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## **Take Care with the Stories You Tell: Five Guidelines for Practicing Solidarity in University LGBTQIA+ Centers Inspired by Intersex and Trans Stories**

Quincy Meyers Dr.

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### **Take Care with the Stories You Tell: Five Guidelines for Practicing Solidarity in University LGBTQIA+ Centers Inspired by Intersex and Trans Stories**

Quincy Meyers  
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater  
[meyersa@uww.edu](mailto:meyersa@uww.edu)

#### **Abstract**

In this article I present guidelines for practicing solidarity in university LGBTQIA+ centers based on lessons learned from intersex and trans people's stories of their lived experiences. Specifically, I argue that intersex and trans stories challenge our assumptions regarding solidarity to reconsider the stories we tell ourselves and how we approach differences and commonalities. Based on these lessons, I present five guidelines for practicing solidarity in University LGBTQIA+ centers. More specifically, I articulate these guidelines drawing on intersex and trans writers such as Emi Koyama, Emily Quinn, Sean Saifa Wall as well as the work of the Intersex Justice Project, the literature on LGBTQIA+ university students, and the author's experiences working in the leadership of the Oregon State University Pride Center and the PB Poorman Pride Center. These practices are rooted in storytelling, an honoring of both commonalities and differences, intersectionality, and reciprocity.

*Keywords:* Higher education, intersectionality, intersex and trans, LGBTQIA+ universities centers, solidarity, student affairs

## **Take Care with the Stories You Tell: Five Guidelines for Practicing Solidarity in University LGBTQIA+ Centers Inspired by Intersex and Trans Stories**

### **Introduction: Story and Solidarity in Intersex Trans Perspective**

Stories hold power. Stories can wound or heal communities, escalate or deescalate conflicts, break or sustain relationships. It is then necessary for those of us who have been entrusted with leadership of social justice spaces to evaluate the stories we tell ourselves as they inform our work and communities. This includes leaders of LGBTQIA+ centers as we work to build coalitions across the varied communities we steward. As intersex genderqueer activist, many of the stories that inform my work come from intersex and trans communities and especially from those who are both. It is for this reason that I here examine the experiences of intersex and trans people with attention to their implications for practices in university LGBTQIA+ centers, especially where matters of solidarity are concerned. Specifically, I pose the following questions: What are the implications of the experiences of intersex and trans people for understanding solidarity? What can we learn from the lived experiences of intersex and trans people about solidarity and the role of stories in our work as leaders in university LGBTQIA+ centers and similar settings?

In response to these questions, I argue that intersex and trans stories challenge our assumptions regarding solidarity to reconsider the stories we tell ourselves and how we approach differences and commonalities in our social justice efforts. From this argument, I present five guidelines from my dissertation research on intersex-trans solidarity and narratives (Meyers, 2023) and apply them to work in University LGTQIA+ centers. To articulate these guidelines, I draw on the work of intersex and trans writers such as Emi Koyama, Emily Quinn, and Sean Saifa Wall as well as the work of the Intersex Justice Project, the literature on LGBTQIA+ university students, and my experiences working in the leadership of the Oregon State University Pride Center and the PB Poorman Pride Center at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. These guidelines include practices of careful storytelling, honoring both commonalities and differences, being mindful of and enacting intersectionality, and showing reciprocity. It all begins with a renewed consideration of the stories we tell.

## One. Take Care with the Stories You Tell.

As Thomas King (2003, p. 9) stated, “The truth about stories is, that’s all we are. You have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch for the stories that you are told.” Here King is referring to the significance of stories and storytelling in Indigenous contexts, but his words also have implications for other communities. From an intersex trans perspective, I would add: Take care with the stories you tell for they determine your possibilities for solidarity.

All too often members of intersex and trans communities have seen how false narratives about our identities and the identities of others disrupt and even foreclose possibilities for solidarity. An example of this can be seen in the impact the false story that intersex people will only achieve bodily autonomy through presenting a respectable (read: white, cisgender, heterosexual) gender presentation has had: it has led to the exclusion of trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming intersex people from some sectors of the intersex rights movement. At least one of the leaders of the Intersex Society of North America used this false respectability narrative to justify excluding Latine, nonbinary intersex activist Hida Viloría from being the organization’s educational programs materials, eventually making it clear she was doing this because of Viloría’s visibly gender fluid identity and expression. As Viloría recalls in their memoir *Born Both: An Intersex Life* of the last time this person, who they call Brittany, excluded them from being featured in ISNA’s outreach efforts, Brittany gave the following reason: “I don’t want parents thinking their children are going to want to be little girls one day and little boys the next” (Viloría, 2017, p. 134). In other words, according to the story Brittany was telling herself in this moment, visibly trans and nonbinary intersex activists like Viloría are threats to her movement’s goal of persuading parents to postpone medically unnecessary surgical interventions on their intersex children. This is because nonbinary intersex people like Viloría do not fit into a respectable image of normative gender the predominately white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class parents ISNA is trying to reach are presumed to want for their children. Therefore, Viloría and others like them need to be hidden. The inevitable breakdown in solidarity between the two over this action is swift, with Viloría leaving Britney’s office for good thinking, “With friends like you I don’t need enemies” (2022, p. 190). Viloría’s experience then is a cautionary tale of what can happen when those in the leadership of a movement internalize a problematic narrative about others who are different from them and demonstrates

the necessity to take with the stories one tells.

In the context of university LGBTQIA+ centers, taking care with stories we tell means being aware of the stories circulating in our space and their impacts—encouraging those stories that contribute to the community’s thriving and intervening when some stories take a problematic turn. Such practices are even more necessary for centers who explicitly incorporate storytelling in their educational efforts. This is the case for the PB Poorman Pride Center at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and their LGBTQ+ Peer Educator program. The LGBTQ+ Peer Educators are LGBTQ+ and allied students trained in social justice storytelling and LGBTQ+ advocacy to serve on interactive panels in classrooms and other educational environments. On these panels the peer educators and myself as the LGBTQ+ Coordinator blend national and local data with stories from their experiences as LGBTQ+ people and allies with the goal of educating others. Taking care with the stories we tell on these panels then is necessary given that they may be the first some in our audiences have heard directly from openly queer and trans individuals with proper contextualization and may significantly shape their understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people going forward. With all this in mind, I always encourage LGBTQ+ Peer Educators to carefully consider the audience and the wider context in which we are presenting when making storytelling decisions during panel preparations. I also ask them to consider how the stories we tell also have the potential to open or close opportunities for solidarity, especially when told in public. For instance, a story well told at the appropriate time and place to the right audience can have positive impacts such as lessening isolation and opening doors for further advocacy with others. This was true for intersex activist and speaker Emily Quinn, after hearing the stories of other intersex people for the first time (2015, p. 10). However, a story can have negative impacts if shared inappropriately such as violations of privacy and consent and breaks in trust that foreclose possibilities for solidarity.

Ultimately, the teller bears responsibility for ensuring they are telling the right story, at the right time, in the right place, and to the right people. In the words of Shawn Wilson (2008, p. 126), “As a storyteller, I am responsible for who I share information with, as well as ensuring that it is shared in an appropriate way, at the right place and time.” While Wilson is referring to the roles and responsibilities that come with storytelling in Indigenous research and communities in accordance with the respective cultural protocols therein, the responsibility to share information in the appropriate context does extend to those in other marginalized communities.

For instance, within intersex, trans, and queer communities, storytellers have a responsibility to share certain stories only in the right context as a matter of safety in a society in which failing to do so can be dangerous for those of marginalized genders and sexualities. It is for this reason that I include a discussion on the importance of considering one's responsibilities to all those involved in a story when training peer educators and reinforce this discussion later in panel preparations. In addition, I also remind them of the importance of not telling their stories alone—a lesson I have learned from experience.

## **Two. Center Our Own Stories and Tell Them Together.**

Given that cis-endosex medical and academic authorities tend to dominate the narrative of what it means to be intersex and/or trans within wider cultural discourses (Agarwal, 2018) and many intersex and trans people live in isolation (Costello, 2016), trans and intersex communities have learned how necessary it is for us tell our own stories and tell them together. This process can look like trans and intersex people sharing our stories with one another in support groups, in activist meetings, social events, or even through the process of sharing texts online or in libraries. Regardless of the method or setting, the act of collective storytelling gives communities members a chance to find one another, deconstruct problematic narratives from cissexist institutions, and collectively create new ones that are more conducive for solidarity. As intersex Quinn states of her experience meeting others like her and sharing intersex story for the first time in a support group, "Meeting people who understood what I have gone through has been one of the most important steps of my personal happiness and my growth as an individual. It has allowed me to really love and accept my body for what it is: Different, but good" (2015, p. 110). Not only was this a key step to Quinn's "personal happiness and growth" (2015, p. 110). It was also a key step in her journey into intersex activism speaking at medical symposia, LGBTQ+ groups, and medical students, and acting in solidarity with others (2015, p. 110). Thus, for intersex activists like Quinn, telling their story with others can help end isolation and be a first step in acting for their rights and the rights of others.

In the context of university LGBTQIA+ centers a similar process can occur in the everyday informal story exchanges that occur between students, faculty, staff, and other community members. It can also take place in a formal fashion such as a story circle. According to the contributors to the Student Experiences and Engagement at Oregon State University's

*Story Circles Toolkit* (Martinez et al., 2020, p. 4), “A story circle is a group of individuals sitting in a circle, sharing stories—usually from their own experience or imagination—focusing on a common theme.” Story circles then can be organized in a variety of ways and serve a wide range of purposes, making it an ideal format for resisting the isolation and distorted narratives often associated with oppression. In fact, marginalized communities have long utilized story circles to create new stories as well as to build community, create spaces for sharing and listening, and inspire further action. As the contributors to the *Story Circles Toolkit* (2020, p. 4) explain:

Story circles are often understood as deriving from Indigenous traditions. There are many variations. Theatermakers such as Roadside Theater and John O’Neal have been central in developing the practice for use in creating original performance and community telling and listening projects. Story Circles can become practical interventions for building shared power and moving to action after hearing themes from the stories and building relationships between individuals.

As such, story circles can be powerful for fostering solidarity through bringing community members together to challenge oppressive narratives and create new ones that foster better relationships.

A specific example of how all this can take place in story circles held in university LGBTQ+ centers and similar settings can be found in the trans storytelling circle series hosted by the Oregon State University Pride Center. In the winter of 2020, members of the undergraduate staff and I founded a series of trans story circles for students, faculty, staff, and community members. The story circles quickly became a space in which trans people were able to safely share their experiences related to a variety of topics ranging from coming out to questioning one’s gender identity during pandemic lockdowns. It also became a place where participants could challenge dominant, overly medicalized narratives of what it means to be trans. This challenge took the form of participants sharing their own stories of gender euphoria, intersectionality, and fluidity that many found to be more conducive to solidarity and building relationships than the way trans experiences are typically narrated for cisgender audiences in terms of gender dysphoria and medical intervention.

The exchanging of these stories extended into further action in the form of a collaboration between the Pride Center and the Oregon State University Libraries’ Special Collections and Archives Research Center based on a shared purpose of preserving institutional memory of trans people’s stories. In this collaboration the Pride Center organized and promoted

the story circles while the archives provided recording equipment, informed consent forms, and transcription services to preserve the stories shared therein. With each story circle the Pride Center staff made the decision to record through a process in which power was intentionally shared. Often the decision was made based on the topic and overall community needs at the time. For instance, during the pandemic lockdown many of the undergraduate student staff planning the trans story circles made the shared decision to put recorded session on hold. This decision was made based on their sense of preparedness to facilitate such a collaboration in a virtual space and on feedback from their peers stating what they needed during a pandemic lockdown was a space where they could simply be in community. The collaboration was later resumed after the pandemic when both the student facilitators and the community felt prepared to do so.

In addition to having these conversations, to better ensure shared power and consent on the part of all participants beyond the planning process, measures were taken during the promotion of trans story circles. Promotional materials for all recorded trans story circles always made the fact that the session would be recorded for the archives clear, allowing potential participant to make an informed decision regarding their attendance. Further, on the day of the event all participants were walked through an informed consent process with a form explaining the collaboration, how the session will be recorded, how that recording will be used, and their options in relation to privacy. Some chose to have both their name and story included in the transcript and recording, others chose to have their story shared but not their name, and some elected to have both their name and story edited out of the transcript and audio recording.

Today one can find transcripts of trans story circles in the Oregon State University Libraries Special Collections and Archives Research Center for the purposes of research, education, and history—evidence of how story circles “can become practical interventions for building shared power and moving to action” (Martinez et al., 2020, p. 4). Thus, when done from a place of shared power and with the informed consent of all involved, such collaborations resist the erasure of marginalized populations from university histories through preserving our stories in institutional memory.

As such, the trans story circles held at Oregon State University represent an example of the power that can be found in the act of telling our stories and telling them together. Such practices can be a practical intervention against erasure and act of institutional memory



preservation, as was the case when the story circles were preserved in collaboration with the Oregon State University Libraries Special Collections and Archives Research Center. Even when the collaboration was paused the trans story circles still represented an empowering, practical, and relational intervention that participants could continue into further action in other spaces in their lives and communities. Regardless of the setting or method, sharing our stories with one another allows us to resist the stigma contained within dominant narratives of what it means to be trans and the isolation many of us have experienced or are experiencing. All this opens more opportunities for solidarity across trans communities and beyond. It also allows us to gain better understandings of ourselves and one another beyond the cisgender gaze and more honestly evaluate our differences and commonalities.

### **Three. Honor Differences and Commonalities.**

Often solidarity is assumed to be based on commonality with the phrase “natural allies” being used to describe the relationship between communities who are understood to have a common cause. Emi Koyama (2001) observes in this phenomenon in the context of intersex, trans, and bisexual intercommunity relations, stating, “We frequently hear that bisexual, trans and intersex people are ‘natural allies’ because we all share victimization from the dualistic view of sex, gender and sexuality. We all share the sense of ‘minority within the minority.’” In other words, intersex, trans, and bisexual people are presumed to be aligned with one another due to their common experience of oppression on account of not fitting into dominant binaries of sex, gender, and sexuality. Other commonalities that are also raised when discussing potential alliances between intersex and trans communities include a shared concern for establishing bodily autonomy and eliminating stigma (Costello, 2016). For some this assumption of “natural allies” feels intuitive and one can see similar assumptions be made about other marginalized communities including women, people of color, disabled people, and LGBTQIA+ communities broadly. However, Koyama (2001) challenges this assumption, asserting:

But I am here to say that, no, we are not “natural allies.” Not only that, I’m willing to say that a bisexual person is not necessarily a ‘natural ally’ to other bisexual people, and a trans person is not necessarily a “natural ally” to other trans people, and an intersex person is not necessarily a “natural ally” other intersex people.

In other words, simply having an identity in common does not guarantee solidarity let alone

having common experiences and concerns. For instance, although both trans and intersex people experience victimization for not fitting into binary sex/gender expectations, being victimized on account of one's body not fitting into what is considered standard for either male and female and being victimized on account of one's gender identity differing from one's assigned sex are different in many ways. Not to mention the experiences of intersex trans people who face oppression on both counts and those who are marginalized due to other factors such as race, class, disability, etc. in addition to being trans and/or intersex.

For those of us who work in university LGBTQIA+ centers, a lesson to draw from all of this is: If there is to be solidarity, our differences must be honored as much as our commonalities. On a practical level, honoring our differences as much as our commonalities looks like resisting the assumption that just because the communities we seek to support share an experience of oppression means they will behave as “natural allies.” It means educating ourselves about the differences that exist among LGBTQIA+ communities and incorporating that education into our programming, advocacy, and training. It means modeling respectful curiosity regarding cross-community differences and humility when approaching them for students and staff in our spaces. It means allowing what we learn out of this respectful curiosity to tangibly change our relational practices for the better. In short, it means understanding that solidarity is a conscious effort and then participating in that effort. In Koyama's (2001) words, “If we are not ‘natural allies,’ then, we need to work at it in order to build alliances.” And this work of building alliances can start with learning to honor differences as much as commonalities with intersectionality in mind.

#### **Four. Mind the Intersections.**

Paying attention to the stories of intersex and trans people who are multiply marginalized, one notices the ways systems of privilege and oppression intersect. An example can be found in Sean Saifa Wall's autobiographical essay “Standing at the Intersections: Navigating This Life as a Black Intersex Man” in which he recounts his experiences navigating the intersections of racism and cis-heterosexism as a Black intersex man while medically and socially transitioning to live as a man. In Wall's (2015) own words:

Prior to transition, I felt scared and was often harassed and disrespected, and at times feared for my physical safety. Now my fear is something that stretches back to the annals

of American history from the time when Black men were once lynched with abandon until today we are imprisoned in disproportionate numbers.

Here one can see that the cissexism and anti-intersex oppression Wall experiences is racialized and the racism he experiences is sexed and gendered. Any movement that only addresses intersex issues or a movement that only addresses racial justice would not be adequate for meeting his needs. It is out of this need for a movement that can address his concerns as a Black intersex man and the concerns of others like him that Wall co-founded Intersex Justice Project, an intersex activist organization whose mission is to “end invasive and unnecessary surgeries on intersex youth by empowering intersex people of color as change-makers.” To achieve this the Intersex Justice Project is “committed to expanding the conversations about bodily integrity and autonomy so that our movement as intersex people of color can align with reproductive justice activists, the transgender community, those who are incarcerated, disabled, undocumented, and anyone else fighting for sovereignty of their bodies communities and sacred lands” (Long et al., 2016). Thus, Wall used his lived experiences at the intersections alongside other intersex people of color to inform his activism and create alliances with other movements and communities ranging from the reproductive justice movements to trans communities to movements for abolition and decolonization.

Yet, just as there are positive examples of solidarity based in stories like Wall’s, there are also examples of failure to account for how systems of oppression intersect and are experienced simultaneously leading to the foreclosure of potential opportunities for solidarity. Koyama witnessed this personally while visiting Yale in April 2001 at the invitation of Yale Women’s Center to speak about third wave feminism. During her time there “Yale University’s GLBT student organization had just held a week of events celebrating queer lives and issues. The problem was that almost all of the presenters featured had been white, with little multi-racial or multi-cultural representation, reinforcing the myth that all queers are white” (Koyama, 2001). In other words, the leaders of Yale University’s GLBT student organization were operating with a story what it means to be queer based in whiteness that poorly informed their advocacy decisions and reduced their opportunities for solidarity with queer people of color on their campus.

Thus, as we learn from the narrated experiences of intersex trans people of color and others who are multiply marginalized, failing to attend to the ways systems of privilege and oppression intersect creates barriers to solidarity while doing is a necessary part of solidarity. To

borrow a metaphor from Kimberlé Crenshaw's discussion on Black women's simultaneous experiences of sexism and racism (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149), we must mind the intersections. For trans and intersex communities minding these intersections means recognizing how cissexism and anti-intersex oppression intersect with other systems of oppression and building coalitions with other social justice movements, as organizations like Intersex Justice Project (Intersex Justice Project, n.d.) do as a central part of their mission. For those working in university LGBTQIA+ centers minding the intersections means ensuring the narratives we are telling ourselves about what it means to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, or any of the identities represented in the acronym accurately reflect the multiple and intersecting identities of our communities and taking what those stories mean into action.

Taking such action requires resisting the whiteness that is a part of the history and present of many of our spaces to create more welcoming and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ students of color. As Jen M. Self and Kimberly D. Hudson (2015, p. 219) note in their empirical study of homonormative whiteness in university LGBTQIA+ centers:

Although LGBTQ centers are grounded historically in political discourse resistant to heteronormativity and in the exclusionary practices of public institutions, such regulating norms continue to haunt LGBTQ organizations even as they shift toward practice models that consider homophobia and transphobia as complicit within interlocking system of oppression.

In short, LGBTQIA+ centers have a continuing history of simultaneous resistance to heteronormativity and complicity in white homonormativity within public institutions of higher education even as they seek to change their practices. White homonormativity in this case refers to "the regulating norms that constitute the dominant queer body as White and male, and center static and polar ideas of whiteness and masculinity as normal" (Self & Hudson, 2015, p. 218). In this way, university LGBTQIA+ centers are microcosms of the wider society around them in how they tend to reinforce white, cis maleness as the norm and the ideas and practices associated with this norm.

Examples of how homonormative whiteness can show up in university LGBTQ+ resource centers are shared in the narratives of LGBTQ+ resource center professionals at the Spectrum Center at the University of Michigan, Roman Christiaens and Chelsea E. Noble. Reflecting on conversation she had with queer and trans students of color on their racialized

experiences of the spaces, Christiaens names manifestations of white homonormativity at the Spectrum Center as follows: “These norms included lack responsiveness to racist events on and off campus, minimal representation of queer and trans people (QTPOC) staff, programing focus *about* QTPOC identities rather than *for* and *with* QTPOC identities, and generating a culture of minimal accountability for mistakes” (2022, p. 190). Unsurprisingly, such norms contribute to diminished possibilities for solidarity across lines and left queer and trans students of color with a diminished sense of safety and belonging in the space, rendering a space that was supposed to be a sanctuary only “a *marginally safe* space for some of us, but not for all of us” (Christiaens & Noble, 2022, p. 191).

We can see this story play out in other sectors of the literature on queer and trans students of color in university LGBTQ+ centers and similar spaces. As Sheltreese Donyell McCoy observes (2018, p. 1), “Studies focused on the experiences of QTPOC are few, and on QTPOC in Student Affairs even fewer, but what is available makes clear that racism remains an undercurrent in the White gay community and homophobia pervades many communities of color.” Naturally, queer and trans students experiencing racism in predominantly white LGBTQ+ spaces and homophobia in many communities of color presents another barrier to solidarity within our spaces that leaves our mission to provide an inclusive space for all LGBTQ+ and allied students on our respective campuses unfulfilled.

In response to this situation, Self and Hudson (2015, p. 241) recommend the leadership of university LGBTQIA+ centers “include integrate, fluid, and dialogic materials regarding materials regarding intersectional and interlocking systems of oppression, multiple identities, and processes of normalization and regulation.” Minding the intersections in university LGBTQIA+ centers then involves leadership first taking responsibility for educating themselves and their students and staff on intersectionality, preparing them to recognize and interrupt white homonormativity in our communities and establish new norms for solidarity. This looks like engaging in the opposite of the norms Christiaens and the University of Michigan queer and trans students of color with whom she worked named (2022, p. 91): responding to racist events on and off campus, representation of queer and trans staff of color, offering programing *for* and *with* LGBTQ+ people of color, and developing and maintaining a culture of accountability for mistakes. Such shifts in culture take time and, while education alone is not enough on its own to end white homonormativity in our spaces, it can be a starting point for creating more inclusive

environments based in solidarity.

### **Five. Practice Reciprocity.**

Finally, a key part of solidarity is reciprocity. After all, how can one expect others to show up for them if one never shows up for others? For trans and intersex communities, the need for reciprocity is especially apparent at a time when, “Anti-abortion, anti-trans, and anti-critical race legislation efforts [which] are propelled by similar actors” as a part of a “gendered racial project to promote policies that uphold white supremacy, normative gender, and heterosexuality” (Barcelos, 2022) underscore the need for coalitions around bodily autonomy and anti-oppression. Yet, reciprocity is not always considered when discussing these issues. First, oftentimes anti-abortion, anti-trans, and anti-critical race they are often discussed separately in wider cultural spaces. Second, some non-intersex trans activists conflate intersex people’s concerns with their own, leading to disruptions in intersex-trans solidarity over the subsequent erasure of intersex people’s specific concerns (Koyama, 2002).

Disruptions to solidarity can also occur in university LGBTQ+ centers when those with privilege do not reciprocate the efforts of those with less privilege. For example, in the fall of 2021, tensions rose when most of the white Oregon State University Pride Center staff members failed to show up to events held by their peers working in SOL: Multicultural LGBTQ+ Support Network, an initiative focused on the needs and concerns of queer and trans people of color on campus. Those in SOL felt understandably were hurt by the absence of their colleagues and they expressed skepticism of their white coworkers’ commitments to racial justice and intersectional practices. They also felt discouraged that, after taking the time to support the events the white Pride Center staff hosted, their coworkers did not make the effort to do the same for them. The only way through this tension with any sense of solidarity between the two groups intact was for the white Pride Center staff who neglected to attend SOL event to take accountability for their inaction and practice reciprocity in terms of event attendance and support going forward. Those who did not do so found their relationships with their coworkers in SOL suffered while those who made such changes eventually saw their possibilities for solidarity with SOL improve. Of course, reciprocity does not end with attending one another’s events. Effectively responding to a political landscape of anti-trans, anti-abortion, and anti-critical race theory bills and legislation (Barcelos, 2022) requires a greater sense of reciprocity in our solidarity efforts. S

Here it should be emphasized that for our conception reciprocity to be conducive to solidarity it must *not* be thought of in transactional terms or be dependent on another ability's to "pay back." To engage in such a form of reciprocity leads to unrealistic expectations and score-keeping behaviors that damage any sense of solidarity. Further, many have expressed the concern that normative conceptions of reciprocity under ableism exclude and isolate disabled people who may not have the capacity to reciprocate in a transactional sense. For this reason, disability justice activists like the founder of the Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative, Jennifer Lee (2024) conceive of reciprocity in terms of interdependence rather than transaction. This conception of reciprocity allows for the inclusion of all disabled people and for greater solidarity overall with its emphasis on relationships and resistance to isolation. As Lee (2024) observes, "The reciprocity inherent in interdependence serves as a powerful antidote to the isolation and alienation that many individuals, whether they have a disability or not, may experience." It is then a conception of reciprocity based in interdependence that I urge us to practice for the purpose of solidarity.

### **Conclusion: Solidarity is a Conscious Choice**

In analyzing the stories of intersex and trans people have drawn key lessons on solidarity that can benefit those working in university LGBTQIA+ centers. Many of these lessons challenge assumptions of "natural allyship" that prevail in many communities (Koyama, 2001). As such, these lessons ask us to reexamine the stories we tell ourselves and how those stories inform our work, for better or worse (Viloria, 2017), and to be prepared to create new ones together (Quinn, 2015). They challenge us to honor differences as well as commonalities (Koyama, 2001). They also ask us to mind the intersections; to hold the multiple and intersecting identities contained within our communities in our minds and practices (Wall, 2015). Most of all, their experiences teach us that solidarity is not a matter of finding commonalities, but a conscious choice to reach across differences in reciprocity. Going forward with all the above in mind, we must hold one another to the challenge Koyama presented to her audience at her keynote address to the Transcending Boundaries Conference in 2001, "Will you stand for me, so that I can stand for you?" If the answer is yes, solidarity starts here and now. No more waiting for "natural allies."

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