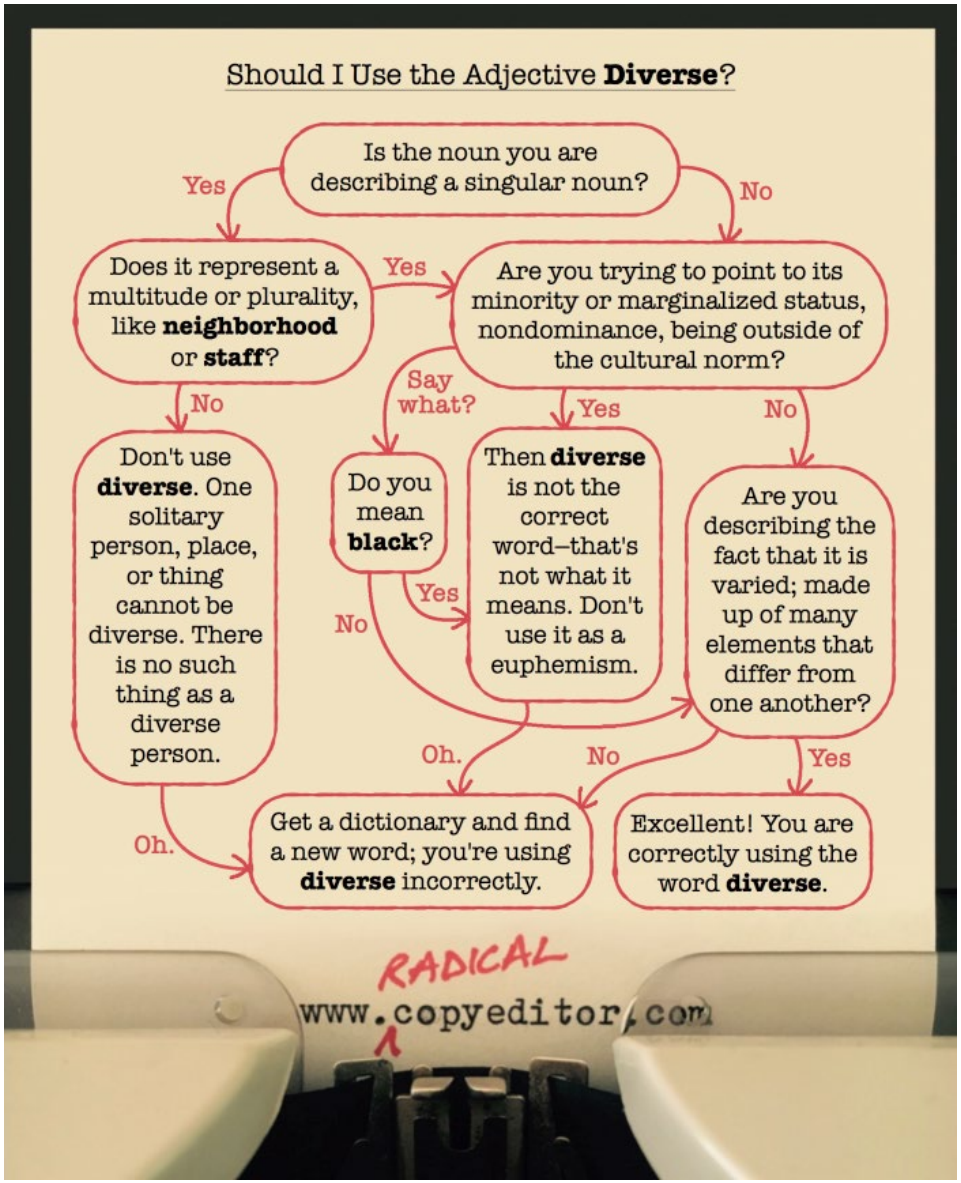

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SHIFTING LANGUAGE IN YOUR JURISDICTION

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Where to Start

- Observe, learn, and start conversations
- Identify existing resources around language
- Introduce new language in a learning environment (i.e workshops, trainings)
- Encourage reflection and solicit feedback
- Keep revisiting language use and revising any language guide
- Consider other ways you communicate language (body language, written word/policy, imagery)

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IMAGERY & LANGUAGE

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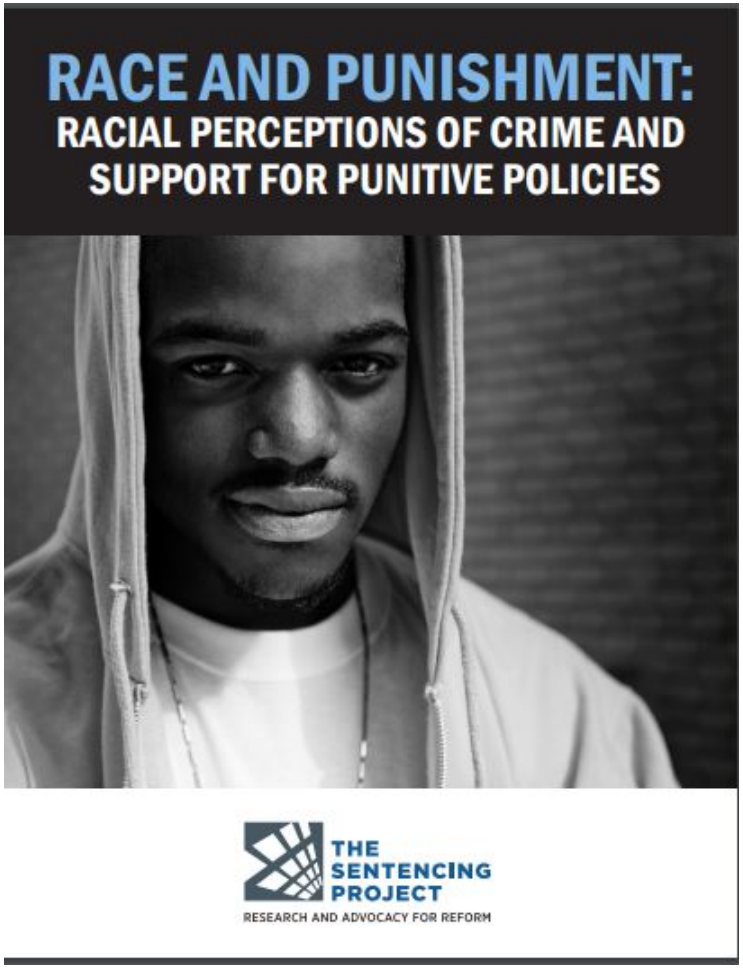

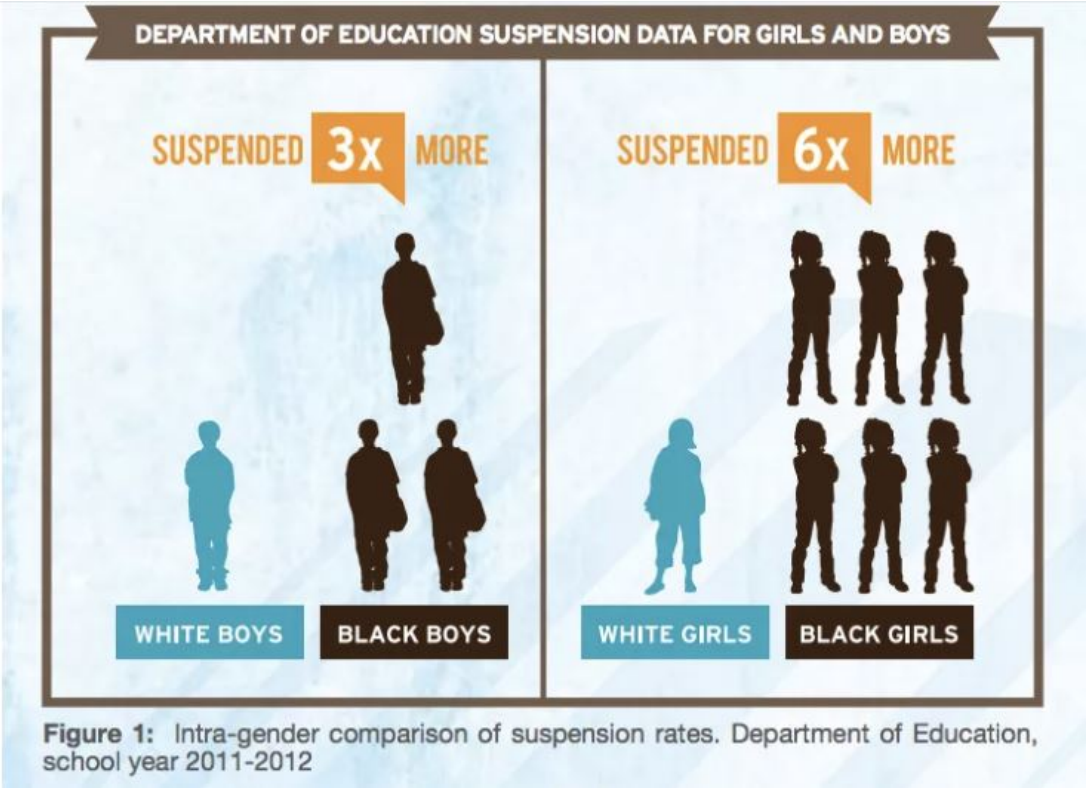

Figure 1: Intra-gender comparison of suspension rates. Department of Education, school year 2011-2012

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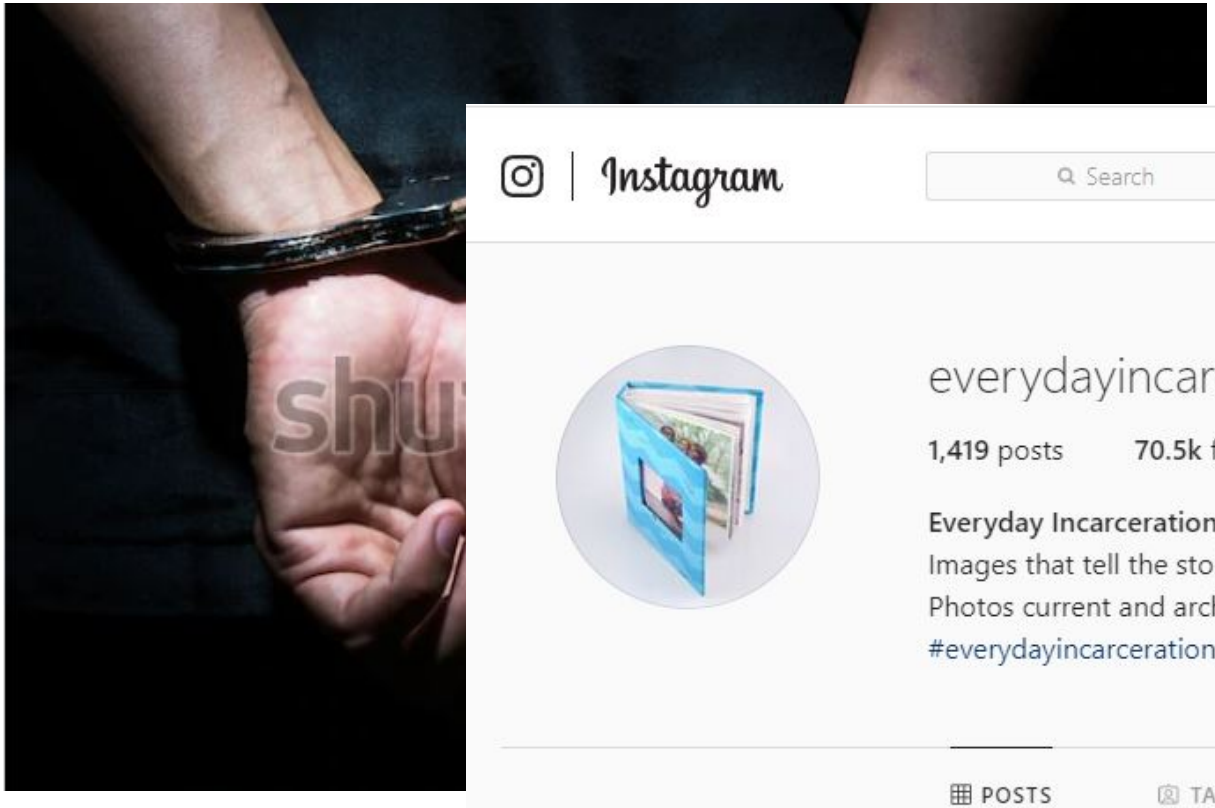

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Images that tell the stories of 40 years of mass incarceration.
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Recap/Takeaways

- Shifting to people-centered language is as important as the structures and policies created in this work to reduce jail population and end mass incarceration.
- Everyone here is working in jurisdictions that use dehumanizing language in their speech as well as in their reports/policies and other legal documents. This MUST shift.
- Changing the language we use is a start however, changing the language is not as impactful if the biased attitudes and beliefs one carries about justice-involved people persist.
- It's time to tell a different story and it starts with us challenging ourselves, and then others to do better.

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Questions?

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Thank you!

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