

Disability Justice: Heart and Center of the Movement
Asian Solidarity Collective
Wednesday, October 7, 2020

LAUREN: Thank you, Kandi. Welcome everybody. So happy to see so many people here today. My name is Lauren, I'm with the Asian Solidarity Collective on the Political Education Committee. We're so excited to have you here for this month's Social Solidarity event. Welcome to Disability Justice: Heart and Center of the Movement. Our goal today is to learn about disability justice as a framework and a practice, and to see tangible ways to further our movements and keep disability justice at the heart and center of them.

For those who are not familiar with us, we are Asian Solidarity Collective. ASC is a grassroots organization in San Diego, our mission is to activate Asian-American social justice consciousness and to -- sorry. Just reorganizing my windows.

[Slide reads: Welcome. Asian Solidarity Collective. Monthly Virtual Social Solidarity Gathering. Wednesday, October 7, 2020. Organized by Asian Solidarity Collective's Political Education Committee. Stacey, Khue, Mae, Amelia, Diana Joy, Lauren, Jasmine, Kayla, River. End slide description.]

To activate Asian-American social justice consciousness, condemn anti-Blackness, and build Asian solidarity with Black folks, queer and trans people of color, and other oppressed

communities. Our work includes political education, community building, events, and collective action.

So to get started, I'd like all of us to get in the chat and share your names, your pronouns, your location, and what is your one word mood for the day? Don't be shy. Kandi, she/hers, is "trying." Thank you so much. Hello Dominic, they/he, and their word for today is "hopeful." So beautiful, thank you. And Sam, she/her, "relaxing." I wish I were on your level, Sam. [laughs] Welcome to Stacey on Kumeyaay territory, her mood today is "proud." I'm seeing so many good ones, inspired, at ease, excited, jittery. And me, I'm just stoked. I'm Southern California stoked to be here. All right. Well let's get started and let's look at our community agreements.

[Slide reads: Community Agreements. There is a yellow highlighted box containing the list: Please mute when not sharing. Live ASL interpreters and Captioner provided - Please pace ourselves and pause when talking. Reminder: this event is being recorded, streamed on Facebook and the transcription will be available after recording. The rest of the slide lists: Show up present and available. Listen from the inside out, or listen from the bottom up. Confidentiality is assured: take the lessons, leave the details. Model generosity. Be aware of intent & impact. Accept responsibility for impact. Practice healthy conflict: Engage Tension, Don't Indulge Drama. Give the gift of grace. Bring openness and awareness of trauma history. Communicate your access needs. Be teachable. Building, not selling—when you speak, converse, don't pitch. Self care and community care. Make Space, Take Space. Experience discomfort. Be aware of power

and privilege. Honor the process - Value the process as much as, if not more than, you value the outcomes. Respect Pronouns. Expect and accept non closure. End slide description.]

These are the community agreements for ASC, for all of our events. I want you to pay special attention to the agreements that are in the box. We ask that you please mute when you are not sharing. You may have noticed, we have ASL interpreters and captioners here today, so I ask that you pace yourselves, and that's a note for myself because I tend to talk pretty quickly. And as a reminder we are also going to be recording, and the transcription will be available after recording. We will not be streaming on Facebook due to technology issues. I want to give a special thank you to our ASL Interpreters for today, Jeni and Darryn, and our captioner, Bayanihan. Thank you so much.

Now we have a brief announcement from Kandi about an upcoming ASC event.

[Slide reads: Asian Solidarity Collective. Announcements. Save the Date: ASC's GOTV Twitch Party. October 18. More details to follow. www.asiansolidaritycollective.org. There is a flyer with photos of speakers that reads: Unprop the Props: ASC's 7 Prop Stances. Wed. Oct 14, 2020. 6PM PST. Register at bit.ly/ascUnProptheProps. Featured Speakers: Arcela Nuñez-Alvarez, Universidad Popular California. Christina Griffin, Community Organizer. Josen Diaz, PhD, Assistant Professor, Ethnic Studies, University of San Diego. Kim Moore, Community Organizer. Trinh Le, Asian Solidarity Collective. Moderated by jean-huy tran, Asian Solidarity Collective. The flyer includes a

logo for Asian Solidarity Collective and Take Action. There is a photo of Yuri Kochiyama wearing a “Free Mumia Abu-Jamal” shirt. There are symbols on the flyer indicating ASL interpretation and closed captioning will be available. End slide description.]

KANDI: Hi everyone, thank you for being here. We do have our events coming up as part of our Take Action campaign at the Asian Solidarity Collective. Next Wednesday we continue on with our webinar series with “Unprop the Props: ASC’s 7 Prop Stances,” On Wednesday, October 14, at 6 pm. You can register at the bit.ly link, if someone could drop the bit.ly link in the chat, that’d be great, as I cannot see at the moment. But we do have our featured speakers, really excited, some really phenomenal organizers here in San Diego. We have Arcela from Universidad Popular California, Christina Griffin, also another community organizer, Josen Diaz, one of our original co-founders of Asian Solidarity Collective will be returning to open a framing conversation with us, and then Kim Moore, another community organizer here in San Diego, and our very own Asian Solidarity Collective organizer Trinh Le, as well as Jean-Huy, who is gonna moderate the panel discussion next Wednesday.

We also have a save the date, everyone, for our Get out the Vote Twitch party. It’s gonna be a DJ party so we’re really, really excited about it, and I’m saying the GOTV is sort of “get out the vinyl.” We will be having "Have a Nice Day" DJs come in to spin for us as our guests, and maybe another surprise DJ. More details will follow in the next week or so, so we’re really excited about that. And that’s it. I’m gonna turn it back to you, Lauren.

LAUREN: Thank you, Kandi. Now I want to uplift the members of our Political Education Committee who planned and coordinated this event, and our other Social Solidarity events, so big shout out to Jasmine, Kayla, River, Sam, Diana Joy, Khue, Mae, and Stacey, and of course Kandi. Thank you all so much. If you're interested in joining Asian Solidarity Collective, we are recruiting for our political ed committee. We would love for you to join us.

And now, I'm so excited to welcome our panelist, Melissa Kelley Colibrí. Melissa (they/them) is a Deaf disabled queer mixed Latinx non-binary femme. They are a full time accessibility activist in the LGBTQ community of San Diego, and are the accessibility manager for San Diego Pride, San Diego Trans Pride, and SheFest, ensuring events are accessible for all people with disabilities including Deaf folks. In addition, they provide free accessibility training workshops for community members, organizers, and agencies that serve LGBTQ folks in San Diego county, and give presentations on accessibility nationally. Melissa also co-coordinates access for virtual events hosted by the People's Collective for Justice and Liberation with another Deaf coordinator. They are on the advisory council for the People's Collective for Justice and Liberation as well as the advisory board for the Disability Project housed under the Trans Law Center.

Please give Melissa a warm welcome, we're so happy to have them here. Melissa, is there anything else that you would like to add that you want people to know about you before we get started with the conversation?

MELISSA: I love being here and you will see me soon. You'll see me drinking some matcha because it's my favorite thing, so you'll see me throughout the presentation.

LAUREN: Thanks Melissa. So we will start this off, for those of us who are unaware of what this means, can you please share with us, what is disability justice?

MELISSA: Yes, absolutely. The term disability justice was coined by -- let me make sure I get the names right here -- they were by queer women of color activists in 2005. It was actually Patty Berne of Sins Invalid, and Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern. They eventually united with Leroy Moore, with Eli Clare, and also with Sebastian Margaret. They were seeking to challenge radical and progressive movements to more fully address ableism. So disability justice was actually built because the disability rights Movement and disability studies didn't inherently centralize the needs and experiences of folks experiencing intersectional oppression, such as disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others. Disability justice recognizes the intersecting legacies of white supremacy, colonial capitalism, gendered oppression, and ableism in understanding how people's bodies and minds are labelled 'deviant', 'unproductive', 'disposable' and/or 'invalid'.

So that framework was actually established -- they actually established 10 principles of disability justice, by that organization, Sins Invalid. So in terms of intersectionality, the idea is that “We do not live single issue lives” as stated by Audre Lorde. So when ableism is coupled with white supremacy, and supported by capitalism, underscored by heteropatriarchy, it renders the vast majority of the world “invalid.”

The 2nd of the principles of disability justice was leadership of those most impacted. And a quote to represent that is by Aurora Levins Morales that says “We are led by those who most know these systems.”

The 3rd principle is anti-capitalist politic. So in an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming bodies and minds.

For the 4th principle, a commitment to cross-movement organizing. So shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.

The 5th principle is recognizing wholeness. People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.

The 6th principle is sustainability. We pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.

Commitment to cross-disability solidarity. We honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.

The 8th principle is interdependence. That communicates the idea that we meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over lives.

9th is collective access. As Brown, Black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.

And 10th, collective liberation. The idea that no body or mind can be left behind – only mobbing together can we accomplish the revolution we require. And that's the end of that.

LAUREN: Those are such beautiful principles. Melissa, thank you for sharing. I'm going to drop the link for everybody to view those principles in the chat, so you can review them on your own if you'd like. So as people living in an ableist society, what lessons must we unlearn in order to center disability justice in our movements? And with those lessons in mind, what are some tangible things that we can all do to center disability justice?

MELISSA: Listen, honestly. When you first start organizing, you need to include appropriate payment for ASL interpreters, and then you also need to reach out to Deaf and disabled folks, let

them share their own access needs. Don't assume that you know their access needs or argue with them. Just listen. They know their bodies and they know their needs best. It's really important that you promote ahead of time, at least 2 weeks in advance preferably, and include accessibility information on flyers. There are icons you can use to signal that ASL interpreting will be provided and is wheelchair accessible.

You should also consider the cost of your event. Is it free? If it's not free, if there are individuals who are low-income, can they afford it? If you're hosting an in person event, are your events accessible to public transportation? Do you have a designated scent-free area?

For virtual events that are held via Zoom or Webex, do you have a chat feature that is turned off so that it doesn't interfere with folks who are using screen readers? Do you also have a separate page for live transcription services? Some Deafblind individuals prefer to have both ASL interpreters and captioning services on the same screen, while other Deafblind individuals prefer to not have sensory overload or be overstimulated, so they prefer separate live transcript. It's important that you understand that you are working with multiple sets of access needs, and sometimes they clash with one another. You might need to work with an experienced accessibility coordinator and if they are part of the QTBIPOC community, you will need to pay them for their labor, their energy, their time. And that's really where you can start.

LAUREN: Thanks for that Melissa. I really want to uplift your work as an accessibility coordinator. Just to give a little bit of insight into the ways that Melissa helped us to not only be a panelist, but also organized the accessibility team for this event. They were super thoughtful about the different intersections of oppression and made sure the accessibility team for this event was uniquely able to work with us and our needs as Asian Solidarity Collective and be thoughtful of the content of this event as well.

It takes intent, it takes thought, and it takes time, and frankly it takes resources. So the folks that are here with us today are also paid. As community organizers it's very important for us to be centering that and making sure that we are appropriately compensating people for this really important work that they're doing. So thank you Melissa, and extra shout out to the accessibility team.

In these current unprecedented times...yeah, unprecedented times. There's so much going on right now. [laughs] What are some things that people need to be aware about that people with disabilities are currently facing?

MELISSA: So, many disabled folks are actually immunocompromised. Given that, it's really important that our community emphasizes that self-isolation is even more difficult than it is for able-bodied folks. It leads to a lot of disabled folks feeling lonely and disconnected from their communities. So, I want to emphasize that it's even more important to include them in your events so they can participate and reconnect with their community again.

There's also something else that I just became aware of recently. It's important to be really intentional when you're coordinating access. If you end up finding an interpreter, that's great. But you have to ask, are they the right interpreter? Are they actually -- how do I frame this? Are they queer? Are they BIPOC, trans, disabled? Do they represent any of those communities? Perhaps they do. Perhaps they're part of the members of those communities, but it's important to ask the community themselves. There are some interpreters who might cause harm to the Deaf community, so it's important to emphasize that you have the right interpreter, so that the Deaf participants feel that they can fully access the event and feel safe.

Unfortunately that is a reality, and that has happened in the past, so it's really important that you are intentional about who you work with. And reach out to the Deaf and disabled community members to ask them, who do you want for your access? And again, some individuals, they have preferred interpreters because of their style. Some are more English, some use more American Sign Language in their signing word order that they use, that's more comfortable for specific Deaf community members. So that's really important to be intentional about that.

LAUREN: That's great, thank you. The disability justice community has always taught that there are many ways to contribute to movement building work. As more people are currently going out to actions and being more engaged, what should folks consider as we plan actions and determine how we can contribute?

MELISSA: Deaf and disabled people want to be part of the action. So when you actually start the organization process, you need to reach out to the Deaf and disabled communities, to ask them what specifically they want for their access. My mentor, Drago Renteria, a wonderful Deaf Chicano transgender man, wrote this piece and I'd like to share it with you. I'll actually add it to the chat here, so you can access it as well.

http://deafqueer.org/handouts/15_Tips_ASL_Interpreters.pdf

It's called 15 Tips for Providing ASL Communication Access to the Deaf Community.

1) Make a commitment to be accessible in all things. Don't let access be an afterthought.

2) Change your attitude towards how you approach access. Access is a fundamental human right.

3) Move away from thinking of interpreters as "helpers" and "volunteers". Interpreters are highly skilled professionals and deserve to be seen and treated as such; compensate them for their time and expertise.

4) Just like the cost of a sound system, venue rental, flyers, etc., communication access is a necessary expense that you should budget for when organizing an event.

5) “Deaf” is an umbrella term. Not all Deaf people have the same communication styles or needs. Some Deaf people may prefer interpreters with strong ASL skills while others may prefer interpreters with strong transliteration skills. And still others may prefer to use a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI). To make your event accessible to DeafBlind individuals, tactile interpreters may also be needed.

6) Be aware that not all interpreters are created equal. Some interpreters are more skilled and culturally competent than others.

7) Deaf people often have interpreters they prefer to work with. If you know the Deaf person/ people planning to attend your event, ask them who their preferred ASL interpreters are for your event and reach out to those interpreters.

8) ASL interpreting is strenuous work and ASL interpreters risk injury to their hands when working for long periods of time. For this reason, two interpreters are typically required for events that are longer than one hour in length. Budget accordingly.

9) Don’t wait until the last minute to find and secure interpreters for your event. They are typically booked well in advance.

10) Some ASL interpreting agencies may be able to find interpreters for you at the last minute but keep in mind that it will typically cost 2 to 3 times more than if you had planned ahead and hired the interpreters directly.

11) Don't forget to do outreach. Let the Deaf community know that you are committed to making your events accessible and listen to the feedback and requests you receive from them.

12) It's generally okay to ask Deaf folks to RSVP in advance prior to hiring interpreters if you're not sure if anyone from the Deaf community will attend your event and you are a small organization with limited funds. You can state in your advertising something along the lines of, "We are committed to making this event ASL accessible. Please let us know by xx date (typically 2 weeks before the event) if you would like us to secure ASL interpreters for this event and we will do our best to do so." And if you receive a request after this date, please note that it is still appropriate to try to find interpreters, despite the date having passed.

13) In order to do the best job possible, interpreters need to be prepped. Provide them

with as much information relating to your event as possible, including but not limited to transcripts of planned speeches, lyrics, agenda, PowerPoint slides, notes, names of people that will be mentioned, and so on. The more prepared the interpreters are, the better job they will be able to do.

14) Be intersectional in your activism and organizing. Deaf people have many intersecting identities. Providing an interpreter does not mean complete access has been achieved.

15) Check in with Deaf people after your event and obtain feedback on how access can be improved next time.

Thank you for your allyship.

LAUREN: Sorry, I didn't unmute myself, my bad. Thank you so much for that, we'll definitely save these. I know from Asian Solidarity Collective's perspective, these are things we certainly want to keep in mind, and I encourage everybody who is participating to save this as well so that we can all do our part to be more inclusive. And also I wanted to note that if you have any questions for Melissa that you want to ask, please drop them in the chat and we would be happy to go over them at the end of this session.

My next question for you Melissa is, what does solidarity mean to you?

MELISSA: I have to say that I'm very intentional about everything I do. I handpick ASL interpreters and captioners that are queer, and also trans, BIPOC, and disabled. Especially for anything that is a paid opportunity. I really try to connect them with potential mentors so that they can grow and develop their skills. I also created a leadership team for San Diego pride, and I invited several different folks with multiple intersectional identities so that they could have a chance to lead.

I don't pretend to know all about different access needs from every different identity, but I would hire one interpreter to handle stage access, and then hired another person who was blind to discuss the type of accessibility needs for blind individuals. I brought in a person that spoke about -- like we had set up a scent-free area but then COVID happened. We had invited them to come and speak about people who are on the autism spectrum.

I'm trying to think of other things I did. I also worked with community organizations who serve various people with different disabilities that partner with organizations in the community. I can't do all of this alone obviously, this is all done in collaboration and partnerships with organizations in the community and we try to do the best we can.

LAUREN: That's wonderful. I have a question that's more personal to you. How did you get started doing accessibility coordination? What got you really involved in this capacity?

MELISSA: It's actually a funny story, well I don't know if it's that funny. [laughs] I was actually leaving an abusive relationship and I told myself that I would go to different events. And one friend of mine, we're friends on Facebook, and -- there was a planning meeting for the first trans meeting in San Diego. So I went to the event, and I met A.T. Furuya, who is now part of my chosen family. Anyway, the point is, there was this event and this was the first planned meeting for this organization, and I noticed that their access wasn't really taken care of. I ended up having to ask an interpreting friend to volunteer to interpret for me, to provide access for me. And it's still just -- it wasn't really working, and I was trying to push them to hire paid interpreters.

And they started learning from different people, especially Drago, and so then they took off from there, and then I ended up joining Pride. I was in various positions and then I ended up becoming manager of accessibility. So it's a long story.

LAUREN: Thank you for sharing that and how you had to advocate for yourself, and now you're here and you've been able to improve accessibility for so many Pride events and really throughout San Diego, and with People's Collective. So thank you so much for all of your work.

I have one last question for you. You shared so many wonderful resources for us today during your talk. How can one deepen our

understanding of disability justice as a political identity with an intersectional framework?

MELISSA: Connecting with them, asking and speaking with them, asking for their stories. Do reading. Sins Invalid has really great resources that you can access as well. Also there's -- let me grab one thing, I'll be right back, one second. This is a great book, I wanted to show it to you. It's called *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. Thank you for adding that to the chat. This isn't really fully focused on disability justice but it is somewhat related, I think it can relate to the concepts. *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Maree Brown. And this is one of my favorite books, it's *Beyond Survival*, and it is a story about transformative justice movements. I think disability justice is part of social justice work as well, it's part of the social justice movement, and it's part of transformative justice.

LAUREN: Thank you so much for that, those are all great books. We talked about *Beyond Survival* really recently, a couple months ago, at a social solidarity event about transformative justice, so highly recommended by a lot of people who we really respect and trust. I'm going to check the chat, is there anybody who has any more questions for Melissa today? While we're waiting, Melissa, anything you'd like to plug or let people know about work that you're currently doing in San Diego?

MELISSA: Oh actually the hashtag, #MeTooLGBTQ conference is approaching. It's actually next week on October 15th-17th. San Diego Pride is hosting that, so we'll have interpreters. We'll have captioning services as well. We recognize that the hashtag

#MeToo includes Black women and we need to have that focus on people who are also in the LGBTQ community who have experienced sexual violence, relationship violence, intimate partner violence. So I'm really excited about that, and the MeToo movement was created by a Black woman, just to clarify

LAUREN: Yes it was, thank you for lifting that up. We have a question from Dominic, they ask, are you available for hire and how can we request your services?

MELISSA: Yes, absolutely I am. You can email me at melissa@sdpride.org

LAUREN: Thank you. I have one more question for you. What are you personally doing in this time to find care for yourself?

MELISSA: Oh gosh, honestly, since coronavirus started my life actually changed. I became more depressed honestly. I developed a fear of going outdoors for a while. I refused to go out. But now, I started therapy, and I force myself to go for daily walks. I've been reading, I've been trying to read more. I'm trying to reconnect with people who are part of my support system. Yeah, that's basically it. I mean, I've been hiking as well, with friends but socially distanced. I'm trying to do yoga. I'm going to try next week. I have a friend who said they're willing to teach me, so yeah.

LAUREN: That's so great, that all sounds really good. I'm glad you're able to do that for yourself, get some sunshine and be with friends and stay active. That's lovely. If there aren't any other

questions, and everybody does have your email information. Definitely, I cannot recommend Melissa highly enough. They do really incredible work within the community. So thank you so much for that. I want to thank Melissa, our interpreters, our captioners, and the Political Ed Committee for coordinating this event. We are recording it so we will have a transcript available afterward, and we'll make sure to post about it on social media. We have an Instagram for Asian Solidarity Collective and Facebook as well. You can visit our website, asiansolidaritycollective.org, and follow us all over social media. I want to thank you all so much for being here, and extra thank you to Melissa. We're so grateful to learn from you today. Well then we'll just close --

MELISSA: Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity. Sorry for interrupting. No, it's fine.

LAUREN: Go ahead, I didn't have anything important to say.
[laughs]

MELISSA: I just wanted to say this is such a wonderful opportunity, I feel honored and grateful that you were so willing to accommodate my needs as well. You were very receptive and very open dialoguing about that. I think it was wonderful. Not all events are this well organized or as willing to discuss accessibility needs so I felt really great coming and being with you all here today.

LAUREN: That's so good to hear. Well keep up that standard in the future, as well. We've been able to learn a lot from you. We

have a lot of resources. I think everyone here today is really well equipped to center disability justice more and more, so thank you. All right. Have a great rest of your day everybody.

MELISSA: Again, thank you so much.

LAUREN: You're welcome. Bye everyone.