

IFQT S1E5

[00:00:00] **Eric:** Just a quick note before we begin, this episode does have mentions of suicide. If you are having thoughts of suicide or self harm, you can call the Suicide and Crisis Hotline at 988 or visit 988lifeline.org. For LGBTQ plus specific support, visit thetrevorproject.org or call 1 866 488 7386.

[00:00:29] **Sonyamia:** Hi, my name is Sonyamia Blanco. My pronouns are she, her. I am 20 years old. I am originally from Berkeley, California. What advice would I have given to my younger self? I would have said to her, it's literally all gonna be okay. And that I know that sometimes it feels like the end of the world, but it's not.

There are people to support and love you, and help you, and relate to you, and I can promise you that.

[00:01:01] **Alex:**

Woke up on the right side of the rainbow.

Feeling bright gonna 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!

[00:01:39] **Eric:** Hey everyone, I'm Eric Eubank, I'm 17 years old, my pronouns are they them, and I live in Glendale, California.

[00:01:45] **Sonyamia:** And I'm Sonyamia Blanco.

[00:01:47] **Eric:** And we want to welcome you to *I'm Feeling Queer Today*, the podcast that amplifies the voices of queer youth.

This is episode 5, "Coping While Queer." Sonyamia, you shared at the top of the episode what you hope this podcast can become for young queer people. You talked a lot about the struggles we can often go through alone, and sometimes that isolation and anxiety can have a big impact on our mental health.

[00:02:11] **Sonyamia:** Yes, without a doubt, I was looking at some statistics from the Trevor Project's 2023 U. S. National Survey on the mental health of LGBTQ young people, and I wanted to share a few of those. 41 percent of LGBTQ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, and young people who are transgender, non binary, and or people of color reported higher rates than their peers.

Nearly one in three LGBTQ young people said their mental health was poor, most of the time or always due to anti LGBTQ policies and legislation.

[00:02:49] **Eric:** Hearing statistics like that can be so hard. But that's why it's so important that we discuss them so that we can raise awareness, especially for the queer voices that don't have a chance to be heard.

And the fact that we live in a country in which the already marginalized queer community is being further discriminated against makes experiences like these even more isolating.

[00:03:08] **Sonyamia:** I know that oftentimes it doesn't feel like there's a way out. It doesn't feel like things will get better. We're not thinking about the outcome.

We're not thinking about the outcome. The light at the end of the tunnel because we feel so stuck and I'm here to tell you that it will get better With the right support.

[00:03:26] **Eric:** I had a friend who struggled when he came out as trans Because he wasn't able to come out to his family or anyone besides a couple of his friends He felt that his struggles went unnoticed and unheard And it wasn't until he was able to find a support group at our local LGBT center that he felt able to share the things that he previously left unsaid.

He was finally able to find a space to be himself. But not everyone can. Which is why projects like this podcast are so important. To allow people like him to feel seen and appreciated. We are going to share a clip from the Future Perfect Project original series, Queer Youth Animated. We will hear from Will, a young queer person who was being bullied at their high school, and how, with the help of their mom, they were able to move to a new school and get the support that they deserve.

[00:04:17] **Will:** I'm Will, 17. I use he, him, or they, them pronouns. I live in Minneapolis and I'm bi. Having to hide part of yourself for so long really makes you appreciate when you don't have to hide it. The summer before my sophomore year of high school, I was talking with my mom and she was like, your sister is graduating.

Is there anything that you would want to do differently when it's just us at the house? And I started thinking about the places that I would want to go. And I knew that I wanted to be in a city because I wanted to be somewhere where there were people like me. Because I had never experienced that before.

Like, in the time that I lived in Lafarge, Wisconsin, I heard the F slur every single day. Like, every day. And there would never be any kind of, like, retribution for that. Like, people would say it in front of the teachers, and the teachers would laugh. I constantly felt like, I had to hide and even if I was like talking with the other queer kids, we could never openly discuss what it was like for us.

Coming to Minneapolis was so important. We went on a tour of South, my high school, and like from the moment that I stepped in, I was like, Oh, this is my home. This is where I should be. The connections and relationships that I'm building are going to be with me for the rest of my life. Everyone should be allowed to express who they are without fear of retaliation.

For a long time, for me, identity meant something that was not right within myself, and something that I couldn't actually show. Now, I exist as openly as I can because I don't want to go back.

[00:06:19] **Eric:** Wow, the perseverance that Will and everyone just like them shows each and every day is so inspiring to hear. I am so glad that they found a home where they can finally be themselves. Hearing Will's story really goes to show how even just a little bit of support can go such a long way.

[00:06:36] **Sonyamia:** I think that's just really important to know that there are people, there are so many people in this world, and at the end of the day, many of the experiences you're going through may not be as unique as you think.

[00:06:47] **Eric:** So, Sonyamia, you sat down in this past year to have a candid conversation with your BFF Cindy about different struggles you have both faced with your mental health, including being diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and Cindy with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Let's take a listen to that interview now.

[00:07:15] **Cindy:** My name is Cindy. I am 21 years old. She, her, and pansexual.

[00:07:21] **Sonyamia:** It's very nice to have you here, Cindy. I've been wanting to interview you for a long time because not only are you one of my best friends, but I really like your input on a lot of these topics. My first question is, how has mental health ever been a struggle for you?

[00:07:38] **Cindy:** In the beginning of childhood, I was a happy little girl. As soon as I hit middle school, I started to gain a lot more anxiety and a lot more, I wouldn't necessarily say depression cause I was not yet diagnosed with depression, but I got diagnosed with GAD, GAD. It's generalized anxiety disorder as well as depression.

[00:08:02] **Sonyamia:** The interesting thing about GAD is the exact cause of it is not fully understood. It's likely that it's a combination of multiple factors and from what research has shown GAD may include genes that you've inherited from your parents. So you may have a history of stressful or traumatic experiences.

What GAD gets compared to a lot of the time is symptoms similar to panic disorder or obsessive compulsive disorder. These symptoms include constant worry, restlessness, and a trouble with concentration. Have you ever been able to have a friend or someone in your life Who has ever been able to relate to your mental health challenges and barriers?

[00:08:48] **Cindy:** I would say almost every single family member, meaning my sisters and my mom, have depression 100%. It can be a genetic thing where, you know, family gets passed on genetically. With you, you know, you have borderline personality disorder, and we didn't know this until recently, like, I would say last year. I had to kind of work around that, and study it.

I would look up some stuff about it, you know, and I would be like, Oh, this makes sense. This is, this is why she's acting like this. And so for me, although it's very different, we still have some sort of understanding of how we feel emotionally when we go through certain things because you feel that depression sometimes.

You, you get to that point and that's understanding what I'm feeling throughout a lot of my days.

[00:09:31] **Sonyamia:** Last year over the summer, I did get diagnosed with BPD. At first, that was super scary to me, and I was like, Oh God, I don't want people to know that I have this. I think I'm gonna get judged immediately right off the bat.

There's about nine symptoms of BPD, and many of those symptoms include fear of abandonment, unstable relationships, unclear or shifting self image, impulsive, self destructive behaviors, chronic feelings of emptiness, and explosive anger. Everyone who has BPD is very different because some of these symptoms may be very minor, and then other of these symptoms may be more distinct.

For me personally, I have a fear of abandonment, and that can also be based on past experiences. So I did have a pattern of impulsive behaviors in the past. In the moment. I'm not really thinking, and then afterwards I feel horrible, I feel guilty. Subconsciously we're like, oh my god, we're gonna drive more people away.

Everyone has different ways of coping with BPD. Honestly, therapy has saved me in many, many ways. Because of therapy, I've become more aware of what my triggers are, how to deal with them, how to take a step back. I do believe that I've gone through a huge period of growth and I think that's also just me taking a step back from romantic relationships and just really focusing fully on myself.

Final question, how has your mental health affected your romantic relationships?

[00:11:02] **Cindy:** You know, when I'm going through depression, I don't want to talk to anybody. I've been in a place where I would not talk to you for like a whole month. It's basically that same concept, but within relationships I would shut down completely and I would stop talking to them and it would cause a lot of issues because obviously they want to talk to me.

It is hard for me to talk about, especially when within a new relationship. In terms of navigating that, I think it would be building trust. I tried my best to communicate as well as I can when I can.

[00:11:31] **Sonyamia:** I truly believe that taking time for yourself, learning how to fully, genuinely love yourself, spending time with yourself.

That's so important.

[00:11:39] **Cindy:** And yes, that's why therapy is really important because it makes you realize and makes your mind open to certain actions. And why do you do this? It is all about understanding yourself, for sure.

[00:11:51] **Sonyamia:** Thank you so much, Cindy, for being here and talking about all of this. This is something I feel very, very deeply about.

Mental health and relationships and all of that. It's just so important and we don't talk about it enough. So, thank you so much for being so open and expressing everything.

[00:12:07] **Cindy:** Yes, of course. Thank you for having me.

[00:12:20] **Eric:** So, Sonyamia, I know that it's been a little while since you've done that interview. Um, so now, six months later, how does it feel listening to it and reflecting upon it?

[00:12:29] **Sonyamia:** It's been a while, and what's crazy is the fact that me and Cindy are both deaf. In very secure places within the relationships we have right now.

She just hit her one year relationship with a girl, which is the longest relationship she's ever had, and it's just amazing. I've, I've spent time with both of them, and it's really great. And I think that

understanding their relationship dynamic, and like understanding that communication, honesty within yourself and the other person is, they're just essential things to have.

For me, I have been single for a while. I still am. However, I did meet a person a few months ago, and honestly, I was a little scared because I was like, Hmm, I don't want to give up this part of me that I've worked on for so long, and I don't, I don't want to jeopardize that by, you know, allowing myself to open up to another person.

However, I think I came to a realization that, You don't want to push good people away, especially people who actually impact your life in a very positive way. And, you know, I, I still am in therapy and I'm in a very, very happy place in my life right now. I'm very proud of myself. I'm very proud of Cindy as well.

We've seen each other grow in so many different ways. I'm just so proud of us for being able to manage those parts of ourselves a lot better.

[00:13:50] **Eric:** You have obviously navigated the world with having different, like, experiences and different, like, internal and external struggles. Um, how has, like, diagnosis changed that?

Has it made it easier? Has it made it harder?

[00:14:03] **Sonyamia:** Hmm. Yeah, that's a good question. I would say It's honestly made it a lot more clear. I wouldn't say it's necessarily easier, but before when I wasn't diagnosed with this I was like, there's just something wrong with me. I don't know what it is. I don't know how to label it and having a label sometimes just Makes things more clear for myself and then I could go to therapy and I could tell my therapist that you know I have this these are the symptoms.

How do I work on it? How do I? Navigate life through this lens. Um, but I think it's also important to understand that Whatever you're diagnosed with it doesn't necessarily mean that It's you as a person and you know, you could definitely overcome anything Many, many of those things.

[00:14:48] **Eric:** Next up, we're going to hear from podcast participants, Zorian and Jax, about how they balance self care and activism.

The segment is called Two, and it's created by co producer Trudy Poux.

[00:15:05] **Alex:** Hi, hi, hi. Hello.

[00:15:08] **Zorian:** Hi. Hi there. Hi. There we go.

[00:15:15] **Trudy:** Hi, this is Two, the show where I interview two people separately and bring their opinions together. I'm Trudy Poux, and today we'll be hearing from two student activists: Jax and Zorian

[00:15:27] **Jax:** hi, my name is Jax Gervasio, and I use he/him Pronouns.

[00:15:31] **Zorian:** I'm Zorian Edwards. My pronouns are he, they.

[00:15:35] **Jax:** I run a gender and sexuality alliance at my school. We currently have just raised over 170 for charity and for the GSA. Another thing that I'm doing activism wise is I'm setting up a

carnival. And it's going to be raising money for a bunch of clubs, just through like activities and stuff. And as much as capitalism is a flawed system, it's understanding how that works and how you can maximize how much money you're raising for a cause.

You can't just run something by yourself. You have to delegate, which is something that I've been learning the hard way past couple of weeks. You have to talk to people and you have to be really clear.

[00:16:20] **Zorian:** For the past three, four years, I've been working towards educating the community around me. With our school board, they've been banning books as of recently and had threatened to two, three years ago.

From then on, I attend the school board meetings, I give my speech to the board. I was ignored a few times, and still am. I'm now the president of our Pride Alliance here at Saegertown, Pennsylvania. We work toward educating the community, letting people know they're not alone, and of course, just overall, trying to make people feel accepted.

[00:16:56] **Jax:** My discovery of, like, who I am, being gay—or bi, we're looking, we're looking into it — but seeing the issues that affected this community and being like, “that don't seem so, that don't seem so okay.” That definitely started the ball rolling. But what really put the fuel in the rocket engine, as my dad would say, is this GSA leadership role got passed on to me from somebody who I see as my older brother, because they graduated, went to Appalachian state in North Carolina.

[00:17:32] **Zorian:** What initiated the start to my activism, I suppose, was when a board member pretty much called me and my friends. completely evil over Facebook, which kind of spurred controversy and that made me severely angry, and I wanted to do something about it because I felt that a board member who's meant to represent the students of our school district should probably not be calling those students evil, and I wanted to do something.

So I went to my teachers, And I was like, “hey, is there anything I can do?” And from then on, I started looking into policy, ended up speaking at that board meeting, and I suppose that's what sparked everything.

[00:18:17] **Trudy:** Unexpected Parts of Advocacy...

[00:18:21] **Zorian:** Often when you think of activism, you think of someone who's standing up for what's right, something that they believe in.

But there is such thing as advocating for something and then realizing you're wrong. And I feel like that's something we don't talk about often enough. Seeing some other people who may have disagreed with me on this subject and other subjects as well, who were deeply invested, standing up for what they believe in, and were like, “oh my gosh, this is the truth, this is my truth, and this is what everyone should believe in,”

and then having to kind of backtrack. “Oh, no, I didn't have all the facts. I didn't see the full story,” and I feel like when they admit they're wrong, a lot of people give them backlash for that, and I feel like that's something we don't talk enough about when talking about activism overall.

[00:19:13] **Jax:** The pushback. I mean, I get it, like, well, I *don't* get it, but you have to understand where people are coming from, even if you don't think that it's right.

Because you can't argue against something if you don't know what the other side is saying. You have to understand what everybody else is thinking.

How do I deal with doubt? Ooh. I heard a quote a while ago, "Don't compare yourself exponentially to somebody who has years more experience than you. Compare yourself, linearly." Who are people that are on your level and then compare yourself to them.

Cause if you compare yourself exponentially, you're never going to get anywhere because you're going to like keep looking at yourself like, "Hey, uh, I could be so much better. Oh, I could do this, this, and this," when reality you're exhausted. Now I drink a lot of tea. It's my version of self care.

[00:20:12] **Zorian:** I deal with self doubt in a variety of ways.

One of the first things I go to is kind of analyzing what I'm doubting about. So if I think I'm wrong on something, I will take myself to the internet mostly and I'll do a whole bunch of research. I'll pull down a rabbit hole trying to figure out, okay, so this is what I believe right now. What do other people think about this subject?

What are the facts? And just kind of going through this whole stage of trying to gain as much information as possible and then analyzing my actions to see if I still believe what I'm doing. Once you have all the facts laid out in front of you, it's easy to go, "Oh, well, these are obviously biased," or completely deny them.

But often I'll take two, three days trying to figure out, "Is this really what I want to be doing?" I'm not gonna say not doing anything, but kind of taking a short break and focusing on myself, kind of separating yourself from the issue to get a better outlook of everything that's going on. Another thing you can do is talk to those around you.

I'm not necessarily a social person, so going around and talking to a bunch of people at once is a little hard, but often I'll do that through email or even like over the phone. Communicating with people who disagree with you or have a different point of view overall is a very good thing to do when you're dealing with doubt.

[00:21:37] **Jax:** Young people are so important and I know I sound super old saying that. Seeing what younger people think of the world around them is so important because eventually they're going to be in power. I find it futile for people in older generations to see, like, "Oh, they're just young, they don't know what the world is."

And sometimes that's true, sometimes that's true. But other times, other times, especially with student activists who are well versed in issues and stuff, it's gonna happen eventually. I don't see why we shouldn't support student activism in the school. The school is just like a mini society, pretty much.

It's a reflection of. the society you're in. I'm really lucky the school I go to is super diverse and represents my county super well, but even then we don't have everybody and it's impossible. Well, it's improbable.

[00:22:35] **Zorian:** I feel pretty confident in what I'm doing right now because this in particular is a subject I've been dealing with like three to four years now.

I've done a lot of research. I've talked to so many people, not just in the state of Pennsylvania, but nationally, about what's happening here in this very small town in Pennsylvania. I'm confident, brave, and I'm here to stay.

[00:23:01] **Jax:** Take time for yourself. Lord have mercy, take time for yourself. I've run on the principle of "if I still have something left in the tank, I can still drive."

But no, you can't be running on fumes because then you're not gonna give anything good.

[00:23:15] **Zorian:** Many people say that you have to be confident, you have to know what you're doing in order to advocate for something. And that is true, to an extent. When you first start off, you look at all of those great activists that you hear about in storybooks, in history, and you're like, wow, I wish I could be like them.

But I'm not that brave, I'm not that confident, and oftentimes there's even an age barrier. Like, me in particular, I'm 17. I started this when I was 14, 15 inch. Best advice I can give is trying to get over that imposter syndrome to start off. Because once you start something, then you kind of either have to keep it up, or Or just stop.

[00:24:03] **Trudy:** This was two with Jax Gervasio and Zorian Edwards. I'm Trudy Poux. Thanks for listening.

[00:24:14] **Eric:** When it comes to activism, I think that at its core, fighting for something starts with just being able to be open and being able to accept people for who they are and what they believe in so that then we can get changed and we can see progress. I think it ties back to mental health in that We have to have this awareness of who we are and where we stand and what we believe in, but also how we're functioning in the world and how we're interacting with other people.

Because as much as we have to be mindful of what we think, I think it's so important to kind of recognize, kind of, where others are coming from and what situations they might be presented with.

[00:24:49] **Sonyamia:** Yeah, I completely agree. You put it so perfectly, Eric. I went to this school called Berkeley High School and, you know, at this high school we were very known to go on a lot of walkouts and raise awareness of activism in so many different areas.

And I think that's something I noticed from my time there was the fact that not everyone agreed with each other and we have to, you know, it was something I heard from, I believe it was Jax mentioned in there that, uh, even if we don't agree with the other side, we have to understand where their argument is coming from.

So we have something to respond to and it doesn't necessarily have to be a conflict. Take time, sit down, write out your thoughts. It could literally just be a sit down conversation. It's so important to take that step back and understand, you know, how is what you're going to say affects this person?

[00:25:40] **Eric:** Just having that awareness, having that thought put behind everything that you do and everything you say for other people and for other perspectives, but also for yourself.

[00:25:48] **Sonyamia:** Yeah. It's a really important concept to understand within every area of mental health, activism, sexuality, gender identity... all of that just comes down to awareness and understanding.

[00:26:00] **Eric:** I think it's so important to know that you should honor your feelings. Having access to deep emotions is such a beautiful thing, especially when it comes to experiencing love.

So, let's end on a note of queer joy by sharing another edition of Queer Crushes. This one featuring none other than you, Sonyamia.

[00:26:26] **Sonyamia:** My first crush was in seventh grade. It was this girl who I'm still friends with today. She was probably the coolest girl ever. Still is. I was making new friends in middle school and when I met her, there was just something different. I didn't feel the same way about her. I had memorized her perfume, her scent.

I had her over for playdates and stuff and I was obsessed with the feeling that I had because it felt so Wholesome and so pure like I know she sees me as a friend, but I don't feel Like I want her to be my friend and that was a really confusing scary feeling for me. I ended up telling one of my other close friends and she ended up kind of Revealing my crush to her.

I was super scared cuz I was a really big deal I didn't want to mess up her friendship or anything and you know This crush continued to my first year of high school. And she, she knew that I liked her, but she told me, she's like, I know, and that's okay, but I am straight, and I am your friend, and there's not really a future for us in that way, but I don't want to lose you because you're super cool.

And I will never forget that. Like ever. I'm 20 years old and I'll always remember that. It did change my life. I was like, wow, I did get rejected, but in the best way possible. My first queer love was at the end of high school. I just cannot take my eyes off of her. She was so beautiful. I had no idea what her sexuality was, but her style was amazing.

I was pretty dorky around her. I finally built up the courage to ask if she wanted to hang out. And over time, we never really even established what our sexuality was. But we kept hanging out over and over again and We kissed one night and we dated for quite a while after that. I'm really happy she was my first love. That is a distant memory. It's precious and something to hold on to for a long time.

[00:28:44] **Eric:** It's so it's so nice to hear like happy stories because I feel like a lot of the time, obviously when it comes to whether it's queerness mental health or anything really, a lot of stories that people have are not necessarily the best because just like the world is complicated and the world is tough. So I definitely think hearing stories like that is just it's so heartwarming because it's so genuine and innocent and wholesome and it's a very like playful thing the core thing to being a child

[00:29:14] **Sonyamia:** Hearing it back, I mean, yeah, like, I think it's funny because something I noticed even listening to that was the fact that I I mentioned like "they were so beautiful," like "I smelled her perfume and I was like, oh my god!" That's so little Sonyamia speaking because now like when I'm actually, you know talking to other women and like, you know, I'm interested in them I'm like, "okay, honey, you may be pretty, but like, let's get to know the deeper layers of who you are because, uh, that is so important."

Um, and yeah, I am single, but like I mentioned, I am talking to someone right now. And that's something that I looked for. I was like, I just really like her because she's so creative. She's a great listener, great storyteller. Um, she kind of allows me to step out of my comfort zone a little bit. So there's those things, right?

That you like, you mature, you get older, and you realize, like, these little crushes, they're funny, and they're cute and wholesome. But you know, as you get older, it gets honestly a little more complex. Everything in life is a learning and growing process.

[00:30:14] **Eric:** Tying back into the broader idea of mental health, I think the kind of at the end of the day that, like, it's so important to keep in mind that we have to, like, nurture that growth.

It doesn't end, and there's no reason that it should end.

[00:30:26] **Sonyamia:** Definitely. That was so well said. Yes.

[00:30:31] **Eric:** Thanks to everyone for joining us for this episode, and we hope it offers you some comfort to know that you are never alone. If you or anyone you know are struggling with your mental health, there are many resources listed in the show notes that are specific to LGBTQ plus youth.

Take advantage of them and take care of yourself.

[00:30:50] **Sonyamia:** Once again, I'm Sonyamia.

[00:30:51] **Eric:** And I'm Eric. And you're listening to

[00:30:54] **Sonyamia and Eric:** *I'm Feeling Queer Today.*

[00:30:59] **Eric:** Be sure to join us next week for episode six, where we explore the spectrum of the trans experience with Zorian and Frankie. 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?

[00:31:15] **Sonyamia:** We hope you enjoyed our episode today. For more information and resources about it, check out the show notes or visit the episode page at thefutureperfectproject.org.

[00:31:25] **Eric:** If you or a young person you know between the ages of 13 and 24 is currently in crisis, check out thetrevorproject.org. For LGBTQIA plus specific support, you text and chat. Or call 1 866 488 7318.

We will also include this information in the show notes as resources. To learn more about the Future Perfect Project and all of our free arts programming for LGBTQIA plus youth, visit thefutureperfectproject.org or find us on social media at thefutureperfectproject.org.

[00:31:58] **Sonyamia:** *I'm Feeling Queer 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, Sonyamia Blanco.

[00:32:14] **Eric:** And me, Eric Eubank, as well as Trudy Poux and Frankie Gunn, featuring Will, Cindy, Zorian Edwards, and Jax Gervasio. Our theme song was composed and performed by Alex Masse and produced by Emma Jayne Seslowski. Additional music composed by Alex Masse, Frankie Gunn, and Epidemic Sound.

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