

## Chapter 8

### SHARING ACROSS GENERATIONS: THE LGBTQ+ INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE PROJECT

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#### *An Opening Example*

During the second year of The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project a small group discussion took place between students and elders as they planned a collaborative art project. Taylor, a master's student, brought up the concept of queer time as they described an idea about a possible direction for the project. Taylor noted:

I was also thinking about . . . I read a recent paper [Farrier's "Playing with Time"] about a queer performance that was playing with queer time. And because it's a time-based performance, I was almost wondering if there is a way we can incorporate that. Umm, just in terms of queer time as challenging notions of heteronormative, straight time.<sup>1</sup>

Taylor was working to make sense of this article and the concept of queer time, bringing in a quote from the article to provide some clarity. "Time becomes so important to legibility," they read from the small group's working document, "that it sits at the root of humanness and citizenship to the extent that to be legible is to be correctly in time" (Farrier 2015: 1401). They started to explain . . . "It's just talking here about . . ." realizing, perhaps, that they didn't quite know what the author was talking about—an ever-present challenge in queer studies—turning again to a direct quote from Farrier who wrote:

queer work on temporality, [on the one hand], is a queer articulation of time that seeks to expose the temporal power play in legibility. [On the other hand], the work is manifest as lived experiments with ways of life, forms of identity, cultural activities and modes of existence that upset the smooth flow of reproductive straight time. (2015: 1400)

Still sensing their own uncertainty with “queer time” and its meanings, Taylor shifted gears asking, “Is everyone following? I hope it’s making sense . . .” Hope is a rather common thing one does in a pedagogical encounter with queer studies as one navigates complex and often opaque language. The work of making sense or making meaning of new concepts and ideas, often not within mainstream discourses and conversations, is no easy task, and a task that is often sadly limited to those with access, time, and interest in such queer ideas.

Danie, a seventy-year-old trans elder, spoke up in response to Taylor’s question, saying “I’ll admit to having some difficulty understanding the concept. However, that being said, I sense the direction and the details . . . and I would be in favor of that.” Danie, a generous and often quiet presence in the dialogues, helped put Taylor at ease, continuing, “I’m not quite sure what is being proposed, but I understand the language that you are using . . . even though I don’t understand some of the definitions. Whatever you are talking about sounds really good to me and you can let me know how I can be a part of it.” While neither clarity nor meaning was immediately found, what was offered in this initial conversation was an opening to a shared educational encounter with queer studies. It was not a shared encounter between a professor and student, but rather two participants who ranged in age from twenty-eight to seventy years old with little to no formal education in queer studies, broadly conceived.

Of course, the shared encounter did not just happen out of nowhere. We, the authors and cofacilitators of *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project*, are each tenured or tenure-track faculty at universities, meaning the professor-student dynamic is always present. Furthermore, we are white, cisgender, lesbian or gay, able-bodied, and middle-aged, placing our bodies in complicated positions among the participants who are diverse in age, race, gender identity and expression, sexuality, economic class, and education. In recognizing the need for sustained intergenerational dialogues, we wrestle with the ways our own identities and positions are implicated in ways known and unknown as participants, but also those looked at as being “in charge.”

We begin with this exchange and our own positionalities, both brief, to capture the potentials that emerge when cross-generational contact is cultivated and sustained, bringing “queer studies,” we might say, out of the classroom and into the community. As Russell and Bohan remind us:

In [LGBTQ+] communities/families, contacts between youths and elders are not an intrinsic element of social systems, as is true in most biological families and in most other communities that face oppression by virtue of their members’ identity (racial, ethnic, or religious communities). Rather, LGBT[Q+] interactions tend to be age segregated. . . . Any contacts across generations must be arranged with the explicit intent of creating cross-generational interaction. (2005: 2)

The exchange between Taylor and Danie was not happenstance but emerged through an intentional and sustained project creating intergenerational dialogues that provide space and time to share stories and more.

*The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project* not only seeks to intentionally and explicitly create space and time for cross-generational contact but also provides a glimpse into an embodied queer pedagogy (Greteman, Morris, and Weststrate, 2021; Morris, Greteman, and Weststrate, 2022). This embodied queer pedagogy provides a concrete way to counter forms of epistemic injustice, particularly hermeneutical injustice described by Miranda Fricker (2007). This form of epistemic injustice exists where there is a lack of interpretive (hermeneutic) resources or tools that can be used to make sense of shared collective experiences rooted in difference. Hermeneutical injustice, as it impacts LGBTQ+ populations in the United States, exists as resources and language are rarely shared within and across generations to help make sense of LGBTQ+ experiences. This lack of resources and tools cross-generationally emerges, in part, because of the almost complete lack of any attention to LGBTQ+ histories and lives in US schooling (K–12 and beyond or ages five and up). Additionally, there are histories of controversy surrounding such attention seen in continued bans on books addressing LGBTQ+ issues in school libraries as well as parental advocates seeking permission to remove their children from lessons containing LGBTQ+ content. There is, however, a growing movement to seek LGBTQ+ inclusion in the curriculum of US public schools. Six states, as of this writing in December 2021, have such requirements, including California, Illinois, New Jersey, Colorado, Oregon, and Nevada. While this points toward a possible future, it does not address the historic ways LGBTQ+ exclusion perpetuates a widespread gap in the interpretive resources for making sense of one’s LGBTQ+ individual experience and seeing those experiences within a broader historical narrative.

In exposing this form of epistemic injustice and the need for resources to counter it, Elzinga (2018), building on Fricker, asks, “how do we develop these resources and make them widely available to members of society” (Elzinga 2018: 60). How indeed is the question? A key part of *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project* is to develop such resources through intergenerational dialogue rooted in shared experiences and sharing a range of resources. As we have witnessed within the first three years of the project, the sharing of experiences and resources has helped younger and older populations see first-hand the material realities of LGBTQ+ life and the multifaceted and precarious ways those realities persist across time.

Participants in the project—across generations—are by and large among the poor, working and middle classes that have had less access to and involvement with queer studies as an intellectual pursuit and the resources it provides for making sense of “queerness.” Yet, while they may lack the language of elite queer discourses, they carry with them the material and historical experiences that can help expand and educate others about LGBTQ+ historical and present circumstances. Our elder and younger LGBTQ+ folks have had little to no formal education in LGBTQ+ histories or issues, given, as just noted, that LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum is in its early stages of implementation in only six states in the United States. Many of the participants are, through this project, experiencing their first foray into queer studies through a hybrid experience that vacillates between the “academy” and the

"community." This allows, we have found, participants to help create a different form of queer studies informed by embodied histories, pedagogies, and the act of sharing with one another. This time together helps highlight and develop resilience and in small ways buffer against precarity that is felt differently due to age, class, race, gender identity, and more. Participants in *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project* share not only stories, but also time, resources, and space in ways that allow them, and the authors, to feel and think our ways into not only queer studies as a form of intellectual work but broader understandings of LGBTQ+ lives and realities.

### *From Coming Out to Coming Into*

We use the language "coming into" quite intentionally. Coming out is, of course, the more commonly engaged action associated with LGBTQ+ lives. At its core, it is a moment that is repeated and remixed over one's life where one shares a part of one's self, which one has had to, for various reasons, keep hidden from family, friends, coworkers, and one's broader communities. Less engaged in discussions about coming out is that alongside them, one builds the momentum of coming into one's sense of self and LGBTQ+ communities. In recent decades, social scientific research has shown that LGBTQ+ individuals in the United States are coming out at younger ages than in previous generations (Groß, Rendina, and Parson 2018). Amid a political and cultural climate in the United States with increased political attention, media representation, and everyday interactions, LGBTQ+ visibility has increased as more LGBTQ+ individuals share this part of their identity with others. In the United States, a 2021 Gallup Poll on LGBT identification found a 1 percent increase in such identification since 2017, with 5.6 percent of respondents identifying as LGBT. This was attributed, in part, to the sense that it is more likely for younger generations to identify as something other than heterosexual (Jones 2021). More and more people coming out illustrates that queer adage "we are everywhere," but also raises questions about how and if coming out puts one into contact with others that are part of LGBTQ+ communities. As we share a sense of self through coming out, how does such an act assist us in coming into LGBTQ+ histories, politics, and communities?

Our interest in this chapter steps to the side of coming out to explore the work of coming into LGBTQ+ selves, histories, politics, knowledges, practices, and cultures through the work of sharing: sharing space, sharing resources, sharing stories. Put differently, it is often the case that when we come out, we come out into still "straight" world that at best seeks to tolerate us, at worst seeks to extinguish us (Sedgwick 1991). We rarely have, in coming out, access to LGBTQ+ histories, politics, and cultures because we often lack access to other generations of LGBTQ+ people that have, in various ways, worked to sustain LGBTQ+ cultures in all their messy, complex, and contradictory ways. While the internet has broadened one's ability to access "queer" ideas and people, such access often lands within one's generational cohort and is complicated by material realities of access tied to

geography and economic class. This siloing of experiences and ideas perpetuate the lack of contact across generations and related forms of difference. This lack of intergenerational contact perpetuates already elevated feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by LGBTQ+ youth and elders (Emlet 2016; Garcia et al. 2020), while also creating divisions between generations that, on the surface, may appear quite different but upon closer examination may have more similarities than differences. Given these divisions, possibilities, and conditions, our work, like that of Brim, seeks "to look for queer theory elsewhere" (2020: 11) so as to challenge and expand the projects and possibilities of queer studies alongside the classroom.

### *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project*

There is a need, we think, to not merely theorize the potential in intergenerational contact, but to experiment with ways that might allow a sustained queer educational encounter. Following Patti Lather, "Let's be a queer family with a different relation to generations" (2010: 75). These different relations to generations we hope, following Halberstam (2003), break the deadlock of intergenerational conflict (Lather 2010: 69). Instead, as becomes visible with *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project*, we create and sustain intergenerational relations that are rooted in sharing within and across generations. Such sharing as we explore in the following is neither simple nor without conflict. There are reasons why upon coming out, we face challenges of coming into LGBTQ+ culture. While institutions—most notably schools, but also affordable housing residences and nursing homes—have historically advocated against or ignored LGBTQ+ existence, there exist within LGBTQ+ communities and institutions challenges and conflicts (Lugg 2016; Ramirez-Valles 2016). The simple premise of the project is to counteract the legacies of homo-bi-trans-phobia perpetrated by "straight" society that has kept LGBTQ+ people separate from one another.

The project emerged out of a conversation in the summer of 2019 between two School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) faculty members and the manager of senior services at the Center on Halsted. The conversation was initiated to discuss possible collaborations that would be mutually beneficial to our work with both LGBTQ+ elders and college students. There was, we found, interest from both LGBTQ+ elders and young adults in having conversations with members of different generations.

*The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project* responds to these interests and brings together diverse groups of LGBTQ+ young adults (18–28 years of age) and LGBTQ+ elders (60+ years of age) to engage in sustained dialogue about a range of topics (e.g., LGBTQ+ intersections with race, gender, activism, history, aging, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic) that flow from the participants themselves. Each year, the project welcomes a new cohort of fifteen students from SAIC and fifteen older adults recruited through a variety of networks including the Center on Halsted, the largest LGBTQ+ community center in the Midwest. Participants commit to

nine-month series of biweekly dialogues followed by shared meals. As part of their dialogue work, they collaborate in small intergenerational groups on creative art-making projects for the project's public-facing website (generationliberation.com). In its third year, the project expanded to include a faculty cofacilitator from the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) with plans to bring UIC students to the project in subsequent years. The three cofacilitators who participate in the dialogues work behind the scenes to secure funding, address any questions that participants have about the project, make connections with other local groups organizing around related issues (e.g., housing, school curriculum), and strategize ways to make sure participant voices are visible (e.g., through the website, participation in conferences). This constellation of work pulls the cofacilitators in different directions while also helping us develop practices that get the work of the project out in diverse contexts.

Our interest in and sense for the need for more intergenerational contact emerges from the cofacilitators' own experiences teaching and working with different LGBTQ+ generations alongside research that has illustrated a lack of sustained intergenerational contact among LGBTQ+ folks in the United States (Brown 2009). This lack of sustained intergenerational contact between LGBTQ+ folks in the United States limits the sharing of intellectual, affective, and historical resources across social and economic divides within queer communities (Russell and Bohan 2005). Ageism and classism within both queer studies and LGBTQ+ social spaces render older LGBTQ+ people, the majority of whom experience heightened levels of financial, social, and health precarities (Hoi and Meyer 2016), invisible. The "generation gap" between the youngest and oldest generations of LGBTQ+ people who are usually not actively involved in or subjects of, queer scholarship, is further reinforced by the persistence of societal homo-bi-trans-phobic fears around the "recruitment" of youth (Graves 2009; Rosky 2017) and the scarcity of education and social services institutions where the existence of "gay people is treated as . . . a needed condition of life" (Edgwick 1991: 23).

As Kristen Renn argued "although higher education is the location of much development of queer theory, it is not an especially queer system of organizations or a system of especially queer organizations" (2010: 138). Queer theory, as an elite course, aligns with the work of higher education, and in such alignment has not impacted the structures or organization of higher education itself that might challenge the possibilities and conditions of queer existence. For Renn, thinking specifically about queer theory, "queering theory was acceptable, but queering organization was not" (2010: 138). The work of theory, in such a normative positioning, can be disciplined and housed in ways that provide a certain badge of honor for universities while forgoing the work of disrupting the structure and organization of higher education to be more equitable or accessible.

The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project expands the possibilities of queer studies beyond the classroom often inhabited by young people to interact with and connect to LGBTQ+ elders, many for whom studying "LGBTQ+" histories in school was simply unheard of during their school days. Following Matt Brim, we

recognize that "Queer studies makes us gay (or queer) because it opens a door to rooms, in this case classrooms, in which we do queer stuff together" (2020: 119). And we recognize our work as well connects with similar projects concerned with intergenerational LGBTQ+ possibilities, for instance, The Age Project out of Europe (Paulick 2008), the Generations Project based in New York City, and the Stay Gold Project at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson (Burke, Orr, and DiCindio 2021). The classroom doors opened here in our work are not only to rooms on a university campus but also include the doors of an LGBTQ+ community center's senior services program housed within one of only eight residential facilities in the United States for low-income LGBT seniors (ages fifty-five and up). Queer studies, in this sense, come out of the academy and come into conversation with communities, in our case, elder communities, who are on the vanguard again, helping LGBTQ+ elders retire out-and-proud.

### Queer Sharing

While there is much to learn from the project, we turn to unpacking the lessons and importance of sharing across generations as a queer form of coming into LGBTQ+ sensibilities. Our focus on sharing across generations is multifaceted as we address not only the practical importance of sharing resources across institutions to fund and feed such educative opportunities but also the importance of sharing stories as a form of queer becoming and knowledge building. Taken together, our need to work through and address space and financing the project, namely meals, was done with the recognition that participants would join the project from a range of positions. And while some participants would be (and are) financially secure, we did not want economics to bar anyone from participating, much less cause undue friction. What we did want was the ability to talk and think through LGBTQ+ lives as always already implicated in economic realities and, in particular, economic precarity, which itself implicates gender, race, and ability. Or, put differently, economic diversity alongside other forms of diversity could not be ignored at any stage of the process from imagining, planning, and implementing to revising and learning what we could do differently.

### Sharing Space

A key component of thinking through and developing *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project* involved thinking about space. As Samuel Delany (1999) illustrates in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, space is central to thinking about what makes us gay for the ways spaces, particularly queer spaces in public, created opportunities for contact with others, including cross-class contact. The loss of such spaces—seen with the gentrification of Times Square for Delany—closed down opportunities for contact central to making us gay. Drawing on Delany, Brim notes:

What makes us gay is not the fact of our being but the fact of there being places where being gay can have social meaning, spaces where people can be gay together. To be gay is to be able to live among others within the social constraints that produce (rather than merely oppose) opportunities for gay sociality. (2020: 119)

Space for LGBTQ+ sociality is not ever merely social but tied to spaces and their educational potential. In sharing spaces where “being gay can have social meaning” or where social meaning can be created about “being gay,” opportunities arise to do something different with the knowledge and histories that have been documented for some time now.

Yet, thinking about space is not merely conceptual. Rather, it also involves practical concerns about inclusion. Since a few of the elders that had expressed interest as the project was in development had various mobility limitations, we needed to be sure that wherever the dialogues were held that such a space was accessible. LGBTQ+ sociality cannot, we understood, assume able-bodiedness, particularly as aging is factored in. Fortunately, since the project was a school-community partnership with the Center on Halsted, they were very early on able to commit to allowing us to use their “living room space.” This living room space is connected to Town Hall Apartments, Chicago Housing Authority’s (CHA) senior living facility for LGBTQ+ older adults. What’s more, the space is located in a former police station, which provided participants young and old, including us as cofacilitators, a historical glimpse at a space with connections to LGBTQ+ life. This glimpse came by way of a few elders who are long-term Chicagoans sharing stories about their experiences with the space including being brought in and asked for being gay (e.g., for not wearing gender “appropriate” clothes). Such stories helped all of us connect current struggles against police violence with these spaces that came alive through the stories of some of the elders.

Being able to host the dialogues in this space provided a convenient option for elder participants who lived there and made the search for a space, which can be difficult, rather easy. The space was also easily accessible via the city’s public transportation system. Of course, the location of the building was within the city’s historic LGBTQ+ neighborhood which suffers from its own legacies of exclusion while encountering the impact of gentrification (see, for instance, Orne 2017; Simpson 2013). These legacies and histories can, as with any snapshot, tell a particular story of a moment in time that can miss other snapshots of a dynamic neighborhood that has given sustenance and inflicted violence on its communities, simultaneously.

In sharing space, the Center on Halsted was able to provide the project a home base that was not only accessible, at least more so than the school’s campus located in the city’s business city center, but also provided younger participants the opportunity to talk about and through queer aging in a space committed to LGBTQ+ elders. This was made visible in the first few months of the project when several of the residents of the adjoining apartments offered a tour of the building, including its outdoor space and other community-based features. Such a tour helped participants

develop a certain intimacy with one another, as well as made manifest the reality that this generation of elders, one of the first “out-and-proud” generations to retire, must now navigate new questions about being out-and-proud while aging. This includes not only economic challenges but also questions of dignity in growing old as an out LGBTQ+ person. Sharing the physical space of an old, converted police station connected to a housing facility materializes what research illustrates about economic precarity within LGBTQ+ communities. As Hollibaugh and Weiss (2015) illustrated, affluence in LGBTQ+ communities is more a myth than a reality. This “living room” space also allows for such a space to tell stories of its past as sexualities, genders, races, and classes interact. The walls of these buildings may not be able to talk, but the people sitting surrounded by those walls are able to tell stories that bring to life what haunts those very spaces. Some elders have expressed that their sense of being as an LGBTQ+ person is so inextricably connected to physical spaces that they fear what, for example, the disappearance of gay and lesbian bars might mean for their selfhood and even existence. For them, sharing such space across generations is tantamount to being seen, understood, and, eventually, remembered.

### Sharing Resources

Early in the development of *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project*, the cofounders decided that an essential component of each dialogue should be a shared meal. We thought eating together would allow us to create a space for continued sharing. We could, we envisioned, help build community and relations by breaking bread, so to speak. There was a recognition, as well, that within histories of LGBTQ+ lives, the family dinner table has been a fraught site (Schulman 2009). The biological family table has, for some, been a site of violence and exclusion (Ahmed 2006). Yet, for others, it has been a site of acceptance and inclusion. Furthermore, dinner with one’s “logical” or “chosen” family has similar histories, fraught with angst and love. We assumed, as we planned, that our own attempt at bringing together LGBTQ+ people across generations for a meal would lead to similar dynamics since no dinner table is ever simple.

To envision such shared meals and their potential importance is, of course, one thing. Funding such meals is another thing. The role of the project’s three host institutions (SAIC, Center on Halsted, and UIC) is complicated by their dependence on state and federal aid alongside, for the colleges, tuition dollars. SAIC is, for instance, completely tuition-dependent, charging an exorbitant tuition that puts most of its students (many of whom receive federal aid) into a huge amount of debt. Additionally, 77 percent of its teaching faculty are part-time and underpaid (AICAD 2020; Carsel 2018). The Center on Halsted depends on fluctuating external public and private grants and donations to function. UIC, a public research university, depends on revenue from a lower tuition rate and state funding that has recently decreased.

These underlying realities have a direct impact on the project, requiring constant efforts by the authors to secure funding to support the project’s meals, website, and collaborative artistic production. While Center on Halsted was able

are their space with the project, including a kitchen for any meal preparation, the work of the faculty facilitators to try to find money to pay for the meals and any other related costs that would emerge. Early on, in a conversation with Dean of Community Engagement at SAIC, some seed money was secured that allowed the project to get off the ground. This money was secured, in part, thanks, because of the administrator's recent reading of Rebecca Makkai's *The Believers* that provided a fictionalized history of the AIDS epidemic in the neighborhood where the project would take place. It took the administrator back to his own youth during the 1980s and being a student themselves of the school during those neighborhood streets and bars.

Initial seed money to get the project started, however, would not sustain meals for the entire year. So we applied and received a small grant through our college as a "Compassion and Belonging" grant that was focused on developing programs that could cultivate diversity and equity initiatives. With this award, we had to take a different approach to meals since catering them, while not and able to cater to different nutritional needs, was not economical. One of our cofacilitators, who has volunteered with the senior services programs for a decade, drew on his own networks to see if another volunteer, Harold, a nutritionist, would be willing to develop and cook healthy meals to feed people with additional help. Fortunately, he was happy to share his expertise and doing so allowed us to stretch our budget dollars while we worked to secure additional funding for future years of the dialogue.

Fortunately, the COVID-19 public health pandemic began seven months into the first year of the dialogue project, leaving us with grant money that would no longer be needed to fund in-person dinners. With the city, community center, and school shut down along with emerging concerns about the food insecurity of many elders now homebound and at high risk for COVID-19 infection, we used the leftover funds to donate food and other essential items to the community center, which was starting a food pantry for residents and other elder patrons. As, in part, because the funds needed to be used by the fiscal year since city budgets, themselves in crisis, still needed to be used up within the next fiscal year. It was also a way in the early weeks of the pandemic when much uncertainty prevailed that we were able to ensure the funds secured for the year were still used for meals for a vulnerable community population amid the uncertainty.

COVID-19, of course, upended more than just our meals. In the early days, we imagined the project would need to go on hiatus because of the shelter-in-place orders and the reality that many students were leaving Chicago to go to their respective families' homes. However, as Dunn, Chisholm, Spaulding, and (2021) argued, "COVID-19 has provided conditions which ruptured the status quo in a way that may enable the growth of hope and trust" (2021: 216). "Ample time to reflect, (re)focusing priorities, evaluating what we can do to support one another in the face of adversity, and sharing resources," they continued, "are the actions made possible by the pause in normal daily life that COVID-19 has handed of us". Such was the case for the project, as almost immediately

younger and older participants reached out asking if the dialogues could continue virtually. Having not planned or expected this, we went to work communicating with the participants about our rapid transition online, which initially involved twice-weekly Zoom calls, made possible through the faculty facilitators' university Zoom accounts, that allowed all of us to have much-needed social contact. This was made possible by the fortunate reality that all participants had access to some form of technology that connected to Zoom (e.g., phone, tablet, or computer). This rapid transition to Zoom, however, further illustrated the importance of sharing space together, albeit now a virtual space that allowed us to enter one another's private spaces. Project participants became involved in subsequent (mostly unsuccessful) efforts to secure funding to support our newly forming website and artistic production by submitting grant applications, writing letters of support, and mining their own networks for funding ideas. Zoom allowed us to share space and resources in new, sometimes more intimate ways. It also allowed, quite significantly, for the continued sharing of stories.

### Sharing Stories

A key component, often overlooked in coming into one's LGBTQ+-ness, is the work of sharing stories. Digital technologies allow us access to infinite amounts of information as we simply ask Alexa, Siri, or Google questions. These technologies and their predecessors have been, in some regards, central to connecting LGBTQ+ people across spaces within the anonymity of cyberspace. As demands for anonymity have changed as LGBTQ+ people become more mainstream, such digital resources now provide access to information that continues to expand. This allows emerging generations access to stories of yesterday's queer past in rather unprecedented ways, be it through something like the ACT UP Oral History Project coordinated by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman, OUTspoken LGBTQ+ Storytelling at Sidetrack (and through podcast) in Chicago, or Eric Marcus's book and podcast *Making Gay History*, to name just a few. Gone, so to speak, is the need for searching out content in the library stacks, hoping to find something that allows one to make sense of and reach toward understanding one's feelings and desires. However, there remains a need to connect such content to our lived realities and the ways our "now" must respond to challenges not only to our queer pasts but also to possibilities for queer futures, which include LGBTQ+ individuals who have and continue to age. We continue to need opportunities to meet others that allow us to talk about and through the ideas and practices we encounter; this is done, we believe, through stories that join conversations across space and time.

Stories are, we believe, central to the conversations that emerge during intergenerational dialogues. Simple as conversations might appear at the outset, they entail more than meets the eye, particularly as such conversations touch on topics, ideas, and issues like activism, healthcare, pronouns, and queer spaces that have changed for LGBTQ+ folks across time while simultaneously often remaining the same. This is true for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced an extensive

array of changes throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, but the stories of such changes are often not shared, in conversation, with others from different historical moments. By this, we mean quite literally, conversations in the presence of others in what we conceptualize as an embodied queer pedagogy (Morris, Greteman, and Weststrate 2022).

It is within the work of storytelling or sharing stories that we most visibly see ways to counter hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical justice, as a reminder, points toward the gaps that exist in interpretive resources used to make sense of and meaning of social experiences. The lack of hearing and sharing stories of LGBTQ+ lived experiences, on a certain level, limits the knowledge that exists within and across generations and curbs its potential to help us interpret the world. Stories, we have seen, help open deeper dialogues and reveal resources often already present within LGBTQ+ communities. As participants develop certain levels of trust with one another, they can share their stories that invoke a range of realities—joyful, traumatic, and more. Such sharing illustrates that LGBTQ+ individuals do not so much lack interpretative resources on a small scale, but rather there is a wide gap in such resources being shared collectively on a larger scale (e.g., through schools or other institutions). Stories and the tensions that arise in their telling make apparent in action the process by which hermeneutical injustice is countered with participants learning new ways to understand the complexities that exist within LGBTQ+ lives and communities.

An ongoing tension that became visible in the first year of the project and extended into the second year was around the expanding understanding of gender identity. This tension became most visible as participants took the reins of the project and proposed topics to focus on, notably one topic that an elder lesbian called the “disappearing lesbian.” Believing, as facilitators, that the tensions and complexities of LGBTQ+ life cannot be stepped around or glossed over but need to be worked through slowly and patiently, a set of dialogues was planned and developed by participants. One would focus on stories of expanding experiences of gender and another on stories of lesbian history.

Needless to say, many stories and conversations happened, so we want to focus on a particular moment where a breakthrough emerged. A number of elder lesbians shared their stories about growing up lesbian and their diverse experiences in lesbian spaces. As they told these stories, a certain theme emerged around the ways lesbian spaces have disappeared. As the stories ended and conversation started, student participants started to express a realization that they had never really thought about lesbian spaces, nor did they share the elders’ sense of loss, as they have never had access to them. However, numerous students expressed a certain concern about the “disappearing lesbian” framework because they had only ever encountered it through stories of “Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism” (or TERFs), which told a story of lesbians being “forced” to transition. Yet, as they listened to the elder lesbians, they realized that the elders were wanting to articulate and express their grief and mourning about lost spaces, spaces that had given them sustenance and helped them come out and live their lives. Disappearing lesbians was not coded for TERF views, but a need, perhaps even a desire, to mourn

and grieve the disappearance of lesbian spaces. This breakthrough moment also allowed students to teach the elders about TERFs, which the elders were completely unfamiliar with—at least conceptually—since they were familiar with historical tensions around the inclusion of trans women (e.g., Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival). Such a moment where stories help unpack and connect differently did not change things immediately, but it did open up a space that allowed participants to see, quite literally, the different assumptions that were being made about the descriptions or language being used. Disappearing lesbians, to elders, touched on their concerns about loss of lesbian spaces and culture, while to younger folks, disappearing lesbians was a coded way of erasing trans existence through fears of “lesbians going extinct.” Both viewpoints, of course, exist and are important. Yet, when the issues are collapsed without opportunities to unpack them, the resources that exist to both mourn losses and counter transphobia are lost.

This describes, in part, the role of time in engaging in conversation across generations. Concerns around gender were ever present and embodied differently due to histories of gendered oppression. Such conversations around gender across generations are not commonplace in everyday life, happening, if at all, often within the space of bars or one-off programming. And a lot can be lost or missed within such ephemeral encounters as assumptions and stereotypes are made along with a general reality that collective understandings of different LGBTQ+ realities are lacking. If the dialogues had not been sustained, the suspicion and misunderstanding around gender across generations would have persisted. Yet, the participants in the project entered the project with a range of experiences, ideas, resources, and more that were shared and unpacked over time. We each entered intergenerational spaces at different points in the process and have had to work to make sense of where the conversations are, how we might contribute or fit in, and how and when we might leave the conversations, which continue without us present. Sharing one’s story to be in conversation with members of other generations in any sustained manner is rather difficult because of the layers of issues that are in play and often unspoken. However, sustaining such conversations even amid tension or complications allows for resources to be developed and understandings to emerge that are rooted in experiences shared and unpacked together—in one another’s presence (physical or virtual)—and not through the disembodied realm of social media and sensationalist reporting that, as we learned, was a key component in some ways participants had come into contact with stories of LGBTQ+ lives.

### *On Being Implicated: A Conclusion*

Imagining, planning, and engaging an embodied queer education is no easy task as it requires not thinking about the historical and conceptual issues in play but also everyday material, economic, and structural concerns. Such questions, we learned, became even more important and the consequences even more visible as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. *The LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project* is an embodied queer education that refuses to keep queer studies in the

lassroom focused on texts (written or filmic), but to implicate the issues and insights of queer studies in the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ people both within and outside the academy. Queer studies scholars, as Allan Bérubé (1995) argued, can't enjoy the luxury of standing on the sidelines as innocent bystanders" to the racialized class inequality and confusion that structure the larger society." For Bérubé, "we have been implicated" (1995). Decades later, queer studies scholars continue to be implicated in these complex and intertwining inequalities as we have become even more ensconced in higher education with all its complications (e.g., budget cuts, enrollment issues, tuition costs) and legacies (e.g., white supremacy, Eurocentrism). It is not lost on us, nor is it coincidental, that we, the project's cofounders and facilitators, are white, cisgender, and tenured or tenure-track faculty members at institutions of higher education. We believe our implication is important as it means that rather than being on the sidelines as a bystander, we now have skin—including practices, methodologies, and stories—in the game to expand and build on the work of generations of LGBTQ+ people. We can, to draw again on Lather, "have different relations to queer generations" (2010: 69). Such generations are slippery, of course, as they are themselves implicated in politics of race, gender, class, and more that impact access to not only institutions of higher education, but also communities. However, it is necessary we believe to think with and across the slipperiness of generations to grapple with the different cultural, social, political, and material realities that formed and informed each generation's work within communities and institutions of higher education.

We began this chapter with a story where Taylor, a student participant, and Danie, an elder participant, showed a glimmer of what happens when queer studies concepts move outside of the classroom and into dialogue with those outside the academy who bring different histories and experiences. The moment could have gone any number of directions. Danie could have scoffed at the language—involved and obtuse as it might be seen. She could have remained silent in protest to the language or out of embarrassment that she didn't understand it. Instead, Danie joined the conversation, expressed her lack of understanding, and concluded, "Let's keep going and I'll get there." There, in that comment to keep going, to make sense, we saw the potential of sharing across generations and the ways such sharing assists both younger and elder participants to come into LGBTQ+ historical and contemporary discourses, politics, and yes, "lingo." The space—digital due to COVID-19—provided an opportunity to engage in queer intellectual and creative engagement that refused a hierarchy but embraced a process of sharing.

As we conclude writing this chapter, a year after Taylor and Danie's first dialogue around queer time, the two are preparing for a national academic conference in which they will discuss the final product of their small group's collaborative work on queer time. A collection of collages using participants' personal photographs overlaid with transparencies bearing hand-drawn images and hand-written stories, the work reflects members' journeys to locate and celebrate moments of "queer joy" in their own lives. Their sharing of an art piece realized through community-based,

intergenerational exchange among LGBTQ+ folks with academic and professional conference attendees offers a glimpse of the ways that new forms of "queer studies" that travel out of the academy can enter back into, and contribute to, the field.

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