

IFQT S1E2 Transcript

Eric: [00:00:00] My name is Eric Eubank. I use they them pronouns. I'm 17 years old and I live in La Crescenta, California. I think it's important that we, whether it's through the creation of a podcast or individual writing pieces or really any way to portray any part about you or your experience, I think it is so important and really like vital just because shows the most vulnerable parts of you.

In that vulnerability, we find a lot of relatability. So I hope that Even my small contribution to this pod will be valuable for someone else because maybe the vulnerability that I'm sharing, even if it just scratches the surface, will kind of tap into a shared experience with them. And we can connect on some level, even if it's Not face to face.

Theme Song: Woke up on the right side of the rainbow

Feeling bright, gonna [00:01:00] put on a good show

There's a skip in my step

I'm doing my best And I guess that you could say,

I'm feeling queer today.

I'm feeling queer today!

Lily: Hello there, I'm Lily Mueller.

Alex: And I'm Alex Massey, and welcome to I'm Feeling Queer Today, a podcast that amplifies the voices of queer youth. This is episode two, The Label Game.

Lily: For some LGBTQ teens, finding people that they can see themselves in is an invaluable part of understanding their own sexuality or gender.

One of the biggest things that helped me find myself was finding people I looked up to, related to, and felt safe with. I have used a great many words in my time to describe myself, and many LGBTQ people favor having as many labels as necessary to describe their unique grippings of traits and [00:02:00] experiences.

As Maddie G. and J. R. Zuckerberg point out in their whimsically illustrated A Quick and Easy Guide to Queer and Trans Identities, Quote, the main purpose of self identification is to foster community and counteract feelings of confusion, otherness, and shame, and to connect with others who share similar experiences.

Alex: Although using labels to describe our sexuality can help us find solidarity in a heterosexist world, labels can sometimes exclude people, limit their growth, or make them feel boxed into one category. Labels can also be especially harmful when they're forced onto someone who doesn't want them.

Throughout this episode, we explore the idea of labels as validation, but also the notion that it is okay to explore which ones really fit, and how that can change from month to month, week to week, or even day to day. And that's okay. We're all constantly growing and changing.

Lily: At the top of the episode, we heard from one of our participants, Eric, from California, about how they hope that this podcast can be a way to connect people on a deeper level, even if it's not face to face.

In [00:03:00] that respect, Eric got a chance to chat via Zoom with another one of our young producers, Wallace, from upstate New York. about how they both navigate labels, identities, and stereotypes.

Eric: My name is Eric. I am in California. I'm 17.

Wallace: I'm Wallace. New York is where I am right now. And I'm 16.

Eric: For me, I feel like queer is my favorite word to describe myself, just because it says. I'm not who you expect I am, I'm not necessarily how I present. I am a little more complex than that, because I feel like my gender and my sexuality are both very, like, fluid.

How would you describe, like, your identity, if you have a concrete way to do that?

Wallace: I don't know. It sort of goes all over the place. I'd say I would fit under, like,

the trans umbrella, I suppose. And in terms of, like, sexuality, I've never really put a name to anything. Just cause, what's the point?

Eric: Exactly. I feel like it's nice to just know, [00:04:00] because just for yourself to be like, this is what I feel comfortable with.

But at the same time, it's like, we're just people, labels, who cares? Yeah.

Wallace: I feel like at some point labels got so performative, and they got very much for everyone else versus for yourself.

Eric: Yeah.

Wallace: The whole point of having labels was supposed to be to give yourself That stability while trying to figure things out.

And as soon as everyone kept being like, "What are you?"

I just lost interest in trying to label myself. Because if you only see me as the label, it's very limiting to who I am.

Eric: I think that finding those labels can be like, "This is what I'm outwardly presenting." But it's almost always so much more complex than that.

I know I've reached point B. I have the conclusion of like who I am and how I identify and how I feel about that. But at the same time, that's probably going to change anyway. So arriving at that point, it's still just a midpoint to get to somewhere else.

Wallace: [00:05:00] Yeah. It's the same with pronouns, because as nice as it is that people are like, oh, what are your pronouns?

They instantly assume that your pronouns equals who you are. Whereas I might not always be like, oh, my pronouns are this, and that directly correlates to this. Because people will be like, oh, he, him, okay, man. And it's like, I don't know if it's always true.

Eric: Exactly. I mean, obviously, there are different, like, aspects of identity and expression, and everything is a spectrum, and the spectrums don't have to align, but there is this kind of phenomenon of, well, this is what you're going to express yourself as, that means you are this, but that's not true.

And I feel like For me, I would say, like, I'm comfortable with any pronouns, like, he, she, they. Anything would be fine. But if I were to tell someone that, a lot of people would just be like, oh, you're fine with he? Well, you were born male. We're just gonna call you he. And it's like, well, that's all I'm asking.

Wallace: That's my issue too, because as much as it's like, I really [00:06:00] Don't care, bottom line. As soon as I say that, everyone's just going to take the easy route. And it's like, no, I'd like for you to put in an effort.

Eric: Yeah. And I think that boils down to the binary perception that we have of gender.

Wallace: A lot of people find comfort in labels where it's like, Oh, feminine people do this, masculine people do that.

Everything that's very stemmed from sexism and patriarchal ideas.

Eric: I feel like there's a lot of nuances and complexities that can't be encapsulated by, like, labels and things. I like having a menu of options that you get to pick from. It's like a build your own kind of thing, where you can just have, like, the different aspects of yourself, and you can have any combination or any, like, way that that's visually expressed versus the way you act, versus how you just internally identify.

There shouldn't be boxes to check. Rather, it's just kind of like a more fluid, ambiguous kind of thing. I think the biggest change, I guess, that is necessary is just people being more open to what isn't necessarily, like, [00:07:00] traditionally X, Y, or Z.

Wallace: Yeah, I think dismantling of a lot of traditional values would be good as much as, like, people don't want to hear that.

It's kind of needed in order to break away from all of the BS that we have going on in the world presently. It's just hard to be clear these days with all of the traditional people that are like, This doesn't work. And it's like, okay, but no one's asking it to work for you. It's working for other people.

Eric: I mean, even for people who are or claim to be very supportive and everything. A lot of times there's a perception of what something should be. We're all kind of guilty of having certain assumptions that are limiting and that do put people in boxes. And I think there needs to just be some collective agreement like, "we're going to stop doing that."

Wallace: I mean, they're stereotypes for a reason. Because sometimes they're true, but it's also like, just let me be a person outside of what you've [00:08:00] picked out for me.

Eric: Based on the way that I walk and talk and act and speak, the assumption for me is gay man. That's kind of the prescribed label, I guess.

But I think that not only is my gender more complicated than that. That's just not necessarily an experience that I 100 percent identify with. There are overlaps, definitely. But that isn't necessarily encapsulating me as a whole. So I would definitely say that when the label is thrust upon you, Even if you don't have an alternative, even if you aren't sure what is better, don't just settle for less.

Don't just be like, well, this is what I was told, so I'm going to have to accept that.

Wallace: Yeah, something I would recommend is just to take time, because a lot of people will be like, you need to know. And it's just, it won't work out that way. You have to take time, and sit through it, and not deny yourself just the ability to process things.

Because a lot of people are gonna be like, [00:09:00] Oh, are you sure? Blah blah blah. But just stick with it, and whatever happens, happens. Because you will forever evolve and change as a person. It's part of life.

Eric: And also, definitely don't feel pressured to reach a conclusion about anything, because that conclusion is probably going to change at some point.

Oh yeah, definitely. There's no rush for anything. There's no end point.

Wallace: It's just forever going on.

Eric: It's okay to experiment and be who I am and change how I feel about myself.

Alex: Honestly, I love this piece. I love what Eric said about how you shouldn't settle for a label either. There is that fear of being wrong whether it does come from that like homophobic/transphobic implication of "oh this is just a phase..."

Lily: And what if it is? We've all gotten like a weird haircut. We've all gone through like an overall moment, um, we've painted our walls teal, um, and in all, like, people over time, we age, we have partners, we have new [00:10:00] friends, we get new jobs, we move places, we, we're not four years old forever and ever and ever, um, and we accept change in those avenues of life, but for some reason not in the avenues of gender and sexuality.

And that's always really confused me.

Alex: A lot of people want to explore all facets of their queerness. In this next segment, we're going to hear audio taken from the Future Perfect project's original series, Queer Youth Animated. In this clip, we meet 13-year-old Benny from Kingston, New York. Stuck at home during the pandemic, Benny finds comfort and connection through texting with friends, and finally names what they've been feeling about their sexuality for a long time.

Honestly, I think this has the potential to be a wonderful period piece for this generation of queer folk. Let's take a listen.

Benny: My name is Benny. I'm 13 years old and [00:11:00] I am in New York. And I identify as pan. I always just like, assumed that I wasn't straight. I kind of just knew when I had crushes on Disney princesses, instead of the Disney princes. But then one of the things like in real life that made me realize was this girl who I had a crush on in the fifth grade.

When they came out as non binary. I was like, oh, well, I still find you attractive and I'd still, like, date you. So I was like, okay. And then one of my friends who kind of just, like, has been trying to find their label for a while, I asked for them to explain, like, what the sexualities were. And they did.

Great friend. And I was like, oh wait, I think I might be pan. And then I Kind of just stuck with that. I haven't figured out anything else that might work better for me. The gayest thing about me is probably just my personality and the fact that I [00:12:00] can't go 24 hours without talking about some LGBTQ person that I find attractive or questioning my identity in multiple different ways.

That's probably due to having more time to like, look into identities during the pandemic. My friends, we've kind of just been all experimenting with names and pronouns and it's just been really exciting to have that space. A majority of our conversations being text messages definitely makes that easier.

My favorite part about being queer is really just the boldness. and how everyone has out their styles because they're allowed to express themselves. On the internet, I see people who are wearing crazy things like Rubik's Cube earrings, which are really cool, and gigantic dresses and crazy nail designs and I just, it's really inspiring and [00:13:00] I try to put that into my outfits as well.

And I have these crazy worm earrings that me and my friend have a matching pair of. We coordinate our accessories sometimes. Just be like, hey, guess what? I'm also part of this wild and bold community.

Alex: That was absolutely darling. I love that these are conversations that this generation can have. And I know so many people who are always like, Grr, queer people make their whole personality being queer. But there's just something so euphoric about being young and having that first chance to explore and express yourself.

Like, it's literally not hurting anyone. You'll, you'll learn so much, whether it's just, like, what makes you comfortable or how to make your own earrings.

Lily: I, I had, like, a challenging multiple coming out, um, so now, as an adult, I've definitely had positive experiences, but it warms my heart to hear that people's first, like, hop in is going to be positive, because even if Your progressive experience become positive in the back of your [00:14:00] mind.

There's sometimes just always going to be something nagging

Alex: So what do we have next on the docket, Lily?

Lily: Another edition of this story coming from Zorian Edwards in Pennsylvania.

Zorian: So my first queer crush Was on one of my best friends. This is pre-transition, Pre knowing that I was trans at all. I'm just gonna call her Bobby. So Bobby was a more masculine kind of girl. She was more of a tomboy than I was. She was obsessed with horror movies and zombies. And kind of the opposite of how I was at that age.

I don't even know how to explain it. She was just a really nice person and I started to have a crush on her, and around this time is when I realized what bisexuality was, and the fact that I was bisexual, so I came out to my friend group at [00:15:00] the time, which most of them weren't really supportive, some of them thought it was like, a trend, so I was like, well no, I'm not faking this, like, I'm genuinely bisexual and I'm looking for some support here.

I remember that Bobby was the only one that was like, oh yeah that's cool, and that was the most support I really got. I was going in and out of the closet here, and Bobby and I became

closer friends. Then I invited her to my birthday party, and we had a sleepover and stuff, and I wanted to tell her I had a crush on her.

But I was too scared to do it. So anyway, Bobby, you know who you are. But that was my first queer crush.

And then, I guess the other half is like, after I transitioned, I was like, "Oh, well I must just be straight because I'm a guy now." So, I guess rediscovering that I was bi was when I had this huge crush on this very smart guy that was in the grade ahead of me.

He was the [00:16:00] smartest kid in his grade, and he seemed pretty homophobic at first. And then he joined my Pride Alliance, so as time progressed, I started to discover that he was more feminine than the average guy. We dated for like, three months, so I was like, "oh, well I must just be gay." And then once I got out of that relationship, it was like, "No, I'm most certainly bisexual, because women are women. And non binary people are non binary people." Everyone's hot, okay?

Alex: That's such a lovely piece, because I think that it shows just how exploring your gender and exploring your sexuality can be so linked. They're kind of complementary journeys. Sometimes they're not always totally in sync, but like I don't know. I feel like you find yourself by the end, usually.

Lily: I'm, I'm taking [00:17:00] the less, the less deep route.

Um, crush on the best friend, seminal, rite of passage. Um, it's a classic. Um, like, in any given room of queer people, you'd be like, who here has developed feelings for a close friend? The hands would go up. They will soar into the sky.

Alex: And now, folks, we're going to round out this episode hearing from Frankie about their queer identity journey.

Here we go.

Frankie: My name is Frankie, and I use they, them pronouns. My current label is gender non-conforming, transmasculine, and bisexual.

I first came out as pansexual when I was 15, I believe. Uh, and that quickly morphed into gay, which at some point reverted to bisexual. I think I came out as non binary when I was 16.

Something that I've realized lately is that labels have always just been a means to an end for me. They [00:18:00] are simply descriptors to get me where I need to go. Now I feel like I use terms like transmasculine as a way to medically transition and go on testosterone, but I feel like once I'm comfortable with myself that label is gonna fade away And I'm just gonna be myself again. If that makes much sense at all. Same with bisexual I don't feel like that's

necessarily a term that has much power except for that it describes to other people The kind of people I like to date and that is subject to change at any point.

So I feel like as it pertains to how my past experiences inform my current labels and my current experience, they are always to get me somewhere else that I want to be, and once I get to that point, the label changes, or I just go back to feeling like, I don't need a label.

Alex: That's just such an absolutely lovely segment, and I think that it offers a pretty fresh perspective on how [00:19:00] to, like, explore and attach yourself to identities. Like, this idea of just, does it get you where you need to go?

Lily: I've said it before, I'll say it again, um, I want to be Frankie when I grow up, and I really do mean that, um, because I'll have to be well into old age to be, like, so, so wise and introspective.

Um, I appreciate the idea of labels as opening a door. Like, I think when I was first understanding that there was something gender y happening, it occupied, like, 98 percent of my brain. All the time. Like, I couldn't, like, relax. Um, and now I kind of, I, like, I feel like a sense of security that I feel like Frankie gives off in general, but in this clip of like, I know who I am, and I don't need to be able to explain that detail by detail to other people, um.

But also the quotation, the label's gonna fade away, and I'll just be myself again. I write poetry, so sometimes things just make my entire body like, Ehh! Um, so, that's where I'm at today. [00:20:00] Thank you so much for sharing with us, Frankie. We appreciate you so much.

Alex: Overall, it's just such a wonderful way to kind of close up the episode by bringing it back to like a queer identity journey, and if there's one thing that I've learned about being queer, it's that some of us love labels, some of us don't need them. And I think that's really cool.

Lily: I'm very pro whatever word makes you comfy, but now there's even more!

Alex: I don't know. I, I don't feel like anyone needs to be a walking dictionary or glossary of it. I think that just being able to like understand and respect. That's enough, you know? Like, you don't need to know everyone's nuance and stuff.

And sometimes people don't feel safe sharing all of that. But I think that just being able to like, have access to those things can help you understand your gender so much better. Or your sexuality. Or both! Anyways, this closes out the second episode of I'm Feeling Queer Today! And we really hope you enjoyed it!

And we look forward to Joining you again, and I'm Alex,

Lily: I'm Lily, and you've been listening [00:21:00] to

I'm Feeling Queer Today.

Be sure to join us next week for episode 3, when we'll explore the topic of intersectionality. And if you like what you hear, please rate us and share the show with your friends or family, or both, and don't forget to ask yourself, how am I feeling queer today? For more information and resources about this episode, check out the show notes, or visit the episode page at thefutureperfectproject.org/podcast.

Alex: If you or a young person you know between the ages of 13 to 24 is currently in crisis, check out the Trevor project.org for lgbtqia plus specific support through Text and Chat, or call 1 8 6 6 4 8 8 7 3 8 6. We will also include this information in the show notes

Lily: To Learn More about The Future Perfect Project and all of our free arts programming for LGBTQ plus youth visit thefutureperfectproject.org or find us on social media at @thefutureperfectproject[00:22:00]

Alex: *I'm Feeling Queer Today* Today is produced by The Future Perfect Project with support from Radio Kingston WKNY AM 1490 FM 1079 Kingston, New York. This episode was produced by me, Alex Massey,

Lily: And me, Lily Mueller, as well as Frankie Gunn and Wallace. Featuring Benny, Eric Eubank, and Zorian Edwards.

Alex: Our theme song was composed and performed by me. Alex Masse, and produced by Emma Jane Seslowski. Additional music composed by myself, Frankie Gunn, and Epidemic Sound. Episode mixing and mastering by Julie Novak, with assistance from Emma Jane Seslowski. Special thanks to executive producers and mentors, Julie Novak and Celeste Leceane.

As well as future Perfect Project team members Ryan Amador, Jon Wan, and Aliya Jamil.