

# IFQT S1E8. BC2M and Maddux Eckerling

Just a quick note before we begin, this episode mentions 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](https://988lifeline.org). For LGBTQ plus specific support, visit [thetrevorproject.org](https://thetrevorproject.org) or call 1 866 488 7386.

[00:00:00] **Maddux Eckerling:** It's been so interesting to watch my own personal growth go from this very introverted, depressed kid into a very outgoing, energetic, passionate human who just wants to shake up the world.

[00:00:46] **Alex Theme Song:**

*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!*

[00:01:03] **Sonyamia Blanco:** Hey everyone, it's Sonyamia joining you again. May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a time that brings attention to the widespread mental health issues that affect millions of people across America. Every year, local communities organize events and activities that bring the conversation about mental health into public view.

[00:01:21] In this special episode of *I'm Feeling Queer Today!*, you're going to meet LGBTQ plus activist and mental health advocate Maddux Eckerling. Maddux has seen firsthand the difficulties of dealing with anxiety and depression, and through sharing his experience tries to help others find relief and support.

[00:01:39] Maddux works tirelessly to amplify his peers voices, ensuring that LGBTQ plus students and students with mental health challenges are understood and advocated for. At the time of this interview, Maddux was a senior in high school and the leader of both his school's GSA, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, as well as the Bring Change To Mind Club, or BC2M.

[00:02:02] Take a listen to our chat and stick around for the end of this episode to learn more about Bring Change To Mind and what Maddux is up to now.

[00:02:18] Hello, welcome back to another segment on mental health. Today we're here with a very inspirational mental health advocate, Maddux, from Brain Change to Mind. Bring Change To Mind is a non-profit organization dedicated to encouraging dialogue about mental health. It raises awareness, understanding, and empathy for those struggling with mental health challenges.

[00:02:39] Before we begin, may I ask your pronouns and where you're from?

[00:02:43] **Maddux Eckerling:** My name is Maddux Eckerling. I use he, him pronouns. And I am from Grass Valley, California.

[00:02:49] **Sonyamia Blanco:** Awesome. So you're a huge advocate for getting up, getting out, and exercising to benefit your mental health. What advice would you give to an individual who is struggling to get out of bed?

[00:02:59] **Maddux Eckerling:** When you're stuck in bed, just getting the motivation to get out, it's something that I've struggled with a lot. But I think the biggest thing to do is to just find someone that can hold you accountable and they can pull you out of bed. I have a dog that every morning he makes sure that I get up so I can go feed him and take him out to go to the bathroom.

[00:03:19] You know, some people, it's a friend that calls them in the morning, a family member that comes in and wakes them up just to make sure they're getting up. But also just being able to find ways to motivate yourself. Maybe you have a favorite snack or something, so go put it on the other side of your room to motivate yourself to get up.

[00:03:34] A lot of people will take their alarm and put it on the other side of their rooms. You have to get out of bed to go turn off your alarm, and then once you're up, you just stay up. Then once you're up, start moving, start your day, and get going.

[00:03:47] **Sonyamia Blanco:** What helped me personally to get out of bed was, uh, just to write as much as possible.

[00:03:51] Writing is such a beautiful thing because writing is for yourself. You really just get everything that's going on in that head out. And you get to put it on paper, whatever, you can even write on a computer. How do you break the cycle of the doom scroll? Oftentimes we sit with the intention of being on our phones for like five minutes and then it can lead up to three hours kind of disassociating from real life.

[00:04:16] I have struggled with the doom scroll many, many times. Uh, you know, I wake up in the morning, and I immediately get on my phone, and I realize I've been on my phone for way too long. If I know I have to finish an important task or I'm just procrastinating, it always comes down to that doom scroll. What I realize is that time is a very precious thing.

[00:04:37] You could be on your phone, on social media, from minutes to eventually hours. Within that time, you could be doing so many other things, whether that's productivity within areas of your own life. You could literally just go outside. You can read a book. Anything but just sitting there and staring at a screen, because at the end of the day, it's, uh, in the moment, you know, obviously, pretty addicting.

[00:05:01] But it's a cycle that you really just gotta get out of.

[00:05:05] **Maddux Eckerling:** At the end of the day, you gotta just realize that scrolling on your phone is not beneficial to you in any way, shape, or form. Really just look at the facts. There's actually studies saying that it's harmful to your mental health. So you just gotta have that realization and be like, okay, this is not good.

[00:05:23] So finding other things to do. Keep a book with you. There's a Rubik's Cube in front of me right now. Maybe play with a Rubik's Cube if you got one. Rubik's Cube There's so many things that you can do to take care of that five minute gap of time that you're like, what do I do so that you don't start scrolling?

[00:05:39] **Sonyamia Blanco:** Yeah, definitely. What would you say you're most proud of right now?

[00:05:44] **Maddux Eckerling:** I think I've got two things.

[00:05:46] The first one being, well, the simple fact that I'm alive. That has been quite a struggle for me. I attempted to take my own life last year, because I was in a dark space, and I've had a lot of recovering to do from that.

[00:06:00] So I'm now at this point in my life, two years later, where I'm thankful that I'm here, and I'm happy that I'm here, and that's a beautiful thing to know and to experience. To be able to acknowledge, I've been through a lot, I've been through the wringer, and I'm here, I'm breathing, and I'm happy about that fact.

[00:06:17] **Sonyamia Blanco:** I'm proud of myself for pushing through many, many challenging barriers throughout my life. And I am so proud of myself for pushing through all of these challenges, and not just that, but also seeking help. I'm proud of myself for seeking help when I did, and for actively trying to push myself to be the best version of myself.

[00:06:40] For a long time, you know, I didn't push that hard to be the best version of myself. And now that I have, I'm just like, I want to keep doing this. I want to keep growing. It can be hard to speak about mental health challenges and barriers within the queer community because, you know, we, we don't really have a lot of resources all the time for LGBTQ plus people.

[00:07:03] I think that that's a lot more of like what the world needs is a lot more open mindedness. And like you were saying, you know, like have that open conversation.

[00:07:12] **Maddux Eckerling:** Another accomplishment is that I've been able to work with so many different awesome people and my community. When I got out of the hospital and then I started healing, I kind of just jumped into the social justice community.

[00:07:27] There's not a lot of resources here. And so I've really been able to jump in and make some great impacts and do some awesome things, meet some incredible people. It's been so interesting to watch my own personal growth go from this very introverted, depressed kid into a very outgoing, energetic, passionate human who just wants to shake up the world.

[00:07:53] It's been so cool to see that transition and to be able to actually make a difference and start conversations in my community.

[00:08:01] **Sonyamia Blanco:** And I think that's super, super important. How do you start those conversations within your community? How have you been doing that in a way that progresses forward and changes people's minds and perspectives on mental health and the barriers and struggles of what mental health entails?

[00:08:15] **Maddux Eckerling:** I think there's a few different ways that I've been able to do it. The biggest one is simply by showing up. I show up to every single school board meeting over my senior year. I invited them to explore new policies and projects. I questioned their theories and beliefs at every single meeting. I said, Hey, I want you to stop and think about what you're doing.

[00:08:39] I want you to stop and think about who is being affected by your policy. I am huge on mental health. I'm also huge on LGBTQ issues. And so every space that I went into, I said, are you including those that struggle with mental illness? And are you including LGBTQ people? And most of the time, the answer was no.

[00:08:58] I said, let's make this policy better. Let's add some more identities to this policy. Also for my senior project, I hosted a panel of five, including myself, LGBTQ people, youth in the school district here. And we spoke for about an hour and a half on our experiences as LGBTQ youth in this small rural community in California.

[00:09:21] We had over 260 people show up, which was the biggest community organized social justice event ever in our community. It's still echoing throughout the community and creating the conversation. By just showing up and starting the conversation and sparking people's curiosity, I'm able to get them to start to want to learn and want to do more outside of that conversation.

[00:09:45] **Sonyamia Blanco:** It can be hard to speak about mental health challenges and barriers within the queer community because we don't really have a lot of resources. I think that what the world needs is a lot more open mindedness, and like you were saying, have that open conversation. I guess my last question for you would be, what are you working on now?

[00:10:04] What are you hoping to progress over the next few months, years? What does that process look like for you?

[00:10:10] **Maddux Eckerling:** In August, I will be moving to San Francisco State University to start studying sociology, and then my hope is to go on to get my master's in social work. I want to go into community organizing, educating our community about different issues, as well as policy advocacy, getting into the political sphere, just working to help create a brighter future for LGBTQ and those who struggle with mental illness.

[00:10:36] I'm working with our local LGBTQ organizations throughout their Pride events, as well as all of their other things that they're doing throughout the rest of the year. I'm really just getting involved with current things that are happening while I go through my education.

[00:10:50] **Sonyamia Blanco:** Like I mentioned, I am entering my last year of college.

[00:10:54] I am hoping to network and create art with many other creatives, whether that's from school or within the organizations that I'm a part of. I just want to see where life takes me and keep telling stories within the different areas of creative mediums. Thank you so much Maddux for being here and sharing a very important and intimate part of your life with us.

[00:11:20] You're very, very inspiring and even speaking with you right now, I want to thank you for being on this podcast and just saying these wise words. What you're saying right now is definitely going to help many people who may be struggling. I'm thankful that you're alive here today and speaking with us.

[00:11:38] Thank you so much, Maddux.

[00:11:39] **Maddux Eckerling:** Yeah, thank you. It's an incredible thing to be able to be here and to have come so far. I remember early on when I was starting, I went to an event and I wanted to speak. I got

through like five words and I just started ugly crying. It was quite a scene. Then I started questioning if I could be an activist because I was like, every time I share my story, I can't just start ugly crying.

[00:12:03] I'm never going to get through anything. It becomes easier because I start to see the impact that my story has on others. It's a beautiful thing to be able to share. I just can't wait to see where my story takes me.

[00:12:17] **Sonyamia Blanco:** I'm, I'm excited too. We're all on the journey together, you know?

[00:12:20] **Maddux Eckerling:** Absolutely.

[00:12:21] **Sonyamia Blanco:** Yeah, thank you so much for being here again.

[00:12:24] **Maddux Eckerling:** Thank you so much.

[00:12:26] **Sonyamia Blanco:** Today, Maddux is in his freshman year at San Francisco State University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in both sociology and political science. Since coming to SFSU, Maddux has become very involved with campus life, becoming the treasurer for active minds at SF State, as well as joining multiple queer clubs and even working to help build them into coalition.

[00:12:56] Maddux has also continued their activism back at their high school, staying in touch with students and staff, and continuing to work with Bring Change To Mind. Check out the show notes for more information about Maddux, and visit [bringchangetomind.org](http://bringchangetomind.org). That is the number two. To learn more about the organization's vision of creating multimedia campaigns, curating storytelling movements, and developing youth programs to encourage a diverse cultural conversation around mental health.

[00:13:22] Although there's a spotlight on mental health for this month, I think it's important to keep in the back of your mind that mental health and, you know, the challenges and barriers behind mental health. Go on for extended periods of time, any month, any year, and what's important is to really, really check in with your loved ones, even if you think they're just doing okay, like, just send in a text, a letter, a phone call, anything to remind them that they are loved and that they have someone in this world that is there to support them and be with them through all of these hardships that they may go through. I'm so grateful for the friends and family I've had to just really push me through. And even if you feel like there's no one there, there's always someone there. Like, I'm talking to you right now.

[00:14:08] And if you have something going on, contact me. Like, my Instagram is @sonyamia. I will be there. You will always have someone at the end of the day, I promise. And remember, if you or a young person you know between the ages of 13 and 24 is currently in crisis, check out [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org). For the LGBTQIA plus specific support through text and chat or call 1 866 488 7386.

[00:14:36] We will also include this information in the show notes as resources. Thanks so much for listening. We'll be back in June with two bonus episodes for Pride Month featuring Jazz Jennings and Desmond is Amazing. And if you like what you hear, please rate us and share the show with your friends or family or both.

[00:14:53] Don't forget to ask yourself, how am I feeling queer today?

[00:15:00] We hope you enjoyed our episode today. For more information and resources about it, check out our show notes or visit the episode page at the Future Perfect [project.org/podcast](http://project.org/podcast). To learn more about the Future Perfect project in all our free arts programming, LGBTQIA plus youth. Visit the Future Perfect [project.org](http://project.org) or find us on social media at.

[00:15:24] *I'm Feeling Queer Today!* Is produced by The Future Perfect Project with support from Radio Kingston, WKNY, Kingston, New York. Our theme song was composed and performed by Alex Masse and produced by Emma Jane Seslowsky. Additional music composed by Frankie Gunn. Alex Masse and Epidemic Sound. Episode Mixing and Mastering by Julie Novak with assistance from Emma Jane Seslowsky.

[00:15:51] Special thanks to executive producers and mentors, Julie Novak and Celeste Lecesne, as well as Future Perfect Project team members, Ryan Amador, John Wan and Aliya Jamil