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Intersections Between LGBTQ+ and Disability Community

June 15, 2022

11:00 a.m. CT

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>> CELESTE: Hello, and welcome, everyone, to Disability:IN's exclusive webinar, Intersections Between LGBTQ+ and the Disability Community. My name is Celeste with Disability:IN. On today's webinar, you will hear a conversation between corporate partner peers. Our speakers are Ashley Brundage, Meg Grow, Zaylore Stout. Our moderator for today's webinar will be Casey Oakes. Before I turn it over to our panel, for anyone who cannot see the screen or who has dialed in, I will be running a PowerPoint slide regarding the webinar housekeeping items. As an attendee, you are in view‑only mode, meaning you may watch the participation and participate in the moderated Q&A. You cannot share audio and video, so please feel free to submit your questions for our panel in the Q&A box. Any time during the conversation. They will do their best to address all questions, either throughout or at the end of the webinar.

This webinar, as with all webinars in the Disability: IN webinar series is being recorded. You may access all webinar recordings in our corporate partner portal. ASL and live captioning are both being provided during today's webinar. To start viewing the captioning, simply select the CC or closed caption icon in the meeting controls. Feel free to click and drag the closed captioning box to move its position in the meeting window. We will also post a StreamText link in the chat box. Our ASL interpreter video will be spotlighted for the duration of the webinar. Also feel free to pin the interpreters. If you need any assistance during the webinar, please feel free to reach out to me directly through the Q&A or chat box or via email at Celeste@DisabilityIN.org. I will now take down the housekeeping slide and hand it over to Casey.

>> CASEY OAKES: Hi, everyone. My name is Casey Oakes. My pronouns are he/him. I am a 30‑something gay male coming to you live from my apartment here in Washington, D.C.

I've got dark hair, glasses on, and I am sitting in my living room in front of my record player. And today we are listening to Darlene Love.

I am so excited to be here today. It looks like we've got hundreds of you in the Zoom room, where it happens to join this conversation about intersections between the LGBTQ+ community and the disability community. Without further ado, I do want to bring our panel into this discussion. I'm going to ask each of them to introduce themselves, do a visual description, and then we're going to dive into the conversation. I hope as we have this conversation today, you'll be popping questions into the Q&A function. We do want this to be as interactive as possible, so please join us in this conversation. So, with that, I'm going to turn it over to Ashley Brundage to introduce herself.

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Thanks so much, Casey. I am a middle‑aged, white woman with red hair, with, hopefully, a little bit of curl left at the bottom of it, and I'm coming to you live from New Orleans, or New Orleans, for the Society of Human Resources Management Conference, in a hotel room, sitting in a chair. And I am excited to represent my company, Empowering Differences, a dual certified with a DOBE and the Disability Owned Business Enterprise and the LGBT Business Enterprise Certification from the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce.

And I do consulting. I do leadership development programming. And I help people understand empowerment better as a foundational construct to help them grow and learn, and that's a little bit about me.

>> CASEY OAKES: Thanks so much, Ashley. Oh, so sorry, I got distracted during your introduction. I was reading this amazing book by an author who has your same name, "Empowering Differences." What a coincidence! Meg, would you mind introducing yourself?

>> MEG GROW: Absolutely. Thank you, Casey. So, my name is Meg Grow. My pronouns are they/them. I am a nonbinary lesbian, which makes some folks' brains break, but that's where we are. I identify as neurodivergent. I have ADHD. I am a corporate citizen at Boston Scientific, where I am a Senior Consultant in our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion group. And I am coming to you today from the ancestral lands of the Ojebway and Dakota Peoples, which is currently known as Minneapolis, Minnesota.

My physical description: I am a fluffy Caucasian person with short, blond hair, although it looks a little brown today for some reason, and some nice horn‑rim glasses.

>> CASEY OAKES: Thank you so much, Meg! Welcome, welcome. Before I introduce our next panelist, I do want to hold up this other ‑‑ I'm just surrounded by books today. "Our Gay History in the 50 States" by someone who shares the name of our next panelists, Zaylore Stout. Zaylore, do you want to introduce yourself?

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: Absolutely. My name is Zaylore Stout. I use he/him pronouns. I'm an attorney at my law firm, Zaylore Stout and Associates. We have locations also in Pasadena, California. My identity includes being a black man. I have short hair, almost a fade. I need to get another haircut. I have a beard that I just trimmed up today. Blue dress shirt with a bow tie. I was born with disabilities to both my hands and my feet. My law firm is triple certified as a minority, LGBTQ+, as well as disabled certified business. And I'm physically located in Minneapolis.

I have a virtual background with me here today with the book "Our Gay History in 50 States," as well as the shell company that I hired that covers my speaking engagements as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as it relates to LGBT history and the like. So, thank you so much for having me today.

>> CASEY OAKES: Thank you all for those wonderful introductions. So, to start the conversation today, we're going to get into the work. We're going to get into the intersection. But I wanted to center today's conversation, or start it, on the joy. It is Pride Month, which to me is centered around joy and productivity to recharge and re‑engage in this work. So, I thought we could just start with everyone sharing maybe one of their favorite Pride memories. And Ashley, I'll start with you.

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Well, I would definitely have to say having an opportunity to be a Grand Marshal in a Pride parade was pretty cool. And the best part about that was, one of my sons decided to be in the car, sitting on the back of the car with me. And I'm so fortunate to have two children, Bryce and Blake ‑‑ they are my actionable allies that are always there building up compassion, support, trust, and understanding. And that's how I gained lots of empowerment was through their allyship. And so, that memory is probably the best, but there is a lot of other really fun ones, like World Pride and whatnot, in 2019 in New York. But definitely having my son there with me was the highlight.

>> CASEY OAKES: Meg?

>> MEG GROW: So, um, yeah. I have a bit of anxiety, so I actually don't like going to Pride, per se. Awkward! But my favorite Pride spirit moment is from when my kiddo was in first grade. And she came home saying, "so‑and‑so says I have two moms. So‑and‑so says I have two moms. I don't have two moms. I have a mom and a poppy." And I'm like, "yeah, you stand up for that." But then, a little bit later, it got into her head that she had two moms. And I was like, okay, well, then, who's your other mom? Expecting her to say me. And at the time, we had one of our friends living with us while they were going to university, and that person also identified as nonbinary. And my kiddo was like, "Kai. Kai's my other mom." "And who am I?" "Poppy." "All right, kid, good job."

>> CASEY OAKES: That's outstanding. Zaylore?

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: I love that story, Meg. For me, I'm from southern California, so I have attended a zillion Prides. We have so many down there. My first Pride was Long Beach Pride, which is the POC Pride in southern California, so that's always going to be one really memorable for me. But with this question with regards to the biggest moment I guess would be my first time attending San Francisco Pride, because it was the same time that the marriage equality decision came out from United States Supreme Court, and the city just exploded. Like, San Francisco Pride is already a big deal because the whole city celebrates it, which is one of the reasons why I like some of my favorite prides are the prides that are in downtowns, in big cities, where you can't go anywhere in the city without knowing that Pride is happening. And so, that would be my happy Pride moment, being able to celebrate with all my LGBTQ+ siblings in San Francisco to celebrate this very important moment.

>> CASEY OAKES: I have a similar one. I do love a big Pride festival, concert, a parade, but I don't know that anything will ever top for me the day that marriage equality came down. And being here in D.C. at a drag show and hearing that the White House was lit up in rainbow, and then having this pilgrimage from Town Dance Boutique here in D.C. down to the White House and getting to see it with our own eyes, not even really believing that it was true, that it wasn't photo‑shopped, until we got down there. And for me, that just cemented the decision and the embrace of the country, for that moment. And there's been struggles since, but that, you know, we belong here as LGBT people in this country, and we're welcome here, and even more than the words on the page, that visual to me kind of made me feel at home in my country in a way that I didn't realize I hadn't before. And so, but that's certainly mine.

I want to pivot a little bit to us in our business roles now. And Ashley and Zaylore, you're both certified LGBTEs and DOBEs as well. So, can you talk to me a little bit about why you decided to pursue those certifications and how that intersection or that duality of those certifications help in your businesses? Zaylore, I'll start with you to give Ashley a chance not to go first for once.

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: Hey, mix it up. We're good friends, so it's totally fine. For me, I was actually involved in my local LGBTQ+ Chamber when I was in law school. And so, it was a place for me to be able to build community with LGBT folks that are in business. And I don't necessarily think that that was necessarily something that was available for generations past, so I wanted to make sure that I was taking advantage of that, especially being here in Minneapolis, being new to the cities, trying to find my footing and my space in my community. And so, it's Quorum, Twin Cities Quorum, our LGBT chamber here. Been involved with them for a long time. Yay, Quorum! I know. Now I'm on the board at the LGBT Chamber, so I've grown up a bit from that perspective. But finding the importance and the relevance and the support that can be provided by the local chambers as well as the broader NGLCC community has been spectacular and amazing. So, I remember when they encouraged me to attend my first conference. I know it's coming back to Vegas this year, so it will be full circle for me, because Vegas was my first conference before everything changed with COVID.

But interestingly enough, for me, you know, getting my LGBTBE certification first, as opposed to getting my NMSDC, minority certification, or my disability certification first was, because you know, especially at the time, I mean, marriage equality and gay rights and the don't ask don't tell and all these things were just so on the forefront that my most immediate community that was fully and completely supportive of who I was, in all aspects of my identity, was my LGBTQ+ community. And so, that's why I went there first, in order to be able to secure that certification, even knowing that that's not the certification that's most broadly accepted, but it's the community that I was more comfortable with and most accepted in, in all facets. So, for me, that was the most important one. And then I've subsequently secured the other certifications after.

>> CASEY OAKES: Ashley?

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Yeah. I have, like, a longstanding relationship with the NGLCC, so I've worn a lot of hats. I mean, I'm not wearing any hats today, but I just think about the fact that I ran the LGBT Chamber for five years in Tampa. And that was my first kind of introduction into the affiliate chamber council. And then I really worked hard to help that chamber grow. And now they have a full‑time person and they have a scholarship foundation. It's kind of neat to see all the things that you had as ideas, as a volunteer, and now there's actually people running it, which is really cool. But then I was a corporate partner for a number of years representing PNC Bank. And now I get to sit on the other side of the journey, being a certified supplier, running my own company. It's really almost kind of like, sometimes I have to pinch myself and think about, wow, I've, like, literally moved across all of the different stakeholder groups.

But really, the one thing that's the same across all of these advocacy organizations that do supplier diversity is empowerment. Empowerment is what brings them all together. It's how we actually provide support to community members, and that's why organizations do that work and support the advocacy organizations. And then, that's why suppliers want to be involved, because they want to gain confidence and gain the skills necessary to be involved.

And then you want to be able to have the power, which is some sort of treasured or measured resource, and that's empowerment. So, to me, it was kind of that process. So, I went LGBT first because I was so connected into that network, that if I didn't get that certification first, I probably would have had my hand slapped, so I just ‑‑ but it's all part of the process, and I'm excited to be here and celebrate all of my authenticity.

>> CASEY OAKES: That's fantastic. And I see some great questions coming into the chat, so I'm going to do some housekeeping. Meg, there is one. People want to know what the name of your book is going to be when you ultimately write it, so I'll let you doodle on that for a moment.

But I recognize that a lot of our audience might be from employee resource groups or parts of the corporation who are maybe a little less familiar with supplier diversity, and so, just want to kind of level‑set that right now we've been talking a little bit about a supplier diversity certification that Disability:IN offers and some other organizations offer as well to help businesses that are owned by disability‑owned businesses or other diverse groups, such as LGBT, women‑owned, minority‑owned. Essentially, create connections into corporations.

Corporate supply chains have a lot of biases that sometimes are merited towards incumbency or scale, but what we found over time is that those biases disproportionately affect people from underutilized groups, like people with disabilities, like LGBT people. And so, supplier diversity programs and these certifications are a way to counterbalance those biases and create pathways into a corporate supply chain.

And so, when GSK or Boston Scientific are purchasing goods and services, we're intentionally trying to bring in folks like Zaylore and Ashley to pitch us and sell us those services.

So, that's a little background there. Meg, I'm going to come to you with this next question, but we are going to go around the bend on this little bit. So, certification for Ashley and Zaylore was an opportunity to come out and embrace their identity in their work, in their supply chain. But one of the interesting intersections in the disability community and the LGBT community is that there is often a choice that needs to be made every day about how out to be and when to come out. So, can you talk a little bit about how you balance those decisions on a daily basis and how they might differ with your LGBT identity versus your identity as a person with disabilities?

>> MEG GROW: Yeah. That's a fantastic question, Casey, especially because I have a non‑apparent disability as well, right? So, both of them kind of simmer below the surface, and it's up to me on what I share and in what environment.

The fact that I have a woman partner, right, that is something that very early on I didn't want to hide, right? That is my family. So, in terms of my work world, my work self, I've always been out, just in respect to her. That was the easiest decision to make of all of that.

I think the next layer was the pronouns and coming out with my gender identity, which, you know, I've been with Boston Scientific for nearly 16 years now. And for the vast majority of the time, I used she/her pronouns. I have a visibly female type‑shaped body, but that's not my gender, right? But I didn't really have the words when I started at the company, and there wasn't the climate when I started at the company to lead with that identity.

And so, actually, leveraged the pandemic, when we all started living in these little boxes, and had our names handily right below with pronouns next to them, to start having those conversations and being more authentic about who I am. And please, for the love, stop calling me a lady. Because it's just not me. So, that was kind of a ‑‑ I'm not necessarily a situational person with that identity either, right? So, those are for me very much parts of me that I just needed to live.

The ADHD is the part where I kind of toggled the disclosure and the coming out, because it's not apparent. Sometimes I use it as a tool when I'm facilitating a session. I'm using that as an example of the difference. That's very palatable and easy for folks to understand. In the workplace, it's hard because there's stigma around having ADHD. It's one of the neurodivergences that has probably the most stigma in the workplace.

And so, on one hand, I want to be visible for folks who are coming up behind me, but on the other hand, I still have that need to not always be up front about it, you know, if it's not going to add to the situation. So, that's probably the one area of my life where I still decide whether I'm going to disclose or not.

>> CASEY OAKES: And can I ask, is there something that people do in a room or in an environment that makes it more comfortable to toggle that on, or that disclosure on?

>> MEG GROW: Yeah. I think that gets us kind of to the idea of psychological safety that a lot of folks talk about right now, which is such a layered process for individuals that live in both the disability and the LGBTQ community, you learn to read between the lines and look for signs and signals of body language, what have you, you know. For those of us who are more in the gender‑expansive area of life, you look at the body language first. How comfortable are they just with you being there? And then for me, especially with the neurodiversity, it's really just kind of a how much do you share of your own life? How close are we getting? Yeah.

>> CASEY OAKES: We're going to come back to you on this psychological safety thing, because I do want to tie it to self‑ID in a bit, but I want to get to Ashley and Zaylore's personal feelings of coming out and how to navigate that as well. Ashley, can you speak to this?

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Yeah. Honestly, I process of coming out for me, it was kind of a life‑and‑death scenario. I mean, honestly, I think about ‑‑ you know, some people who may not be educated about what it's like to navigate being trans ‑‑ and I am very open about the fact that I transitioned my gender ‑‑ but it wasn't really a choice. The other choice was to not live. I mean, that's the severity of this. It's not a, oh, it's a feel‑good thing. No, it's not a narcissistic thing. It's a, I just need to be able to be me and be able to live. It's that serious.

But some of the things that I do around this when to disclose or when not to disclose ‑‑ obviously, this links back to self‑ID, as we're going to talk about that ‑‑ but I say that I transitioned my gender only one time, but I changed the amounts of languages that I try to speak ‑‑ I try to add new words to all the languages, whatever culture I go to. I've probably done that four different times. Changed my social economic class five times. I've come out around my neurodivergent disability, and I share that, so I changed that multiple times, change my education every single moment of every single day. I change my age every single second on this planet, because I certainly haven't figured out how to stop the aging process from happening. So, you have to think about this process of all of the things that make you who you are as an opportunity to leverage that difference to impact change. That's what my program does.

And Meg mentioned it earlier, around leveraging that moment to show the pronouns. And that's exactly what that process was. There's empowerment embedded in that decision to showcase who you are, so that, that way, somebody else who's coming from behind you has an opportunity to see you and know that you are there and you are valid and that you can drive the impact, too.

>> CASEY OAKES: Outstanding. Zaylore?

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: Yeah, well, I mean, there's, like, so many ways and different opportunities to come out. I mean, for me, in my life, there's been very few folks that look like me and have my lived experience in the spaces that I've been in. I grew up in Orange County, in the '80s, so Gen X! Yay, Gen X! But there never has been, still isn't a critical mass of black people there, so I was always different from that perspective. And then knowing you were LGBT at a young age and not having anybody out or any adults out in your community to be able to see that this is a life that you can live happily, safely, you know, in your community. And then having, you know, these disabilities to my hands and my feet. So, interestingly enough, my first grade teacher didn't know that I had physical disabilities to my hands until my third or fourth grade teacher told him. And so, you know, I think ‑‑

I remember being an adult and realizing that I would hold glasses a certain way so that people wouldn't see my hands. And it took conscious effort to be like, you know, you be you. You know, most folks don't even know, recognize or see it, and if they do and they have a problem with it, who cares? But you know, it's challenging, you know, having a disability, because sometimes you feel deficient, and society makes you feel as if you're deficient. And so, it's being able to learn to love yourself first and then just not worry about everything else. And strangely enough, going through the process of, you know, learning to love myself more and from that perspective, and you know, coming to find out that other folks don't really find it to be that big of a deal, even folks that you're romantically ‑‑ you know, have a romantic interest in and stuff. So, that's been kind of an amazing evolution.

And so, having the opportunity to be able to be in spaces like this, where folks can see that, hey, you know, there's representation there as it relates to diverse folks. But then coming out as a member of the LGBT community. You know, I've always lived my life openly and out, you know. But then at work, there's times where people are talking about, over the weekend what they did with their significant others, and we learn really easily, quickly in regards to how to speak in codes, and you know, not disclose too much information because you're not sure if, you know, it's safe to come out to the people that you work with. Luckily, I've always lived in states where there have been protections from a state perspective, based on sexual orientation and gender identity. But we have almost 500 people on this Zoom, and you know, that wasn't the case everywhere. And yes, there's a Supreme Court decision that is currently on the books in regards to protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace, but you know, that could come into question soon. And if it falls back to the states, we know ‑‑ I know Casey, you were working on this with NGLCC ‑‑ but there are so many states where those protections weren't there, and it's possible that we would, unfortunately, possibly revert back to that. And so, it's always a challenge from that perspective.

And what I always say, especially with National Coming Out Day when it comes around, is you know, we love our siblings that aren't out. There's reasons why people aren't out, and it's not always safe for folks to be out, whether it be as it relates to the LGBT status, whether it be as it relates to their disability status, anything like that. And so, it's all about being able to be there and support them, so I love that we have diversity as it relates to different disabilities here so that people can see that the disability community is just as diverse as the LGBT community, which is just as diverse as all of the other communities that we have.

>> CASEY OAKES: Incredibly well said. I'll just speak to my own experience for a little bit, transitioning from an LGBT organization to a corporate environment. I recognized pretty quickly that it was harder to find LGBT people, I mean, in general. I met ‑‑ I mentioned to my boss, six months in, I had no idea who the most senior LGBT person in my company was, and that was, you know, concerning. So, I made a very conscious decision in that when we were back physically at the office to try and make my space a little bit more visibly gay.

I put up a rainbow flag that I ironed. But more importantly ‑‑ or more significantly, I started just to, like, bring the parts of my identity that are LGBT to meetings in various, you know, subtle, but also visible ways. Like, I brought a Britney Spears mug to meetings with senior leaders, and just anywhere I went throughout the building, right? And that's a very visible sign to people who know that I'm a member of the community and that it might be safe to have some of those conversations.

But you know, if I was, you know ‑‑ I'm from New Jersey as well. I've got some Bruce Springsteen mugs, and I would never think twice about bringing those into those spaces. And so, I shouldn't think twice about bringing the Britney Spears mug or the Carly Rae Jepsen mug into those spaces as well. And I'm as privileged as an LGBT in a corporate environment can get. I'm a white male and I'm working in a diversity function where my identity actually helps the work. And so, I needed to own that kind of privilege and create space around me. And so, that's how I navigated that environment a little bit.

But Meg, I'm seeing a lot of questions for you in the chat. And so, I do want to get back to this psychological safe environment concept. But tie it to the differences between self‑ID versus self‑disclose. And can you talk a little bit about the nuances between those two things? And there's a lot of questions in the chat around getting to a place where you feel comfortable asking for an accommodation. So, can you walk us through maybe your experience, or you know, expertise as far as navigating that journey?

>> MEG GROW: Absolutely, yeah. It's a great question. So, let's start with self‑disclose versus self‑ID. With self‑ID, this is typically in a corporate environment going to be a way to be counted for your company's HR function or diversity organization, however you're structured, to understand how many people in the disability community or in the LGBTQ+ community work here, right? Because they're not part of the standard federally mandated ‑‑ well, disability we do need to count now, but ‑‑ yay! But they're not on those standard questions of demographics when we hire someone in, right? In America, especially, we ask about gender, which is fraught, because usually it then says female and male. And then there's, you know, the race and ethnicity questions. There might be a question about veteran status. But that's not the whole diversity, you know, span of dimensions. We know that. So, self‑ID campaigns are really important to take part in. They're anonymous, typically. They should be anonymous, so that you can just literally be counted.

And then, we can set goals on improving representation. So you know, at Boston Scientific, for the last few years we've had great goals around women in leadership and multicultural individuals in leadership, but because we haven't had a repeated self‑ID campaign, until now, we haven't been able to set those goals for representation and driving behaviors that then allow us to meet those goals. So, that's self‑ID. That's, in my mind, a very safe action to take, right, because it should be anonymous.

Self‑disclosure, that's where you open up about who you are to those around you. Right? That's the coming out that we're talking about. And from both an LGBTQ+ community and a disability community, there's certain ‑‑ you have to evaluate the safety and stigma associated with who you disclose to. You also have to understand why you might want or need to disclose.

We kind of talked about our coming‑out stories and our disclosure stories a little bit as well. And it really is a personal decision. I can't advise anybody. You need to have that safety and know that on the other end there is going to be someone who is not going to bring a judgment to you, or if they are, that you don't care anymore about their judgment, right?

I'm in my 40s, and there was a point where I just stopped worrying about what other people thought about especially my sexuality and my gender. It's just who I am. And you know, to Ashley's point earlier, if I didn't acknowledge that, the cognitive dissidence of having that, the depression gets so heavy that you would just break underneath it.

With disability, to a certain extent, that same situation may happen, right? I have ADHD. It affects how I communicate. For years, my biggest constructive feedback on those lovely annual reviews was communication. And that I was speaking over people too much or that I didn't create a linear enough explanation to the ideas that I was having, right? Well, that's ADHD communication, though. So, I'm being told to mask. Is that okay? No, that's not okay either.

So, really, with disclosing a disability, it becomes, what is the impact to you as an individual that you need to adjust by disclosing? That's kind of the guidance, right? And the same is with LGBT, right, that what is the impact to you? For me, it was that, you know, the alphabet soup identity, it was that cognitive dissidence. With disability, it may be, can I literally do my job or not?

And in those cases, if you don't have the psychological safety with your direct supervisor and you need an accommodation, that's what HR is for. Right? You reach out to them first and you say, "This is my situation. I need help doing this." And you don't even have to talk about why in the United States, right? You just have to say, this is the piece that I need help with. Some may ask for some medical documentation, and in certain cases, you might have to go a little bit further down that road, but you know, you don't ‑‑ the idea of ADA is that you don't have to disclose, necessarily. You have to talk about what you need.

So, I would say, even if you don't have the psychological safety to ask for what you need to do your job, with your supervisor, you need to go to HR. There might be an employee relations function. That might be your door to the accommodations process. But do not let that be a barrier to seeking that out.

>> CASEY OAKES: Awesome. Ashley, I see you have a follow‑up?

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Yeah, I 100% agree, but I also want to add like the framing around this disclosure moment. Like, think about that when you have that moment, to bring as much empowerment with you in that setting, and the "power" part of empowerment is that number or that data that's going to, potentially, hopefully, open up someone else's eyes when you're communicating what's going on with you or what is this thing that makes you who you are. And I love the economic impact study reports, right, the NGLCC Economic Report, right, the $1.7 trillion buying power of the LGBT business community, right? That sometimes will wake someone up, you know, to the fact that there's an economic engine in the fact of having someone like you on the team. I think that could be also extremely powerful, when you link that to who you are.

And then also, the other piece is the authority part, which is that emotional confidence, skill‑building item that's going to hopefully help you remove the barrier, because a lot of times, we put barriers into what we can and can't do, and that's all in kind of how we internalize some of this.

Yes, I'm not saying that you're going to always, you know, be able to go through or not or change someone's mind or not, but as long as you know what you can do and you have that confidence to fight against it, I think that that's going to give you more positive vibes; it's going to change the way that you start thinking about who you are and all your differences.

>> CASEY OAKES: Ashley, I'm going to stay with you, because I think this is a great opportunity for a QVC moment. I know your company, "Empowering Differences," does a lot of work with HR teams, employee resource groups, on these subjects. Can you talk about the corporate trainings you do and how you work with companies? And Zaylore, I'll come to you as well.

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Yeah. Honestly, so, I created a four‑step empowerment process called Empowering Differences. And so, Step 1 is to look at you, right? So, you are the only one that will decipher if something is empowering or not. And that begins by doing a holistic self‑assessment. You can download the self‑assessment right from my website at empoweringdifferences.com. Click on the assessment button. That's going to help you in this process.

But then, connect it to other people, which is Step 2: Getting to know others. That's where we learn about differences. So, my organization does assessments, but we also do training to center people to learn about all these differences, because there's an empowerment path to driving empowerment faster through each of the ten differences that my team studies.

And then we build strategy for consulting, which is Step 3 of the empowerment journey. And then the last step is to take those empowering actions. So, there are leadership actions. At the end of the day, DE&I, or diversity, equity, and inclusion, is driven through the actions of people. That's what can make it an "empowering" action, is when you can communicate exactly what the authority that's being driven ‑‑ that's, remember, that skill‑building ‑‑ and then what does the power that's being driven from the work that you're doing for your inclusion group or your employee resource group. Those items that are done all have a measure of empowerment. And if every person who's involved in that knows what they are, then that's a way to drive leadership actions.

So, I do leadership development as well, and that's pretty much the framework of my company, but I also do events, and I build connection with other humans through empowerment.

>> CASEY OAKES: That's awesome. So, if or your ERG or your company is interested in engaging Ashley on some of this work, her link is in the chat. Zaylore, you are a lawyer, an author, a historian, but you also do a lot of these corporate trainings as well. Can you talk a little bit about how you engage in the corporate sphere?

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: Yeah. It's a bunch of different areas. I mean, a lot of times, we have to have a debriefing moment beforehand to see, what is it that you want me to talk about, because I can speak as it relates to the intersectionality between the LGBT rights movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Strangely enough, the Veterans Administration for Washington State wanted me to speak during Women's History Month, so I spoke in regards to the connection between the LGBT rights movement and the women's rights movement and the challenges that relate there, not only historically, but through today, especially as it relates to gender and accepting folks that are transgender and nonbinary within their circles and their spaces.

But then from a legal perspective, there's, my practice is mainly in relation to the aspect of employment law, but you know, I also serve on the Board for Fair Vote Minnesota and I'm concerned about voting rights and expanding and broadening access to this thing that we call democracy here and the experiment that we have. So, there's many different ways and many different spaces, whether it be in the non‑profit sphere and space and working on DE&I efforts. I've spoken many times ‑‑ and I believe Ashley has as well ‑‑ at the Forum on Workplace Inclusion, the world's largest diversity, equity, and inclusion conference that happens right here in Minnesota. So, that's the great part about intersectionality, is that you know, you can get these different perspectives from folks that have these different intersections as it relates to their identities and get different perspectives as it relates to issues and things that they may have had lots ‑‑ done lots of research on but never had the opportunity to speak with somebody with a different diverse kind of perspective and point of view, even when looking at the same set of facts.

And so, real quick in regards to ‑‑ I love all this HR speak and talk, because I served as an outsource HR consultant for 12 years before going to law school. So, it's been over 20 years that I've been in the employment law space and HR employment law space as a senior human resource certified professional as well.

I really, really encourage folks to go to HR. I know that a lot of times that I've spoken to folks and told them that I work in HR, they're like, "Oh, so you work for the man. You're the bad guy." But what I would say is that, more often than not, HR is the one that's advising managers to abide by the law, right, to do the right thing, to provide them with access and knowledge and experience as it relates to that, because, sadly, a lot of times, managers are promoted from within, and they don't necessarily have the knowledge skill set to be able to manage folks, so they need folks like HR to be able to provide them with that insight and that guidance.

So, just like Meg said, going to HR and letting them know if you're having challenges at work, especially as it relates to a disability, you know, there is an aspect, an element called the reasonable accommodation that could come out, that could come forward that they could try to find ways to be able to assist you in regards to your work. And so, if they don't know, there's not much the employer can do about it. And so, that's why it's really important that if those things do come up, that you're having that essential discussion and dialogue with HR, right? They're the ones best suited to know the obligations that they have and options available to be able assist you. Your frontline manager may not necessarily have that skill set. So, my recommendation would be go to HR and let HR speak to your manager in regards to what needs to happen from that perspective.

>> CASEY OAKES: Amazing advice. I do ‑‑ Zaylore, I'm going to stay with you, because we're kind of focused in on the intersection between the LGBT and the disability community, but there's a great question here in the Q&A that I want to send your way. Just talking about the intersection between African‑American identities in that community and the disability community. Our questioner wants to know kind of what you see happening in African‑American circles around disability inclusion and elevating disabled African‑American voices within the community at sororities, HBCUs, other black leadership groups, and kind of what you would like to see more of or are working to make happen.

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: This is an exceptional question. We have 61 million people here in the United States, according to the CDC that are folks living with disabilities. I think it's the highest number that we've ever had in our country's history, you know, mainly because we have so many different generations living together and living longer and all of these different types of things.

And so, as we get older, you know, our bodies change and things happen. And what I would say is, is that, you know, I don't necessarily know if the numbers are higher for folks within the black community that have disabilities. But I think across the board, we need broader visibility in regards to folks with disabilities. If we look at the history of legal access to bodily autonomy here in the United States as it relates to disability, it's very challenging and hard to grapple with type of history and story, right? There were times in our country's history where we could just send folks with disabilities away, and they didn't have any say in regards to what was able to happen to themselves and their bodies. So, I think having more visibility in regards to folks with disabilities ‑‑ that's why I love, love, love the fact that Biden has been ‑‑ President Biden has been very forthcoming in regards to, you know, his disability and uplifting folks within the Biden Administration as it relates to folks with disabilities as well.

I think one of his highest ranking LGBT folks is a gentleman with disabilities. I think his last name is Greer, Reggie Greer, if my memory serves me correct. And so, the more that we have situations like this where there's broader visibility across the board and showing the full diversity of folks that we have within the disability community is what will make all the difference as well. And so, even within smaller communities, the black community, we need to make sure that we're uplifting folks from a broader perspective as well.

And one thing that I found that has generally been helpful across the board, is that if you're part of a marginalized group, more often than not, you can empathize with folks that are also members of other marginalized groups. Now, I'm not saying that that happens all the time, right, but that's a way to be able to, I think, leverage some of those opportunities for broader acceptance and inclusion.

>> CASEY OAKES: Outstanding. Meg, I'm going to come to you. We've got a lot of folks on the call from employee resource groups. And in my experience, there are some great examples of ERGs kind of working across silos. But oftentimes, ERGs can stay siloed ‑‑ this is the LGBT ERG, this is the disability ERG, et cetera. Do you have any examples from Boston Scientific or out in the world, bridging the gap between those and bringing intersectionality into those spaces?

>> MEG GROW: Absolutely, yeah. And I think that's the thing that I'm most proud of with my company right now is that this year, I don't think I've seen a single event that wasn't co‑sponsored by two different ERGs. You know, when we move through Black History Month, Women's History Month, et cetera, it has always been, like our Black ERG and our, you know, lead ERG. And so, with that, the combinations, the intersectionalities that we see ‑‑ and I want to kind of frame this primarily on the disability community, because that's our commonality primarily on this call, right, is the mental health piece is a very low barrier to entry conversation to have, if you've already started talking about mental health in your organization.

The different impacts, how does ‑‑ what are the different needs? The stigma around mental health is very different for the black community, for the Pacific east Asian community, et cetera, right? The stigma around disability, if we look at kind of that Pacific East Asian culture ‑‑ those cultures tend to have a much stronger stigma around disability than American culture does. And so, really talking about that intercultural intersection, starting with mental health and then broadening it out.

Some other examples. We've done interactions with PTSD and our veterans organization. And I want to take a step away from mental health because I know that's not all we've done, but it does sound like that's all we've done. But we have talked more about the broader intersection between disability and culture, right, so again, going back to that Pacific East Asian as one of the examples that we had internally.

Broadly, for LGBTQ+, we have gone into the black transgender experience and the heavy, heavyweight that is associated with that specific intersection, right? We spent an entire session just on that one intersection. We had intersectionality event recently on the black experience versus the Pacific East Asian experience, right, that model minority myth. That was a fantastic session as well.

So, it's really looking at the places where, even if the ‑‑ where the intersection is sometimes painful, right? And digging into why and what we can do to lift that situation, right? LGBTQ community, we don't do a great job with our black and brown brothers and sisters and they/thems. We don't! And so, having conversations about that is a really great place to start.

>> CASEY OAKES: So, we have a little less than ten minutes left. I'm going to acknowledge there's a lot of questions in the chat that we're not going to get to, and I apologize. A lot of them are on navigating HR and accommodations. I think we're going to ask Disability:IN to maybe bring some more of that content your way outside of this session, maybe another webinar. But I want to kind of acknowledge this dicey political climate that we are in, as respect to LGBT rights, even getting the Americans with Disabilities Act sometimes reauthorized sometimes seems like a lift in Congress these days.

Ashley, I'm going to start the question with you, because we have a person in the chat who's moving to Florida and is looking for a way to kind of be a civically minded activist and ally to the LGBTQ+ community as they become a Florida resident and see if they have any tips for you. Then we'll go to Zaylore and Meg to see how they're thinking of politics these days and activism, both as an individual citizen, but also as a steward of their corporation as well.

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Yeah. I mean, I just think my unpopular opinion in this politics ‑‑ you know, earlier, we were talking about greatest Pride moment, and that Pride parade that I was in the parade was the week of the marriage equality decision and Overheld versus Hodges, but I think marriage equality is the worst thing that ever happened to the LGBTQ+ community. That's my unpopular opinion. And the reason that I say that is because it was our sexiest product, and we literally, basically, kind of lost it, because we kind of rested on our laurels, and it caused us to kind of take a moment ‑‑ obviously, celebrate a win ‑‑ but as we've seen, judicial wins are a lot different than legislative wins. And we're playing defense instead of offense. We have our greatest asset of the Equality Act. It's just sitting there. It's not going to get voted on in the Senate because it does not have enough votes. And that's a scary thing, to know that there's legislation out there that could actually help people. So, I think you have to rally. We have to stand up. We have to march. We have to combine the intersection of advocacy for people of color, for human rights, for bodily protections, for women's rights, for those who ‑‑ you name it. If we package everybody together and we start galvanizing each other, I don't think that there's anyone that can in essence consciously vote against any one of our differences.

But specifically in Florida, you have to stand up and you have to say something. You need to be seen. You need to be involved in the advocacy organizations. You need to go to lobby days every year and quality Florida hosts lobby days. It's a great time. You get to walk around the halls and meet the people who are legislating. Sometimes it's for you, sometimes it's against you. But if you don't be seen, then you're going to be on the menu.

>> CASEY OAKES: Zaylore?

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: Absolutely. And don't forget, local, local, local, local, right? So, there's school boards, there's city councils. All of that kind of stuff makes a difference as well.

So, for example, here in Minnesota, you know, there were two of our largest school districts had gender‑inclusive policies on the books, right? What the school's supposed to do as it relates to transgender and gender nonbinary students, all in writing, exactly what they're supposed to do. But none of the suburbs did. And there were families advocating for this for years in St. Louis Park, in the city where I lived in, and there was no traction. So, I'm like, wait a minute, I'm an attorney. I have a skill set. I do employment law, I don't do this work, but you can lobby and use the advocacy skill sets to be able to assist your community in that way. That's exactly what we were able to do. We weren't able to get the school board to vote in our favor as it relates to that. So, when the elections came, we recruited candidates, we got them elected, and we got the gender inclusion policy in St. Louis Park, which is the first suburb in our state in order to be able to do that, and that was because the community was vested, the community cared, and the community showed up, just like Ashley said. So, showing up makes all the difference. Sometimes it doesn't take that many people, right?

And I can tell you, you know, school board meetings ‑‑ at least before the critical race theory debates and all that kind of stuff ‑‑ weren't all that sexy, right? They're late at night. They're super boring. But you know, it's about people being there for the kids. And so, it's the folks that weren't able to be there for us when we were growing up in the '80s because they were challenged, you know, had different life challenges than we have today. And it's showing up for them. So, it's running for offices, showing up for those local races as well, not just your state, making sure that you're voting in regards to the midterms, which is essential and crucial. Because again, these are the pipelines in regards to who gets ‑‑ who's going to be your Secretary of State, your governor, all those different types of things, because governors in the state legislatures have incredible amount of power, right? Because if marriage equality falls, it's going to fall back onto the states. And so, you know, just like conversion therapy, state issue, right? All of these things fall to the local levels. And so, we need to be involved from a local all the way up to the federal level as it relates to this.

>> CASEY OAKES: In the interests of time, I'm going to ask one final question to all three panelists. Allyship is, in my mind, a verb. So, as we kind of wrap up this conversation, I want you to give an action item to the folks in the audience about how they can be a good ally to the LGBTQ+ community, to the disability community, to underutilized communities. And Meg, I'll start with you.

>> MEG GROW: I need more time to think! So, I think there's a reason that we centered a lot of our conversation around the LGBTQ+ community and not as much on the disability community, and that is because allyship is about sharing the load. It is exhausting to have to do educating about various parts of your existence that are marginalized, right? And we've talked about intersectionality and how we have all these different parts. So, allyship for me is about understanding the experience so that you don't talk out of line and speaking up to those who are more similar to you than the other person when you see something going on, right? And speaking up literally in realtime, speaking up with your vote, speaking up with your social media content. It is doing the work of the folks who are already having to do more work just to exist.

>> CASEY OAKES: Ashley?

>> ASHLEY BRUNDAGE: Yeah, I would just say avoid backhanded compliments/tips. A lot of times, I show up in spaces and people are, "Oh, wow, you're really beautiful!" And yeah, that's nice to get that as a compliment, but how about that I'm a bad you‑know‑what business owner? That's the compliment I want. So, just be mindful how you do that and how you move about that and celebrate people's authenticity and identity.

>> CASEY OAKES: Zaylore, bring it home.

>> ZAYLORE STOUT: I'll bring it home. Recognize our existence, right? A lot of times, especially folks with disabilities, you know, go through the world and people divert their eyes from them, especially if they have an apparent disability. Acknowledge our existence. Say hello. Sometimes those are the simplest things to be able to let somebody ‑‑ you could be the one person that acknowledges somebody's existence that day, right? So, it's some of those simple things. I see somebody that's LGBT, I'm like, "Hey! How's it going? Have a good morning." Somebody? A wheelchair, somebody with crutches it doesn't matter. Recognize their existence, that they're people, that they're here and that you see them, you know, and build from there, and do everything that Meg says and do everything that Ashley says.

>> CASEY OAKES: Awesome, awesome, awesome. Well, thank you, everyone, for joining. The feedback in the chat has been amazing. You all represented these communities incredibly well, so thank you so much. I want to thank Disability:IN for having us and encourage everyone to attend the Disability:IN conference next month in Dallas, July 18th to 21st. I'll be in. I hope you're in, too. Thanks for joining us. Have a great day, everybody.

(Session concluded at 12:00 p.m. CT)

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