

IFQT S1E1. Queerness is Pride

Frankie Gunn: My name's Frankie, I'm 23, my pronouns are they them, and I'm from upstate New York. I hope that at least one, I literally don't care if it's like just one child, gets to hear us and say, oh my god, I'm like that too. Like, it's okay. There are more people like me out there. That's, that's really what this means to me.

And what I hope queer people will get out of this.

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!

Alex Masse: Hi, I'm Alex. I use they them pronouns, I am 23 years old, and I am located in what is colonially known as Surrey, B. C.

Lily Mueller: Hello there, I'm Lily Mueller, my pronouns are they, she, and he, I am 19 years old, and I am from Massachusetts.

Alex Masse: And welcome to the very first episode of I'm Feeling Queer Today, a podcast created by a team of amazing LGBTQIA+ youth.

Lily Mueller: Before we dive in Hey, Alex, what do we mean when we say queer?

Alex Masse: I'm so glad you asked! In this podcast, we use the word queer as an umbrella term for the LGBTQIA alphabet, which includes anyone who's marginalized due to their expression or the repression of their gender and sexual identities. As queer author bell hooks describes it, "queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live."

In this podcast, we try to make that space together. Queer might have once been used as a pejorative or slur, but it's since been reclaimed and is widely embraced.

Just make sure to ask a person what words they prefer, because not everyone will be comfortable having queer used to describe them.

Lily Mueller: And, are *you* feeling queer today?

Alex Masse: I'm feeling pretty queer today. How about you, Lily?

Lily Mueller: I'm in the lesbian capital of the world. Feeling queer today.

Alex Masse: Wait, what is the lesbian capital of the world?

Lily Mueller: Northampton, Massachusetts.

Alex Masse: Wow. I don't know if I could place that on a map because I'm Canadian, but...

Lily Mueller: that's okay, there's nothing here. Just lesbians as far as the eye can see.

Well Lesbians, Subarus, and young children just living their best lives.

Alex Masse: That does sound beautiful. That does sound beautiful. Okay, so, Many people, when they think of queer youth today, have a picture in their minds of a very scared and downtrodden group of young people who feel like they have to hide themselves and who they are.

While LGBTQIA+ rights are certainly under attack, and young people do feel that reality, there are still many queer youth who celebrate their existence. In this episode, we showcase the words of those folks, myself and Lily included, who are doing their best to live out and proud lives amidst all the adversity.

It's not always easy. Even up here in Canada, we've been getting anti-queer rallies and transphobic bills. But being able to share these stories is a privilege. I for one owe everything to the queer storytellers who came before me, as they showed me how to love myself for who I am. It is an honor for us to follow in their footsteps, and I hope that this podcast offers a similar kind of solace.

Lily Mueller: At the top of the episode, we heard from Frankie Gunn, one of the 11 young adult producers of this podcast. They shared what they hope this podcast can become: A place where queer youth feel seen, safe, and celebrated, and most importantly, not alone. We'll hear more from Frankie throughout this episode, including the story of their first queer crush.

To start things off, we are going to hear the first installment of a recurring segment called My Queer Identity Journey. This one featuring you, Alex, which I am so excited to share.

Alex Masse: The label I currently use for my identity right now is Non-Binary Femme Lesbian. I did not discover all of these layers and facets of my identity overnight. And there were a lot of labels that I considered for myself that never really fit. I realized I didn't like men, and my immediate thought was, "Oh, I must be asexual."

And I realized I liked women, and my first thought was, "Oh, I must be bisexual."

"Lesbian" was never an option as a label. In hindsight, a lot of that might be because of how lesbians were portrayed when I was growing up. Either the lesbian was this strange alien outsider, for the simple fact that lesbians were not men and did not pursue men, and that was just utterly inconceivable in our patriarchal society.

When we weren't that, we were predatory, and we were after straight girls, and we were turning them. Like vampires or something.

"Lesbian" was just a word that had all these supercharged connotations and that made me reluctant to use it for myself. Honestly, it took meeting and being able to talk to other lesbians for me to overcome a lot of that internalized lesbophobia. It also took me a while to figure out my gender identity.

I spent much of my youth as a tomboy, very stereotypical tomboy clothes and presentation and all that, and only upon realizing that I liked women did I start feeling comfortable presenting femininely. Feminine presentation with the goal of attracting other women, the lesbian feminine. I find that in my experience, my various identities are all interwoven and they impact and interact with each other.

For example, I know that my neurodivergence and attraction to women play a major part in how I understand and perceive my gender. For example, I believe that there is a correlation between autism and gender variance. I wouldn't be surprised if it's because we understand and navigate gender differently than neurotypical people.

Besides the fact that being autistic made it very hard to do typical girlish or womanly things due to often, like, sensory issues or even behavioral ones, I wasn't a very ladylike child. But I also didn't want to be, so I guess that did kind of work out. And then on the other side of the coin, there's how lesbianism impacts my gender.

I am doing femininity in a very dyke-y, queer, weird kind of way. And honestly, the only real connection I have to womanhood is through that lens. Sometimes I just say, oh yeah, my gender is I'm a dyke. There are a lot of people who will understand what I mean by that. And that is really nice. It's a jumble, alright.

Femme, but not a woman, non-binary, but also a lesbian, and again, the neurodivergence is a huge factor. However, there's one really important experience that I think impacted my identity more than anything: The simple fact that I have access to the queer community has been invaluable to my journey. It's through

knowing queer folks and being able to learn about our history that I've had the privilege of understanding myself, and knowing I'm not alone in my experiences, and discovering the verbiage for my identity.

And that is so important, and that is something that I think every young queer person deserves.

Alex Masse: So here I am today. Non binary, lesbian, still autistic, still all those things.

Lily Mueller: Do you want to talk about the word “dyke?”

Alex Masse: I'm just gonna say it. I'm very fond of the word “dyke,” to be honest.

Lily Mueller: I'm, I'm still getting cozy to it, because I'm, like, old enough that that was not, like, a happy word when I was a youth.

So I'm still, like, exposure therapying myself to the word dyke. Um, but I do still get, like, a little, like, sometimes when I meet older gay people, they're like, “oh, it's so nice to meet a young dyke,” and I'm like, “a what?” And they're like, oh, a what? Yes, correct.

Alex Masse: Something about that, about someone from that generation saying it can be a bit of a jump scare, even if it is said with the utmost affection.

Lily Mueller: It's like, I know you are an elderly butch lesbian who probably runs an insurance company like the Navy, but I was still scared for a minute there.

Alex Masse: Yeah, I'm very fortunate that, actually I don't know if it's fortunate to say this, but it was never *dyke* where I was from, it was always just *lesbo*, or *lezzie*, or even just lesbian said with particular scorn.

Lily Mueller: We, we had the lesbian one. Um, we, yeah, I guess cultural differences in anti-lesbian language that we're learning about today.

Alex Masse: But yeah, it feels like, it's just nice to kind of come into that identity, and it definitely is something that, like, varies on your comfort level, like, people can have the same identity, but feel very different about how they want it referred to, and that's deeply fascinating.

Lily Mueller: I honestly, I think working on this podcast helped me get more comfortable with it, because I think a lot of us will use the word, like, *deck*, and I also, um, this is audio, so you can't see this, but this device that I'm recording on is resting on a copy of *Dykes to Watch Out For*.

Alex Masse: Oh, I love that. I have a copy of *Dykes to Watch Out For* somewhere in my room. I'm not even joking. It's like, I love this. We're both, like, within, like, maybe, like, ten feet of a copy of *Dykes to Watch Out For*.

Lily Mueller: And when you come out as a lesbian, you've received your obligatory copy in the mail.

Alex Masse: Yeah, it just shows up. It shows up on your doorstep with a letter signed by Ms. Bechdel herself.

Lily Mueller: "Congratulations, you are a lesbian."

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

Lily Mueller: We have Frankie, again, my hero, talking about Queer Crushes, and I love this recurring segment. There's gonna be a few of them. It fills my heart with love and joy, and I'm very sappy. Yeah, the

Alex Masse: Queer Crushes segment is probably one of my favorite recurring segments, though I might be a little bit biased because Frankie and I composed the music for it together.

I put together this little theme, and then they did a bunch of really cool stuff with that theme. And yeah, I'm really happy with how it turned out. We will listen to that now.

Enjoy!

Frankie Gunn: My first queer crush comes from a memory that I don't even possess myself. It's a story that my mom likes to tell about when I was in preschool. I had a very dear friend, as dear a friend as you can have when you're We used to spend a lot of time together. She was this small girl that wore so much pink and loved fairies and flowers.

And it was at the same time that my very supportive, wonderful mother was introducing me to the world, as you do with a four year old, and she told me one day that women were allowed to marry women and men were allowed to marry men. Now, of course, this is prior to her understanding of the fact that gender is not binary, but she explained it to me in the best way that she possibly could, and when she got to the end of her explanation, According to her, I yelled fairly loudly, "I'm going to marry Claudia!" who was the very dear friend.

First queer crush I had that I was aware was a queer crush was when I was in middle school. There was a girl in my class who I had gone to school with for most of my life that I thought was the most beautiful person in existence. She had long

chestnut curly hair and these bright eyes. Recently, I found a Polaroid picture of the two of us sitting next to each other at her birthday party and I had the cheesiest grin on my face.

It just reminded me of that giddy joy of simply sitting next to someone and feeling better about the world. And to this day, I try to use that feeling as a compass. to navigate where I should be and what relationships I should be in. I also feel like queer crushes don't necessarily feel different for me because being queer is all I've ever known.

It's all I've ever been. I do think it takes more unpacking to get to a point of acceptance of those crushes and that was the biggest hurdle for me. That being said, I have been out for almost a decade. And, it has been quite a long journey, but a journey I am very happy to be on.

Alex Masse: That was absolutely adorable. Warm and fuzzy.

Lily Mueller: So warm and fuzzy.

Alex Masse: I love that. This is something that happens very naturally. Just like with the heterosexuals. We catch feelings, as kids, and it's okay. It is so innocent, and so pure, and that's what's so special to me.

Lily Mueller: I feel like it's important to me for the same reason, especially like you talked about earlier, especially the predatory lesbian trope.

I think it exists among gay men as well, but for some reason it seems particularly strong there. So to hear a bunch of people talk about the first crushes and to, to make it clear that it's not, it's not a creepy thing. We were just like vibes: "I want to play hopscotch with you."

Alex Masse: (laughs)

Next up, we're going to be hearing from Claire at New York City Pride 2023.

Hearing the way that Claire talks about it is really exciting and fascinating.

Lily Mueller: We chatted with Claire about what inspired her to create this piece, and here's what she had to say.

Claire Florence: This was my first Pride, and I have always felt like it is so important for queer youth to connect with the queer elders in the community.

But whatever age you are, I just feel like it is important to have older people that you can talk to and ask questions and, or just listen and hear their stories and hear their experiences. There's a lot we don't know. Every time I see an older queer couple, I do tear up every single time. Uh, it just, it brings me such joy to see that it's possible to see that we're here and to see that we have been here for at least as long as those two have been together and it brings me a lot of joy and so I felt like being able to hear from And Those people what they wish they knew or you know, just the questions about their life I feel like that was something that was important to me.

I felt like it should have a place here.

Lily Mueller: Thanks Claire I do just want to say that I also cry every time I see an older queer couple in public Let's take a listen to this empowering segment now.

Claire Florence: To be at pride is to experience and celebrate queerness But what does that mean? Where did this word and this event come from? Today, queerness and the word queer encompass the entire LGBTQ community. What I would tell the queer youth is that there is no rush to figure out what you are and there's no rush to find a label.

Just go with the flow and then one day you'll feel like yourself. This is in stark contrast to what the word queer meant ten years ago. Let alone in 1969 when the movement that would be pride began, queerness or being queer is objectively defined as anyone who doesn't conform to heterosexuality and or being cisgender subjectively, however, the word has had a few meanings.

As early as the 1930s, queer was being used as a slur to call people weird, strange, or ruined for experiencing same sex attraction. "Queer" was also used in tandem with words like "fairy" and "pansy," with harm intended.

Pride participant 1: The thing I tell queer youth, do what you need to, to keep living, and to survive whatever situation that you're in at the moment, because no matter what, there will be a day where you will be okay, and you will be in a place where you are safe and loved, um, so hold out, hold forth for love.

Claire Florence: Alongside the metamorphosis of the word queer, pride was being born. Pride is the amalgamation of the many protests, activists, and riots with the Stonewall Inn often seen as its forefront. It is widely accepted that Marsha P. Johnson threw the first brick at the Stonewall riots, but the events of that night are debated.

Queer history is an oral one. We don't have an accurate written historical account.

Pride participant 2: I'm Cleo. The one thing that I would love for Brie to know is that there are a lot of people out there working to make things better, as scary as things

seem, especially for, for trans youth right now. Like, people are fighting for it. So, we'll hopefully get there.

Claire Florence: One year after the Stonewall uprisings, the first Pride was held in New York City. The movement for equal rights was just getting off the ground when the queer community was plagued by another instance of heinous homophobia. The AIDS crisis transformed into the epidemic it is today within a decade, culminating in over 100,000 lives lost.

President Ronald Reagan took no action. With just a feeble mention of the AIDS crisis at the end of his presidency, he left office with the deaths of 100,000 people on his hands. The queer community has never fully recovered from this loss. There is a piece missing from our history, from American history, an entire generation of people who were stripped of the opportunity to see what this community would accomplish due to their contributions, as well as the chance to experience it themselves.

We'd like to take a moment of silence for that generation now.

Pride participant 3: What I would say to queer youth is, the light is at the end of the tunnel. You will feel safe and you will feel comfortable. Time will come. It's okay.

Claire Florence: With the new millennium came a new sense of queer hope. The Millennial March on Washington, the National Equality March, and the beginning of widespread LGBTQ+ decriminalization began a wave of support the queer community hadn't seen.

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court decriminalized same sex marriage, legitimizing gay marriages in the eyes of the state. Unfortunately, this was not enough, and the government continues to be a perpetrator of violence via legislation. Leaving the queer community unprotected and unsupported.

Pride participant 4: Hi, my name is Diamond and what I tell the queer youth is the world moves fast, but move at your own pace. Treat yourself with kindness and compassion as you walk through this journey. There will be people waiting for you whenever you're ready.

Claire Florence: The queer community continues to grow, and with the efforts of Queer Nation and the entire Pride movement, "queer" is no longer a weapon to use against us, but a reclaimed word that reinforces our community.

Queerness is pride and pride is beautiful.

Pride participant 5: So what I would like to say to gay youth is it gets better. It definitely gets much, much better. Just hang in there.

Lily Mueller: I love this segment. We just heard from Claire at NYC Pride 2023. Thank you, Claire. We love you. Alex, can I ask about your pride experiences? Because I know that you are an instrumental artist, a musician, and you sometimes play gigs at Prides.

Alex Masse: Honestly, my Pride gigs are probably some of my favorite gigs.

Um, this summer I got to play at a community Pride picnic over in the city of Burnaby. That probably means nothing to our American audiences, but lovely city. I, I really liked it a lot. I got to just, like, sit on this nice field and play some silly little songs to a bunch of people on picnic blankets, enjoying food.

The field was very alive with people, and I really know I made it. I really know that I nailed that gig, because after the fact, like, some, like, preteen came up and told me how great I was, and they had, like, a little pride flag and one of those little pride flag capes. It was very sweet. Yeah, those are probably my favorite kinds of gigs.

Or, um, last year I played the Vancouver Dyke March, which, just, absolutely delightful. Back on the word dyke, it's a recurring theme in my life, but like, beautiful, beautiful experience. It starts as a march, and then it ends in a field, and there are all these like, tents up for like, local organizations, or like, people selling stuff.

It's really cool, and I'm just very fortunate to be able to have had these opportunities to perform in spaces where I feel safe. Because I feel safe at Pride, and that is paramount.

Lily Mueller: Believe it or not, at my big age, I have yet to be to, like, a true Pride event.

Alex Masse: Really?

Lily Mueller: Yes, I've gone to P Town, which is another very gay place in the Northeastern United States. Um, I went with my partner a couple of years ago. Very fun, very lovely, rainbow sidewalks, um, tchotchkes, the librarian is a drag queen--

Alex Masse: Love that.

Lily Mueller: --like a six foot five drag queen, which is awesome. Honestly, I think this will probably mean more than most anything that I ever go to, um, when my high school. Had their first, like, sponsored Pride event, and we decorated cookies.

And, as we will later learn, I went to a Catholic high school that did not have some very queer friendly policy for most of the time. So that was a, that is some foreshadowing for some later episodes. Um, and that's what you can look forward to

in this season of *I'm Feeling Queer Today*. As for this episode, sadly, we're coming to a close.

In this last segment produced by Frankie Gunn, we all describe what Pride means to us, from the most simple, solitary gestures, to moments of love and support amidst the larger LGBTQIA+ community.

Enjoy!

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Alex Masse: For me, Pride is about embracing who you are and not letting anybody take that from you.

Frankie Gunn: Pride is really important to me. Not really as it pertains to parades or celebrations on a mass scale, but personal pride.

Ari: For me, queer pride is just more about like, can I be proud of who I am as all that I am?

Trudy Poux: Pride feels like a gift.

Claire Florence: Pride is completely accepting and celebrating yourself as you are, and not wishing that things would change.

Sonyamia Blanco: Pride to me means loving myself and who I am.

Ovo Oshobe: Showing up as yourself as a queer person, and allowing individuals to take that power away from you.

Jax: Pride means showing the world that we are still here. That no matter how much you beat us down, we're still here, and nothing is going to change that.

Frankie Gunn: The act of knowing yourself, the act of claiming yourself. Of actively being proud of yourself.

Alex Masse: I feel like seeing Pride in others is what helped me embrace my own identity.

Trudy Poux: It feels like an heirloom that was given to me by people who have done work to make sure that I'm able to exist in the space I am now. Specifically, queer, trans, Black people.

Claire Florence: Pride is seeing other queer people and immediately feeling less alone.

Alex Masse: Pride is something that you can use to uplift others or something that others can use to uplift you.

Ari: Queer people have really learned how to build community and how to build family, how to build chosen family.

Claire Florence: Pride is my queer friends who love me exactly the way I am.

Alex Masse: Pride is what lets me tell my own stories and hopefully that stirs up pride in other people.

Ovo Oshobe: It's a really liberating feeling, finally standing your truth.

Claire Florence: Pride is like a lifeline and it really makes me feel safe.

Alex Masse: I guess it's the lifeblood of this community.

Frankie Gunn: The act of simply existing is an accomplishment.

Claire Florence: I'm forever proud of that.

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Alex Masse: A lovely segment put together by Frankie, which sampled so many voices that you're going to be hearing throughout this season. Yeah, we've got a whole season ahead of like queer stories and queer trivia and all these wonderful segments and adventures from all these wonderful youth voices and this has been the first episode.

Lily Mueller: Thank you for listening.

Alex Masse: Yeah, again, we're your hosts, Alex Masse...

Lily Mueller: and Lily Muller.

Alex Masse: And you've been listening to...

Alex and Lily: *I'm Feeling Queer Today.*

Lily Mueller: Be sure to join us next week for episode two, where we talk about identity, fluidity, labels, and more. 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 the Future Perfect project.org/podcast.

Alex Masse: If you or a young person you know between the ages of 13 and 24 is currently in crisis, check out thetrevor.org for LGBTQIA+ specific support through text and chat, or call 1 - 8 6 6 - 4 8 8 -7 3 8 6.

We will also be including these in the description as resources.

Lily Mueller: To learn more about The Future Perfect Project and all of our free arts programming for LGBTQIA plus youth, visit thefutureperfectproject.org. Find us on social media, @thefutureperfectproject.

Alex Masse: *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, Alex Masse.

Lily Mueller: And by me, Lily Mueller, Frankie Gunn, Claire Florence, and Wallace. Featuring Sonyamia Blanco, Ariella Brodie Weisberg, Jax Gervasio, Ova Oshobe, and Trudy Poux.

Alex Masse: Our theme song was composed and performed by me, Alex Masse, and produced by Emma Jane Seslowsky.

Additional music composed by myself, Frankie Gunn and Epidemic Sound. Episode Mixing and Mastering by Julie Novak, with assistance from Emma Jane Seslowsky.

Lily Mueller: Special thanks to Executive Producers and Mentors, Julie Novak and Celeste Lecesne.

Alex Masse: As well as Future Perfect Project team members Ryan Amador, Jon Wan, and Aliya Jamil.