

Hummingbird Humanity

an LGBTQ+ owned business

Hummingbird Hour

LGBTQ+ Pride Isn't Inclusive

This episode was originally recorded on June 29, 2021

Brian McComak: - Hello, hello, hello, welcome to Hummingbird Hour. It is Tuesday. What is it? Tuesday, June 29th, almost the end of Pride Month. I'm gonna do something what I call filler right content right now so we can let all of our wonderful esteemed guests join us in the participants space. Thank you so much for being with us today for our final conversation of Pride Month, but just in case anyone wasn't sure, I will still be gay on July 1st. So when Pride Month ends, I'm still gay and I think that Andre and JD would both say that they're both still gay or queer. We'll talk more about how we each identify as we start this conversation. So I've see we have a fairly good group already in the room, so I will officially kick things off. So hi, everyone, Happy Pride. Welcome to Hummingbird Hour. As the screen says, the session will be recorded and close captioning will be available on the viewing for viewers who watch the recording later as well. So we wanna make sure that our content is accessible to everyone as much as possible. So I'm gonna stop the sharing now, So for those of you who don't know, my name is Brian McComak, I am the Founder of Hummingbird Humanity, which is a firm that focuses on building human centered workplace cultures. And we started the Hummingbird Humanity a year ago or just over a year ago, it's almost 13 months now during the height of the pandemic, and we've built a firm together, Andre and JD have both been part of that journey, where we work with companies to create spaces that are welcoming to everyone. I also identify as a gay man and a person with a disability and I'm really grateful for the series of conversations that we've been able to share during Pride Month, so if you've missed any of them, the first week of Pride we had in June, we had Graci Harkema, who is a wonderful human, an immigrant from Africa, a black queer woman and really phenomenal DEI professional, so that was the first week of June, then we had Natasha Porizkova and Julia Hamilton, talked about supporting queer women in the workplace the second week. The third week we had Bryce Salado and Ben Greene, who are both openly transgender men who shared about beyond pronouns, many of us put pronouns on our signature lines and on our Zoom screens, and they talked about some of the next steps to making sure that everyone feels inclusive in the gender spectrum of identity and expression. Last week, we released our paper "Representation Matters", with props to JD who was the author of that paper, so if you haven't seen it yet, please check out the Hummingbird website and download your copy. And then today for our final conversation, we have two queer people of color, JD Valladares-Williams and Andre Herring, who are going to talk about their experience of Pride not feeling inclusive. And before I pass the virtual mic over to Andre and JD, I wanted to share that I think, as I was sharing with JD and Andre just before we joined, I saw this graphic on LinkedIn, I think it was this morning or last night, it all blurs together, that shows, and for some, as we were talking about, there's some aspects of the graphic that not everyone loves of seeing people below water, which doesn't feel good, but the concept of the chiseled, white gay, cis-gender man, circuit boys. And I have friends that fall in that community who are good humans and who wanna make the world a better place for everyone as well, but that, there's something that feels like the work to make Pride inclusive has really benefited individuals with that identity. And this is a story I want JD and Andre to really tell, but it's something that I was just sharing with them that I feel as well, I've never really fit the mold of the hip, cool, sort of in the middle of the crowd, I've always, I'm 6'6, and so as much as I've tried to work out and exercise, I've either been too thin or overweight, and so even for me, while the world without question has given me privileges that I'm aware of and that I try to use to benefit others. This conversation actually I think, is really relevant for me as well, so I suspect as I'm listening with all of you, Andre and JD are gonna spark my heart and feelings and emotions as well. So with that, without further ado, I

wanna pass it over to the two of you, I'm gonna go behind the scenes, I will share links in the chat, answer questions and Happy Pride gentlemen and distinguished guests, and I'll pass it over. Andre, JD, thank you.

Andre Herring: Thank you, Brian. One, I'd wanna re-shout-out the thought leadership paper that you and JD worked on, it is wonderful. if you have not read it before, please do, I will be sharing it on all my social media platforms right after this, amazing and it does highlight a conversation around representation of having inclusive movements. I personally identify as black, queer or gay. I use them interchangeably even though they're different, black, queer, cis-gender man, who's chronically mentally ill. I will also allow my accomplice in crime to introduce themselves as well.

JD Valladares-Williams: Hi, everyone, my name is JD, I use he or they pronouns. I identify as queer as far as my sexuality and my identity. I am also Latinx and I am an immigrant, so those are the things that are part of my lived experience and that have definitely shaped my LGBT experience in a different way than others, something we wanna talk about today.

Andre Herring: So let's go there about the iceberg. So that iceberg, sometimes is the reason why I don't leave my house for certain places, 'cause I just don't have the mindset to deal with feeling othered or feel like feeling different and, or, and we're not gonna lie, I think when we look at how society filters messaging, it affects you whether you look akin to the people at the top of the iceberg, whether you're being pressured to look like the people at the iceberg or whether you feel like you'll never look like the people at the iceberg, it does have internalized messages for everyone and we all react to it differently. In terms of our pride conversation and how Pride needs to become more inclusive, this conversation, as I warned all of you, it may be a little more New York centric, but we will be touching on other Prides and other places in the country and around the world. So just to give some context, because the New York Pride is one of the most prolific, just because of the origins of how it started 52 years ago, with the first stone being thrown by Marsha P. Johnson and literally to fight off with the cops to protect the community as a black trans woman. Essentially, I don't know if people are around for the World Pride in 2020, well, 2019, we had World Pride, and it was tons of people all around the world showing up everywhere to be. However, the following year we went through a pandemic and it really showed all of our disparities, it showed how our identities are affecting the way that we live, it highlighted the amount of violence that black trans women and Latina trans women are experiencing, it highlighted the joblessness and the homelessness that queer women, in general, experience, and it highlighted also the experience that black queer men we're not immune to the same issues that happen to cisgender straight black men, but we have that and extra. And there are so many issues, whether it's from immigrants being mistreated through policy and by law enforcement or housing. So there's so many issues we did have and we saw that played out, however, unfortunately, the official New York Pride, New York City Pride, the organization itself was not very vocal about the issues that were being faced by the communities here in New York. And the queer community here has always been parts of multiple communities. It has not been vocal about the experiences of women in the community, trans women, trans women are women, we're talking about trans issues and what that impacts people, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities and chronic conditions, it did not talk about, or immigration status. It did not discuss any of these things. And however, what we saw is that people were really angry about the inability and the silence of the organization in not saying anything. So essentially people moved towards a march called the Queer Liberation March. I don't know if you've learned of it. The Queer Liberation March is a union of different communities that partitions away from corporate, it partitions away from capitalistic behaviors, and it really is purely about activism, and just kind of like because of that, it's not the only march that has splintered outside or the only Pride that has splintered outside of generic, I would say the generic Pride that we see, that you see actually on the top of the iceberg. We have Black Pride, we have Harlem Pride, we have Queens Pride, we have, I go to Black Pride in different parts of the country, there's Black Pride in London, there's so many different Prides. JD, as someone who has showed up to Queens Pride, wanna share a bit about how that is?

JD Valladares-Williams: Yeah, I think something that we're not aware of is our history, and that's because a lot of times history is passed on from generation to generation and LGBT people don't have that. They usually don't have those connections to the older generations because it's not passed through your biological family, it's usually your chosen family, and that's only if they also know their history. So being someone who grew up in Queens, I've been in Queens since I was 12 and I still live here, I love Queens, it's the most diverse place in the world, it's the most diverse neighborhood in the world, literally. So I needed to know more about the origins of Queens Pride, so I did some research and it was due to, in the 1970s, a gay Latino man was leaving a bar in Jackson Heights and he was approached by two men who were asking him for a lighter and he went over and they beat him with a hammer in a school playground near the area. So this person was killed, the community went to the police to open up an investigation, and the police gave the case to a detective that was on vacation because they didn't see queer life as something important. So the community decided to hold a vigil and once they held a vigil in Jackson Heights, they saw the amount of people that showed up and they decided to march to Gracie Mansion where the mayor lives in the upper east side, and demand that they find the people that killed this man, accountable, that they hold him accountable. And because of that is why now we have Queens Pride every year, the first Sunday of June, and there's a stop for a minute at the playground where he was killed. So there are these other prides and other origins for other places because of the same problems of people not valuing queer people of color's lives the same, putting them to the side, and the community really having to come together to do something about it. So it's nothing new in the past, it's nothing new in the future. It's something that's always been going on and those queer people of color are always pushed to the back.

Andre Herring: And I would love to show a clip about being pushed in the back figuratively and literally. Please bear with me. Give me one more second. It is a wonderful video I would love to share with the people. Love, love to share, All right, and my computer is going so. Okay, cool. I mean, if everyone can hear just, well, JD, if you can tell me if you can hear it.

Video: [Narrator] Our nation was founded on a bedrock principle that we are all created equal. - [Narrator] Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall. - [Narrator] Ordinary people can do extraordinary things. - I'm gonna get you all figured it out. Grew up in Kansas and mama, probably baked apple pies. Yo, everybody this is Danny. Danny welcome to New York. ♪ And I never should have listened to you ♪ Don't use your real name, it was run by the mob. - We're an organization that fights for gay rights. ♪ And I never should have listened to you ♪ - What are you looking at faggot? ♪ I don't wanna see you anymore ♪ - Up against the wall. - This is what we're fighting. ♪ Broke to what became ♪ - We have to fight in a peaceful way. And resist the radicalism that I see is starting to take hold. - I have not seen one dream come true on Christopher Street, baby. ♪ You won't let me ♪ There is no hope. There is no family, Danny. ♪ Even harder forgettin' ♪ - I like being there. - These kids have nothing left to lose. ♪ Hard time forgivin' ♪ - I can't love you. - That's not the way, Danny. - Its the only way! So we're having a parade to commemorate this fighting and we're gonna call it Gay Liberation March. - I'm coming. ♪ Hard time forgivin' ♪ ♪ Even harder forgettin' ♪ ♪ Before you do somit' ♪ ♪ You might regret, friend ♪ ♪ Hard time forgivin' ♪ ♪ Even harder forgettin' ♪ ♪ Before you do somit' ♪

Andre Herring: So that came out in 2015.

JD Valladares-Williams: Lets talk about what we saw.

Andre Herring: Both you and I were working at LGBT organizations at the time that came out and yeah, it was very troubling to watch that. 'Cause I was like-

JD Valladares-Williams: I think one question that we can answer right now is that the director is German and a straight white man.

Andre Herring: Yeah, it was super inaccurate. I saw Marsha, but like she was in the background as if she didn't leave the movement and a stone was not thrown at the store, it was actually done at the police.

JD Valladares-Williams: And not by a gay white man.

Andre Herring: No, a black trans woman and actually trans women, Marsha P Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. Other trans women of color were actually fighting physically first. And taking those attacks from the police for cisgender straight, sorry, cis-gender gay men. And it's just very troubling to see that video and this is like how inaccurate, but that is the way that this film was gonna teach LGBT history. And when we talk about LGBTQ history and saying how we have our chosen family to teach us, we don't have relatives that teach us this information. We actually have to seek it out. And if this was a general narrative, you'll usually walk around and think that's what happened. You're gonna think that there was a white man running around throwing the stone, leading Marsha when it was the other way around. And throwing a stone at the building that is historic. So it was just kind of wildness and it's true story. And it's like, "No, that's not a true story." There's nothing true about this story at all. Other than maybe the raids, but there is nothing true about the story I was like-

JD Valladares-Williams: What's true, it's how the community responded to Sylvia Rivera, who was one of the two queer trans women that started the movement. How she was received a few years later as the movement continued.

Andre Herring: And I can show you, we can actually show you, we're not talking about it now. we can actually show you how this look.

JD Valladares-Williams: Because this shows why our community is not inclusive. This shows why even though somebody began this movement, they were pushed to the back a few years later at one of the marches. And you'll see how they booed her. Even though she started the movement.

Video: Hi, baby. Y'all better quiet down. 'Cause I regret nothing. I've been trying to get up there all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help.

Andre Herring: So that is a bit about the way that Sylvia was treated. And that was in 1973, literally about four years after the Stonewall Riots. And those people booing her were not straight people. Those were were people within the community. And it's very troubling to see how the erasure on how quickly it was to let's push her aside because had she looked like one of the people at the top of the iceberg, she would never receive that treatment. However, because she looked like someone under the water, she was receiving those behaviors. It is just very troubling 'cause even though we think that 1973 is so far away, literally during World Pride, we watched, we heard incidents about how two trans women of color spoke up within the Stonewall, the bar that their ancestors fought for. They spoke up about issues happening to

trans women of color, specifically the violence and the homelessness and the criminalization of sex work. And essentially what had happened was people booed them and actually called the police on them. This is during World Pride. This is a 50th Anniversary of someone that looked like them defending everyone else. And this is the way they were treated. So these are very troubling narratives that still have continued. These are biases and hate. And I think we also have to acknowledge all because we're within the same community, doesn't mean that we don't carry biases and hate against each other. We are all programmed in the same, very flawed society. So that's something that we don't like to confront that these are things that we hold dear to us, that we need to release and let go of.

JD Valladares-Williams: Absolutely, there's a lot of internalized hate within our community. And it's because we've absorbed it from our surroundings, but it's also up to us just like we're always trying to be aware of unconscious bias, but also looking at how we're treating each other within groups that are oppressed. Are we lifting other people that are oppressed? Or are we just pushing them out of the way to just benefit ourselves only?

Andre Herring: And when we talk about the segregation that occurs between us, we can even look at, 'cause I, we both have worked within LGBT, HIV/AIDS movement and no shades of the people who have done tons of work and tons of support in our movement, but the people who are leaders in the movement have dramatically looked cis and white, cis-gender and white for quite some time. I think this these past couple of years, with the first wave that we're seeing one people of color, trans people, people who do not look like the people at the top of the iceberg. People that they can say, "sell." These are the people who are running the show. And they're also the disconnect because if you're saying we do programming for black and brown youth, but there's no black or brown people at the top, there is a disconnect, classes behaviors pop out. If you're saying, "Oh, we wanna support trans people." But everyone is cisgender that saying, "We need to support trans people." But you don't have trans people in your life. You don't wanna hear their narrative. You only wanna put them on stage for a gala and then throw them away after the gala is over. You don't care about the fact that they deal with homelessness. You look down on the fact that they have to use sex working to survive. These are things that we are seeing within the own movement of the work that we're supposed to do, not corporate. We're talking about nonprofit, social justice, organizations, and also the erasure within the movement and outside of the movement, because if you look at tons of other LGBTQ people who work in other movements, their voices are also diminished. Their voices are diminished in immigration rights, their voices are diminished in black rights, their voices are diminished in women rights, they're diminished in disability rights. They're diminished in so many movements, regardless of what they look like the minute they are not cis and white, they're removed. So this is something that we both saw. I feel like we bonded over this a couple of times, we looked at each other and we're like, "Well, we're not up there."

JD Valladares-Williams: We're not up there and we're also not in charge of any decision-making. So something that happens at previous places where I've worked is it wasn't until I got there and realized I was the only person of color in a management level that I started speaking up of, Hey, if we're working with this population of LGBTQ in the New York City area, and we know that there's a lot of black and brown folks that are part of that population, why are the people that we're bringing to these spaces also queer people of color? How is that representation going from this nonprofit and the work you want to do to the actual community that you want to serve? And that's something that I think we can talk about now on how ERG's can change that, how you as part of a LGBT affinity group at work can really start taking those steps to change the narrative because the facts are half of LGBT people are not out at work. That's the facts right now. It's also the fact that one in five gen Z identify as LGBT. So these people are at your company. These people are the future of the workforce. And so if you're not creating an environment for them that is truly safe, how are they going to show up at work? So let's talk about some ways in which ERG's can really lead that movement.

Andre Herring: I mean, I think our first step is making sure that the only people who are leading the ERG are not for people who look like people are at the top of the iceberg. There's a couple of corporations I could call out that I know of that are like that, but I'm not gonna do that for the sake of this wonderful organization called Hummingbird Humanity. I'm not gonna do that. But tons of corporate affinity and employee resource groups that are supposed to cater to the LGBTQ+ community tends to only be the G and tend to look a certain type of way. And anyone else who voices an issue is told, "Oh, well, there's another organization for that." Or I feel like you need to bring it to the women's group, or you need to bring it to this group or this group. And understanding that this specific ERG is supposed to, is more of a very intersectional approach. You're supposed to cater to so many different issues because it's a very diverse community. And in essence, if you're not addressing any of their needs, you're not addressing anything. So it's really troubling to see that and kind of also understanding who works at these corporations. One, a lot of corporations tend to be the most privileged who tend to be white, who tend to be cis, but also if there are people of color or women or people who don't traditionally fall under the privilege range is town to 10th. And that's a very small number of people still. So essentially this is not a great representation of the world. And you might not even be getting the most healthy representation within people who are "underrepresented" in those ERG's. So it's important to understand who makes up these ERG's and how you're gonna work to recruit people who look more like the world in the room, or honestly, even people who do fit the top of the iceberg. They may have invisible identities that they feel like they can't talk about. They can't bring that up in fire . They can't bring that up when they're at events, they can't bring that up at charity events. They might not feel comfortable saying that they're HIV positive. They may not feel comfortable saying that they live with a disability or that they're neurodivergent, or that they're mentally ill, or that they might have a chronic disorder. They might not bring these topics up because of the fact that they know that their position in the social realm of what we view as acceptable, not acceptable, they will be removed. 'Cause this pressure falls on everyone. It's not people at the top of the iceberg are immune to that pressure. They are in the top of the iceberg because they feel that pressure. So having conversations about who is not in the room and who is actually in the room, it doesn't feel like they can say the other parts of them that should be in the room. So having those conversations on who's here, where are we getting these people from? Are they able to be their full selves? As well as discussing like how we make decisions. Are we gonna have these real conversations at work or we're gonna be like, "Oh, well, we're actually planning only for like June 1st to June 30th, we're gonna have our logo change and we're gonna have a couple events. They're all going to be fun, alcohol filled events. Which also excludes sober people are a bunch of alcohol filled events. And we are just about partying this whole like couple of days, like month. And then after that, we don't talk." And when we talk about also the places that they're like, "Let's just donate." HRC and tons of other organizations do amazing, amazing work. The Trevor Project does amazing work. However, those are the organizations that tend to cannibalize charitable donations, and smaller grassroots organizations that tend to also make what less than \$10 million are not provided the opportunity to gain any funding or attention. So it becomes really unsettling because it's the same organizations everyone gives money to. And like for instance, the Rainbow Railroad doesn't get as much money as they should. It's a Canadian based nonprofit that focuses on supporting refugees within our entire diaspora around the world. Tons of great work. They're a global organization. And most of you might not even know what Rainbow Railroad was until I brought it up today. That's an organization that deserves tons and tons of money or BYP 100, it's led by a black queer woman, and it kind of splintered outside of Black Lives Matter and Color Change because they wanted to focus more intersectionally on black queer issues. These are organizations that we don't hear about, don't talk about. As another member of the coming from the nonprofit world, as I guess we both departed. What are your thoughts as well about the cannibalization of charitable donations?

JD Valladares-Williams: Yeah, I think something that companies usually do is try to, I think the good intent is always there of wanting to do something for the community, especially during Pride Month, but it's how are you going about this. So questions for your ERG are intersectionality, are you working? So for example, my identities are queer, Latinx, and immigrant. So are you including the Latinx ERG group and collaborating with some of them together? Are you collaborating with the black ERG, with the parents ERG? 'Cause there are all these different intersectionalities that come with being LGBT that also needs to be addressed. And I think something that companies don't wanna do and they really

shy away from is being political. My existence is political. I can't help it. And why is it political? Because there's still 29 states in the US that can discriminate against me legally. There's 250 bills that have been, or are in the process of passing anti-trans legislation, just this year alone. So when companies say they don't wanna get political, my question to those companies and their ERG that are there trying to amplify these voices, is if one in five gen Z identify as LGBT and there's 29 states that discriminate against them, how will your employees really show up at work? How can they really be themselves if they're still laws in place that discriminate against them? So when companies say, "I don't wanna get political." I have no choice as an individual. And I'm going to turn to the company that is trying to advocate for my rights so that I can have the same freedoms as everyone. I don't, at the moment I don't. If we really talk about America, I don't have the same rights. So what is the company doing with their power, with their leverage, with their money to change that?

Andre Herring: I mean, I think the sad part is when we talk about what's political and what's not political, everything is political. Everything, the minute that you need to create a policy, to have a conversation or an initiative about something, it then makes it political. And the nature of what companies do, if we move away from even the LGBTQ community, just the lobbying of making sure that your products and your brand can go outside of general location of what you want and trying to expand that in itself is political, because you're asking for your brand to exist upon different communities in different areas. So trying to remove or redefine the word political and trying to understand that, everything is political, the minute you wanna change your logo to rainbow, that is political. But for some reason, we like to use the word and move it away from certain things and change the meaning of it and understand that everything in essence is political. And we should have a conversation about it all. There's no way to have a diversity, equity, or inclusion, or belonging conversation without it being political. There's nothing about lobbying that's not political. It's like the purity of political. So I think also asking, figuring out how LGBTQ ERG's can elevate with their companies to have certain conversations year round, instead of just June and say, "Hey, like, how do we collaborate with other ERG's?" How do we ask for more inclusive policies? And also how are we going to reach our customer base? Because let's be truthfully honest, compassion does not move all of us. Sometimes we have to talk about the business case because not everybody's there. And talk 'cause money makes people move and understanding like, it's not just your employees, but how are you going to endorse your brand or your product or your services to the outside world. And people are like, "Oh, well, we're not gonna hit those consumers." And it's like, well, unfortunately like we mentioned, like you said, one out of six gen Z identify within the community. Nearly half of gen Z within the United States is not white. And these things are not also are reflective in countries with other diversity, kind of like in the UK and Australia and South Africa. These countries also highlight, in France, in Germany, these countries also highlight the same trends that are happening here. 77% of gen Z will consider a company to take on a job if they're diverse. They're not gonna accept the role, that's 77%. 69% of millennials, I'm proud of talking about my age. I don't care, I'm still quite uncomfortable. 69% of millennials report staying in a job five years or longer if it's diverse. These are real important things when you talk about what type of people wanna on work in your workplace, what type of people should be included? I believe what the majority of the population within the next 20 years, it's going to be Latinx.

JD Valladares-Williams: By 2050, half of the US will be people of color. And also back to your point about the customer base and a point that somebody also brought up in the chat is globally the LGBT population has over 3.7 trillion in buying power. So there is a customer base there that you need to address if you want to stay in business. And it's only going to be growing as people feel more comfortable coming out. So there really is a business case for you to try to take these initiatives. There is a business case for you speaking up against anti-trans legislation that is going on in this moment because your future employees care about those things and want to see you address it with the power that you have as an entity.

Andre Herring: I mean, 3.7 trillion is huge. And I mean, also other communities just make the number bigger and bigger. I think the thing, and I love, I don't know if we all are familiar with Jennifer Brown, but if you're not, one of the things that she says frequently to and she can say this actually as a cis white woman, she can say this very easily without, I can't say this, but she'll tell business leaders, "Change or die." And I think that is where we're moving to, the world is changing whether people like it or not. The world's gonna continue to change and it's changing in a better direction, but we need to adjust to it. And I'm in a part of what ERG are structured for is to help companies culturally move in that direction. That is what those entities are for. So I think there is, yes, it's not always the responsibility of people to educate others about their experience, but also I don't wanna discount that ERG's are not also filled with the communities that they're representing, they're also filled with allies. And mobilizing people who are straight and who are cis and who are not part of queer communities to be in the ERG and to help support advocating, who is your executive sponsors? Are they advocating enough? Are you having a relationship to your board? Are you trying to bring proper representation to your board? These are conversations that we need to continue to have, but I believe that these structures are created to make change, not just because, to exhaust the LGBTQ+ community there, but to use the allies present as a mechanism to make change. So I think that the ERG community has a very strong responsibility to help push companies to think differently, to change their practices, to adapt to the world that we're going into. That it can only happen if we have more diverse groups within those ERG's, and that they're doing collaborative events with one another and actually having conversations about intersectionality. I think that's one of the biggest things missing in our conversation. People say intersectionality, and they're like, "Well, yeah, it's the diversity of thoughts and hobbies and this and that." And it's like, "No, it's not." Like Kimberlé, first of all, anytime you talk about it, we have to talk about Kimberlé Crenshaw. She is still living, she is not dead. She's very much living. And she is a black feminist and she is a also critical race theorist and intersectional feminist. And she discusses intersectionality is about how your collective identities inform the levels and different types of oppressions you face and the privileges that you may be granted. And now everybody's experience is unique. Everyone is unique. And when we talk about that, she also centers on who's the most oppressed. If you're not gonna talk about the most oppressed, you're not gonna help no one. So if you don't care about like trans immigrants, you're not helping immigrants, you're not helping anybody else because you're not talking about the most oppressed. And that's where this conversation always has to lean towards when we talk about intersectionality, we love to go to what brings us comfort and say, "Well, we all have this, I mean, all that." Yes, we all have intersectionality but the whole point of the theory is to also move towards who is suffering the most and uplift them. Everyone else has the right to vote 'cause black people have the right to vote in the United States. People can own property because it was pushed now that indigenous people can have slightly more higher property rights. It is not where it needs to be. But it also is the reason why we have so many property issues in this country because of the displacement of both what we view as, and I say this word only 'cause I've been getting permission to say this word, and also communities have used it, American indigenous or American Indian people, tribes, them and also on top of that Latinx indigenous people who have been displaced from Mexico and Guatemala, who this land belongs to. These are the reasons why we have homelessness. These are reasons why we have discrimination in our housing. This is the reason why you file an application to buy a house you have to put your race. And you know that number is going down. And these are things that we hope that ERG communities can use their leverage and their power to do something. I know that it feels quite powerless sometimes within those communities to feel like I don't feel like I have a voice. I feel like I don't have nothing. And it's like, you do have more of a voice. You actually have access to budget. You have access to powerful people, you have access to connections and you also have access to expertise. And you also have the space and I'm making assumptions, but if you work for a giant corporation, I'm under the high assumption that you have, you're not worried about your basic needs. So that gives you the opportunity to sit down and think because some people don't have the ability to reflect because they're busy trying to survive. So I think it's important to use these resources that are to your disposal even if you feel powerless, you're not exactly as powerless as you think you are. And there are people out there that need you. So I think it's important for people to also look at the ways that they have privilege within themselves or near them in their proximity and try to use it as much as they can because I think that there is a strong power that ERG's can have to support the communities outside of them.

JD Valladares-Williams: Yeah, something to add to your point about those people, really the ERG is addressing the problems is to keep in mind that those that are most suppressed in our community are probably not our co-workers. They're probably not at the companies where we're working, but they are part of our community. They are part of what is important to me. So when I'm looking to work for a company, I'm looking to see if they are talking about black trans lives because while I have experienced my own oppression, my own problems, my own obstacles, I realized that within our community, black trans lives are the ones that are most at risk. This year is projected to be the deadliest year so far for trans people, with 27 that's so far this year. Last year, there were 44 in the year. This year, we're halfway through the year and there's already 27. So this is the problem. This is the problem that we need to address in our community of people, literally still being killed for being who they are. So to me as an individual, I'm not ready to celebrate unless it's amplifying the joy of those people. I'm not ready to celebrate that I'm free while these people are still struggling to just live because the laws keep trying to pass against them existing.

Andre Herring: And I think, and to be specific, that's just the United States. The numbers get worse when you leave this country. The numbers get worse when we talk about Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa and Asia, and even parts of Europe, Australia. The numbers get worse and we choose to avoid these numbers. And look, I'm gonna have a real moment right now. I'm just gonna go there. It is troubling to see that we decided, as cis people who might not be, we're not gender nonconforming or non-binary. So I'm talking about cis people who are not part of those communities. We choose this month of this weekend to gender bend but we do not talk about trans people all year round. We are comfortable being told that, "Oh, it's acceptable for me to do this this month." And then once July hits, I ain't taking off my wig and my dress and anything that violates the code of traditional gender, but I'm not gonna have a conversation about the people that I'm trying to actually emulate. I'm not talking about trans people or non-binary people or gender nonconforming people. And also, I just wanna make sure these are all three different communities, they're not umbrella, they're all very different. And we do not talk about that. And I love how RJ mentioned. People think it's Halloween. It does make my stomach somewhat twirl a bit because I'm like, "You do not speak about these issues year round." And then you're like, "Well, I'm gonna dress up like for the weekend." And I'm like, some people can't dress out. This is part of who they are.

JD Valladares-Williams: Yeah, we have to talk about the something that people don't talk about in New York City. And it's, if you live in an underrepresented community and a black and brown community, how you show up to Pride is not how you go home. How you show up to Pride as you're making your way back to where you live, you start taking those parts of your identity off and trying to protect yourself so that you're not attacked. That's still real life right now for people in New York City.

Andre Herring: I mean, we've been meeting people, we've seen the girls you start taking out the makeup wipes on the middle of the L-Train or the A-Train wiping off stuff off of your body, removing stuff, removing your little fake tattoos and starting to you pull out, you have an extra shirt in your bag that no one knew about that's a solid color. And these are things that, if you're not living in the village, if you're not living in Hell's Kitchen, if you're not living in Chelsea, sometimes you possibly not living in Astoria or Fort Green or downtown Brooklyn, you are removing parts of your clothing off. You're removing it off because out of safety and you also know that you don't have whiteness to protect you because you're like, "Well, they're gonna touch me because I'm technically to be part of their community."

JD Valladares-Williams: The police won't do anything about it 'cause it's their own communities are fighting each other. So it's not our problem.

Andre Herring: Black and black crime, we're minding our business, and it's just, these are the things that we have to be concerned about and understanding how people walk into the room. How we walk into the room, how we walk around. So yes, I'm not gonna lie. I'm a little trouble, I'm still a little troubled at this moment about viewing people celebrate certain things. And I'm just like, "This is not a part of your experience." You get to live somewhere where you don't have to worry about that. And don't get me wrong. There is homophobic and transphobic behavior that does occur in Hell's Kitchen and neighborhoods like that. But it's not to the same extent where if you've never had to start removing pieces of clothing on your way home, that is a very different experience. And I've experienced that pretty much all of my existence. So I wanna actually open it up for questions, because there are tons of wonderful people on this chat. And I would love to open it up for all of you, feel free to put some questions in the chat, or you can actually send them to us privately if you don't want people to know that you're asking that question. I would love to answer and JD, or just, if you wanna have a dialogue. Don't be shy.

Andre Herring: Ooh, oh, my God, okay Courtney, you kind of go there today. I'm just gonna read out the question just in case people don't see it. The question is I work at a college can you share any experiences from your college experiences where you can pinpoint where the college failed and helping you feel included or on the other end where the college housing student activity, student organizations may have succeeded. Looking to see where we can bridge those gaps. That is an amazing question.

JD Valladares-Williams: Well , I was gonna say while you were talking I had an idea.

Andre Herring: Sorry.

JD Valladares-Williams: No, well, you were thinking I had an idea of something to keep in mind, at least in my own experiences when I graduated high school. And this is the experience for a lot of LGBT youth is really your first time to explore your identity 'cause you're stepping out into the real world. And so college is really a great way to find that community. And in my experience, I didn't find that community because it was just, I found the gay white men in the campus because there were the most visible. So I became friends with them. And then I realized that that wasn't necessarily my community. And it took me until my 30s to really find my community. And it would have been really helpful if my college did more outreach. They had an LGBT group, but if they really did outreach and focused on bringing in allies, because sometimes allies are just LGBT people that aren't ready to come out but want to be a part of it. So I think really stressing the importance that you don't have to be part of this group in order to advocate and support this group. And also something that was really important with the schools that I've been working with is having those leaders that are straight or not part of about community in general, show up to those meetings, have faculty that is not part of the community show up for the community. And they're the ones that are going to show other people that it's okay to join this club, even though you're an ally, it doesn't mean that you're low key gay if you join this. There are people in positions of power at the school that will also join the conversation to amplify the voice of the community. That's incredibly important for colleges to do, not just have an LGBT club.

Andre Herring: That is strong. I went to a SUNY school. So that's as a state university or college school within the State of New York. And I felt like my school was supportive of LGBTQ people. Like people would come out and I think it was supportive. And we had amazing also courses to educate people on programming, which I really was inspired about. I think the one place that we might've dropped the ball on, and I don't want to say it's necessarily the school, so Greek life has a ton of culture. They run culture in a lot of schools and athletics. And it did not think that the athletics nor the Greek life was very inviting. Some of them were trying. But I think as a whole, there's so much more work to be done.

And it's a reason why many people stayed in the closet. And I think not saying people, everybody wants to join Greek life for being part of sports. But I think if it did look inclusive in these areas, it would make people feel comfortable saying, "Oh, well, the sports team has out people and people are open and friendly about it, or the fraternities and sororities of out people and people are fine with it." It makes people more comfortable. And I think they were working towards that. Of course, I don't go there no more, but I don't know how far they gone, but I think they were trying. As an intersectional person on the other end, I felt like they were suffering with blackness. I think they really weren't good at that. One example, and they have worked towards that. There was a fraternity that used to have a table that had the Confederate flag on the back of the table, and it was very visible all over campus and nobody would do anything about it. That was very unsettling and people didn't realize that was a problem. And I'm also like, this is New York. This flag doesn't even fly, this flag is not even around the state this often. So they're like, "Oh, well, it's Chino tradicional." And I'm like, "Well, so is the swastika is also traditional. And for some people do, this doesn't mean that's an okay symbol to have." But that's what I will say. I wanna leave it up to one more question. Thank you. One more question or thought, I see.

Brian McComak: I see that Michael Stephens has raised his hand. I'm gonna make him a panelist to share with us. So it's just the voice from the background. I'm gonna disappear again.

Andre Herring: You know what? I'm God.

Michael Stephens: Hi, Andre, hi, JD, hi, Brian, how you doing?

Andre Herring: Good, welcome, welcome. So happy you're a part of the conversation.

Michael Stephens: Thank you so much for today. I really enjoyed listening. My question was actually around the fact that there's been an increase in kind of this conversation over the last kind of 12, 18 months, but I saw kind of like a similar thing happening with regards to like the mental health conversation. And I just wondered, do you feel as though we're actually kind of breaking out of the community of people that are actually working within this space or are we kind of talking a lot just to ourselves because how much are we actually getting through to the people that are at the top of that iceberg or kind of are we just really kind of creating a bit of an echo chamber of people that want to make a difference, but I think struggling to maybe kind of go beyond our own kind of network and reach.

Andre Herring: You mean in specific to like the mental health conversation?

Michael Stephens: I've meant more kind of, I guess, around the topics that we've been discussing today really, around kind of, I guess, intersectional kind of struggles across, whether it's kind of identity related or kind of, I guess, discrimination in general.

JD Valladares-Williams: I think that's where the cross collaboration between ERG's is super impactful and that's where you can bring those voices in the room that have the expertise on it. The other point I'll make is that the way your company or anyone's company can make a change is connecting with the community, with your local community, your

local nonprofits, that aren't, the Trevor Project or HRC, but are those run by mostly trans people like the Sylvia Rivera Law Project that doesn't have the name recognition of the other ones, but does so much work in the New York City area for our trans community, that it's really doable. Do the research, not you just specifically, but the company and the ERG leaders, do the research on what's around your area and how you can really uplift that local community 'cause that's really, instead of just talking, making it into action, That's actually an action that's gonna change lives to fund those grassroots organizations.

Andre Herring: I would say to jump in also about where we are in the conversations. This is just qualitative where I'm witnessing, I think we are making movement, but we're also still going to what's palatable. So when we talk about trans people, we're only going to people who can pass as cis. And when we talk about mental health, we're still really stuck on depression, anxiety, and we haven't moved past other conditions 'cause there's still so much more stigma. When it comes to issues with black people, we're still stuck on like cis straight black people who also present in a certain way. I think we're making headway, but I also believe that we're still sitting on palatability and that's something that we're gonna have to push through a little harder. And even when we talk about, let's say, when we talk about appearance and like that phobia, we are still stuck on the plus model, the plus size model. And that actually someone who's not a model. So I think- Yeah, just call it model. And I think we're really stuck on the palatability right now, but I hope that we're, so I think we've hit palatability. I think we're there in the conversations, but I think we have to push past that.

Michael Stephens: Thank you.

JD Valladares-Williams: All right, I think we are at the one hour left mark. I mean, one minute.

Brian McComak: One minute left, one hour, wow. We were gonna stretch that one minute. Andre and JD, thank you so much for such an authentic and real conversation. You know, just a few years ago, I was working with the Pride group at Tapestry that included members of the LGBTQ+ community that are people of color. And there was a transgender person and a non-binary person in the room. And I think you've probably both heard me tell this story probably more than once, that that group, when I was asking them what they wanted us to do at Pride that year, they said, "Can we just make sure it's not centered around cisgender gay white guys?" Of course, which is people that look like me. And I was really grateful to that group for opening my eyes and helping me see through another lens and another perspective. And today you reminded me of that here's always something else for me to learn and something for me to understand. There's so many stories I can highlight from that you shared today, but the story, the message of we go out to Pride and then when we're on our way home, we sort of put back on our disguise to feel safe, I think is heartbreaking and as are so many of the messages that you shared with us. So I appreciate you being so honest and vulnerable. It's helpful for me. And to Michael's question, I hope that others that need to hear these messages will hear these messages. And I hope it helps me do the work that I get to do better every day. All of you that are with us, thank you for being with us, thank you for watching, thank you for listening, thank you for sharing, thank you for being allies. I'm often reminded, there's so much work that we have to do, and I'm so grateful that there are so many of us who are in the conversation who are trying to learn or trying to come together to make the world a better place. And that includes of course, JD and Andre. Thank you all for being with us. Thank you again, JD and Andre. Be safe, stay well, and we'll see you all soon. Happy Pride.