**Mady:** Hello and welcome to the Purple Couch Clubhouse by the Ohio University Women's Center! My name is Mady Nutter and I'm coming to you from Baker 403, home of the acclaimed purple couch. Join me for a cup of coffee and a chat about a book we could all learn something from. I understand that life is hectic and you're probably thinking you don't have time to read a whole book. No worries, just like an in-person book club, I'm prepared to be the only one who's done the reading. Our conversation today will be guided by concepts from the book, and I will include the important context.

This month we will be reading *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel. Alison Bechdel is a renowned American cartoonist. You may be familiar with the Bechdel test, a test which debuted and backdoors popular comic strip Dykes to Watch out for and required that fictional media had at least two women who talked to each other about something other than a man.

Fun home is a graphic memoir of Alison Bechdel, childhood, family and young adult life, specifically focusing on the relationship she had with her father. At the age of 19, Alison Bechdel came out as a lesbian to her family, and in turn, her mother informed her of her father's LGBTQ+ identity. This memoir is a coming-of-age story that deals with the complexities of queer identities, mental health and trauma, alongside endless classic literature references, sarcastic quips, and a dive into Bechdel's very own childhood diary.

For those of you who may not be aware of the content of this book, Fun Home does discuss suicidality. As a part of our conversation, today we will be talking about risk factors and resources, but we will not be covering any details.

I am joined today by Micah McCarey, Alex Reed and Olivia Tenoglia.

Micah has been a member of Athens and Ohio University communities since he arrived on Ohio's Athens campus for undergraduate studies in interpersonal and organizational communication in the fall of 2003. He remained in Athens to complete his master's level studies and human development through Ohio University's individual interdisciplinary program before spending 10 years supporting co-curricular learning in Ohio's Division of Student Affairs. Micah is currently completing an interdisciplinary PhD program rooted in positive psychology and decision making. While he works full time as the director of Ohio's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender center. When not working Micah enjoys spending time with his dog, his fiancée, family and friends. Micah uses he/him pronouns. How are you doing today, Micah?

**Micah:** Very excited to be here. Thank you. I'm joining you from our LGBT center today.

**Mady:** Awesome. We're glad to have you.

Dr. J. Alex Reid is very happy to be able to participate in this podcast series and give a voice and insight to the importance of queer spaces on identity development, and affirmation, as well as highlight the importance of attending to mental health needs of the queer community. He finds being on this podcast episode to be a great extension of his work as a therapist. Alex practices LGBTQ affirming therapy and helps queer people empower themselves to become the most authentic version of themselves. When not at work at OU's Counseling Center, Alex is spending time with friends hiking or trying new recipes in the kitchen. Alex's pronouns are he/him. It's great to have you here today, Alex.

**Alex:** I'm very happy to be here.

**Mady:** And finally, we have Olivia Tenoglia here, a third year Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies and in that environmental studies major, who is focusing on studying eco feminism and queer ecologies. She is particularly passionate about the icon of the evil witch and what it represents throughout history. She is very excited to be able to discuss queer experiences and literature in an open and accepting space. Olivia uses she/they pronouns. Welcome, Olivia.

**Olivia:** Thank you so much, Mady. I'm so happy to be here.

**Mady:** It is lovely to be speaking with you all today. And I'm so excited for this discussion. Are y'all ready to jump in?

**Micah, Alex, Olivia:** Yeah, yeah. Awesome.

**Mady:** So Bechdel recalls feelings of trepidation and sitting in petrified silence when joining a gay union meeting. Queer clubs and student organizations can be a great place for LGBTQ students to make friends and connect with people who have similar identities and experiences as them. But joining a new space can be often anxiety-inducing. If you have been a part of a queer space or LGBTQ organization, can you remember what it was like the first time you went to a meeting?

**Micah:** I know I can. I mentioned in the bio that Mady read that I did my undergrad at Ohio University starting in the fall of 2003. And at that time, our main student organization was open doors, it's now called spectrum plus, but I remember meeting off campus at United campus ministry. And I needed to bring a friend with me to kind of have the courage to go in. So an ally buddy from down the hall, was interested in checking it out. And that made walking through the front door, the first step easier. And then a feeling kind of overwhelmed by the welcoming vibe was enough to like, make us feel invited to sit down on the carpet with them and do some rounds of introductions. And we do a lot of the same things now on our LGBT Center's physical space. So it's kind of neat to see the significance of how the members who show up make new members feel welcome.

**Mady:** That's amazing. And I'm so glad you had an ally to come with you.

**Olivia:** Yeah, I actually, when I first came OU, I didn't really seek out these spaces, I think because I felt that same, like petrifying, like all consuming fear in a way, especially because of, I think that like, the focus on being very secure in your identity, a lot of the times within queer spaces as feeling like you have to subscribe to a certain, like name for yourself. And so I think, understanding that, like I didn't exactly have to have my identity figured out to pursue trying to find queer spaces, even if they were more informal, not necessarily like through an organization, but kind of hearing about just people talking about queer literature, or getting a study group together of people who I knew were also queer. And I knew who also had similar experiences. So kind of going about it in a casual way that doesn't necessarily rely on those identities, I think, really encouraged me and helped me to pursue other spaces and other people that I knew I could relate to.

**Mady**: That's amazing. Yeah.

**Alex:** What Micah said, my first meeting was also opened doors, I went to graduate school here at OU. And it felt really, I mean, unreal at first. It was a part of myself. And I really, really wanted to explore, embrace, and connect with others for a really long time, but wasn't quite sure how. So I was really nervous and really excited. At the same time, I was asking myself a lot of questions like, will I be accepted? How can I start to get more comfortable, and I've been keeping people out for so long and kind of avoiding this part of me. But it overall was very validating, very liberating. And I knew it was a turning point, that would definitely change my life for the better. I went with a friend, also another queer friend of mine, who I was already out to. And she was also kind of wanting more of a space to connect. So we both just decided one day, we're going to do this, and we went to open doors. And it was super positive. And we've, I didn't look back.

**Mady:** That's so great to hear. So my next question was going to follow up with what helped you build up the courage to go to a meeting. But I think that Micah you and Alex touched on that quite a bit in Olivia in a more informal way, in finding that courage. If anyone had anything else to speak to, in that regard, I don't want to be redundant. But I also don't want to, like ignore a space for y'all to discuss this. So if anyone has anything else they would like to speak to, in regards to courage being built up to go to a meeting, feel free to respond.

**Olivia:** I think that, like in the realm of trying to find the courage to go to like a physical space to interact with people, it was helpful for me to find that community online first, not necessarily with people who like, if they didn't accept me, I didn't know them, they lived. You know, I don't, I didn't know them personally. So there was not nearly as much here. But just consuming that content and being part of a sphere of people who I know had similar identities to me in a very informal way, just laying in my bed on my phone, I think really helped me build the courage to see that, oh, I'm truly not alone. And now I can go talk to people face to face and I can shake their hands, I can give them a hug. And we can, like, have that really important. interpersonal connection. But just starting that in a very disconnected way, I think helped me really build the courage to do that.

**Mady:** Yeah, it's like a little Gen Z foot in the door. We got going there with an online community.

**Olivia**: Yeah, definitely.

**Mady**: That's so cool. All right. So our next question here, following up to this is, why do you all think that these organizations are a great place for LGBTQ students to connect with people, and this can be informal or formal LGBTQ organizations. But what about this space do you think makes it a good space to connect with others?

**Alex:** I think the idea that you know that there could be already some shared identities, maybe builds some sense of comfort, you don't have to feel maybe as self-conscious or prepared to explain yourself, or explain your queer identity the way that you may in other settings, you get to keep building a sense of community, while embracing yourself and your identity at the same time. There could be also many opportunities for personal growth and connection to whether that's simply connecting with others socially bonding over common interest or potentially mean being together. And being in a space to advocate for the queer community as a whole.

**Micah:** I would have to agree, I love that the different student organizations we have, for example, at Ohio University, some informal some formally registered, they have different focuses. So I appreciate that if you're really looking for social support, primarily spectrum plus is really about that relationship building and activities together of a social nature. But then you have a group like allies, which is incredibly important, because it's calling people who are specifically wanting to learn about and practice allyship and have a kind of a support system, not just for friends, but for accountability even.

**Olivia:** I think that these spaces also offer an opportunity to kind of situate oneself in like a history of, of queer culture in a way that you might like, never have that opportunity to understand where this this group of people in this movement has come from, and how this culture has developed and the very specific language that queer people tend to use. And you get to ask questions and be very inquisitive about it. And if you are queer, you get to see how you're a continuation of a sort of legacy. And if you're not, and you're just there as an ally, you can understand how you can uphold this history. So I think that those spaces really offer that great opportunity.

**Micah:** Absolutely yeah, the exchange of ideas and even like, cultural materials, like Olivia's mentioning, so even, “Hey, have you not heard of button Home? Let's, let's watch some clips from the musical” or, “Hey, I have a copy of the book that you can borrow,” or, you know, same thing with music and other forms of media. So I agree, Olivia.

**Mady:** Yeah, those are great points, everyone. So kind of building off of a little bit, but Micah started to speak to what are some groups on Ohio's campus again, informally or formally, that you would recommend to students who are queer or questioning their identity.

**Micah:** I can share a couple other examples that come to mind would be our out grads and non trans group that's short for non traditional non traditionally aged undergraduate students. And that has not just the social support connection piece, but also a professional development component. So that's pretty neat. And on the last activities I did with them as a doctoral student, myself was a hike at Old Man's Cave. So it's sometimes nice to be able to go off campus and do some of this bonding and explore other parts of Athens too. That's one that comes to mind for me.

**Mady**: That's great.

**Alex:** And for people needing a more like therapeutic and confidential space, the Counseling Center does offer a few groups out questioning and allied is a group for all LGBTQ identified individuals to connect with each other and explore their identity and potential like, struggles with that and to joys. And then also, we now have queer grad space, which is a similar group, but it's only for graduate students. And then finally, spectrum which is one of CPS is longest running their therapy support groups, that is for students who identify as trans nonbinary or gender diverse, and it's solely focuses on issues of gender identity and expression.

**Micah:** Yeah, and that spectrum group is not to be confused as spectrum plus, but we do like the fact that the term spectrum does convey a lot about diversity that exists within the LGBTQ community. And we have a trans group that they've decided that that trans will be an acronym for them. That stands for team of really awesome, non-cisgender students.

**Mady:** I love that. That's incredible.

**Olivia:** Yeah, and not necessarily a group on Ohio's campus. But I'm just taking like a WGSS has class or, like queer studies are trying to kind of get into explorations of queer identities and sexualities in an academic sense. I know that was really helpful for me. I'm a very like academically minded person. I'm very invested understanding the history of different groups. And so just even taking an intro course, like exploded my interest in kind of exploring how these identities could immediately relate back to me. So just taking the 1000 level course, because you have an empty slot, I think, is a fantastic idea. And I really think everyone should do it at least once.

**Micah:** Oh, yeah, I've definitely heard of people who've made friends in like an English class that specifically focused on LGBTQ lit. And I love that, that you can make those connections

**Olivia:** The tumultuous nature of like academia and like getting through a class can really, like genuinely form some awesome bonds between people.

**Mady:** No certainly, yeah, my WGSS 1000 class really, like, just did a great job of laying the groundwork of history like you were talking about Olivia, and as well as just general terms, and like basic LGBTQ knowledge that I just hadn't been exposed to yet. But yeah, no, definitely very important spaces that help you learn a lot about who you are. All right. So we talked a lot about the resources we do have. So I'm going to ask y'all to hypothesize here for a moment. But if you didn't have these resources available to you, what do you think ideal support would look like for LGBTQ people.

**Micah:** I immediately go to the individualized supports, I would want, in this hypothetical world, if we didn't have organizations doing the work, I would want every student, faculty member, or staff member community member to have had the kind of introductory support education and terminologies sort of piece that would help them at least be minimally at minimum supportive when someone shares an aspect of their identity, and shares their pronouns and shares, like what they might need from someone, I would think if we didn't have the groups and offices and departments formally, it would be left to the individual to make sure that they were ready to support.

**Alex:** I think, generally, as long as you're providing a space where you're listening, trying to understand and embrace the person. That's the most important if somebody comes out to you, somebody shares this part of themselves with you don't ask people to explain themselves or jump to your own questions, provide space and acknowledge that I mean, this is probably could be the first time that they're able to be themselves in a very long time, and just how special and how kind of sacred that moment is. So just giving that space and listening and validating.

**Olivia:** Yeah, I think also like along with that, acknowledging the like fluidity of identities and the fluidity of ideas and how when you're introduced to new topics that can start to change how you perceive yourself, or how you understand the world in which you're operating. So support, understand, like support, looking like that understanding of that fluidity of that ability to change, and comfort versus discomfort of adhering to different identity names, or the joy of being able to leave behind different identities and celebrating that as well. So kind of seeking out spaces that don't demand anything of you other than trying to be authentic, I suppose.

**Mady:** That's a very eloquent way to put it. All of your responses were beautiful. Thank you. Alright, so now we're pivoting to our next question. So Bechdel described her discovery of her lesbian identity as, “a revelation not of the flesh, but of the mind.” As she became more and more enthralled in LGBTQ plus readings. If you share a queer identity, what media did you look to when you were coming into your truth as a queer person?

**Olivia:** I know that like, throughout my whole life, as I've consumed different forms of media, I've always kind of, um, I think that it's, it's generally pretty common that people will like write their own queer subplot, like I will kind of write in or I will, I will project on the characters in a way because I didn't see myself in these characters so often. So I would start to like mentally explore what would it look like if these characters were queer? What would happen if that interaction actually did mean what it would mean to me if I were in that situation? So even it's not even necessarily like, the type of media I was consuming when I was younger, because I think that I also had difficulty finding media that I could see myself in because I was not much of a reader when I was younger. And mainstream media obviously, is not always the best place to find representation. So just kind of exploring my own identity by using those characters as malleable mirrors in a way I guess. So using media as a tool because I couldn't necessarily find something that I felt like fit myself.

**Micah:** Wow, that's really creative. I wasn't as creative. I stumbled into queer media. I think the first bit of exposure was probably an episode of a miniseries called Tales of the City, which was actually recently redone and put on Netflix. But that was just a glimpse. And then I think MTV's, Undressed was like a late night racy drama with sometimes same sex couples or representations of bisexuality. But honestly, I would think it was the fact that I watched the soap opera, All My Children for so long that I would occasionally like they always tried to do social issues and like, oh my gosh, the high school history teachers gay and the parents are upset about it. And I'm glad that that one was on for 40 years because later they became the first soap opera to have a same sex kiss between Erica Kane's daughter, Bianca Montgomery and her girlfriend at the time. So it was neat to have like a kind of high school lesbian and Bianca to grew up with. And then then I think it was really important for me to recognize that a lot of that queer media was very white and not inclusive of that intersectional identity that I have. So now I'm so glad that it's easier to access me, more multicultural queer media like ripples, drag race or pose and just getting to see that we've, we've really grown and I think that's something to be proud of.

**Alex:** I think what first came to my mind was prior to coming out just the way that kind of media gave me a glimpse into maybe what the future would hold in a way I can remember. Like I mentioned, undressed, I also remember that I remember watching Queer As Folk late at night in secret, and just kind of thinking, and it definitely had a very emotional reaction to it and thinking, Oh, wow, this, this, I'm not, this is totally me. But how am I ever going to be anything like this. So that's what kind of stood out to me was just the prior to coming out. And that kind of was more of a, I guess, a pivotal moment that media played for me.

**Mady:** Ya know, and media can give us a wider array of different options and like different lifestyles that people hold, not all of them accurate or fully inclusive. I know, as a queer person, just seeing like, another gay person on the TV. I'm like, Oh, my God, we exist. That's so cool. But then, you know, you, you come to see that more often, or perhaps question that right away like, are these accurate? Are these accurate portrayals of us and our community in the media, so definitely up for critique, even though they are some of our first media coming into it. I know, the L word was really, like, transformational for me just seeing like lesbians, like on TV interacting together and, you know, sometimes perpetuating stereotypes. And, you know, that also leaves room for a lot of critique, like I said.

**Micah:** But yeah, I appreciate that. You're mentioning how there's definitely happy excitement that can come from Oh, my gosh, there's, I'm getting to watch them now imagining Alex, I'm imagining you with a, with a laptop under the bed or something like that, watch the movie these shows. But and, and you're right, there are other emotions that come with it too. Like it can feel like the sacred, like personal exploration. Especially if you're not telling other people that you're watching it. But I'm reminded of the fact that that All My Children character, Bianca, and one of the first scenes where she's coming out, there's a song playing at the bar that she sneaks into on Halloween, lesbian bar, and I still listen to that song today. Because I remember like, mirroring the emotions of how exciting and scary that would be. And it's funny how these the same thing with the book that we're discussing today, there's a great song in there called a “Ring of Keys” that I always like, stands out to me because it's like seeing, seeing something that really resonates with you, someone that resonates with you, and it just leaves us emotional, like impression that can stay with you forever.

**Mady:** Yeah, no, definitely. Anyone else have anything to add there? Okay, then I wanted to go to our follow up question. So we just, Oh, were you going to say something Olivia?

**Olivia:** I was I was just going to relate to Micah on this idea of like, connections through like music and like even smell of those moments. I grew up watching Glee, which, you know, like you said, Maddie does not have the best representation, but it does have quite a bit of representation, especially me being like in fifth grade watching it. Um, and I still hear those songs and I really like it deeply moves me even though they're pretty, you know, average covers of very famous songs. But it's still it means something very deeply. So I think that like, relating, you know, media can be very warped, I guess in my memory in a good way where it's, it's transformed because it's related to someone's journey. It's not necessarily, it doesn't need to be reduced down to just like what it is because it's, it means so much more in those emotional contexts. Yes, thank you.

**Mady:** I'm so glad that I went back and did not talk over you. That was a lovely point. Olivia, thank you so much for sharing that. All right, so we spoke a little bit about different kinds of media. So specifically, though, are there any readings or resources that you found to be essential in coming to better understand yourself or the LGBTQ community?

**Alex:** I guess what I thought of here was when I really started to take a deeper look at myself and a deeper look at the LGBT community and wanted to understand it on I guess, a more academic level and just a deeper level. And this was once I was in graduate school and out myself. I started reading the Journal of LGBT issues in counseling, familiarizing myself with and SAGE competencies for counseling queer and trans individuals, and also a multicultural counseling competencies. And then also any I really appreciated any work by Dr. Kevin Nadal, who studied microaggressions in the LGBT community that really gave me kind of a better understanding that it's, it's more than just oh, I don't like this person, because they're queer. There's so much more depth, there's so much more that needs to be understood and explored.

**Micah:** I just feel like I had an educational seminar. Thanks, Alex. Yeah, I think academically I hadn't thought of this. But it would have been introduction to college student development theory, because I didn't recognize prior to that, that there were people studying the experiences of LGBTQ plus college students and looking at trends and patterns and shifts in terminology and intergenerational perspectives and such but more, more so spiritually, I would give it to RuPaul drag race, because, in part, I'm sure that there's a subconscious connection to you seeing a queer male identifying host who's, you know, someone I can actually dress up for Halloween is in probably make a convincing look like but I like that. There's increasing diversity there. But also with these really intentional messages of self love, and needing to accomplish self love before you're able to love other people. And the idea of chosen family, which I think is important to so many LGBTQ people who might not have strong relationships with the family that they were born into, or grew up with. So I think, academically I'll give it to college student development theory, but spiritually, I'm going to give it to the RuPaul's drag race.

**Olivia:** Yeah, my, um, my freshman year of college, I read a gentrification of the mind by Sarah Schulman. And it talks a lot about the AIDS epidemic. And that was really important for me as a very young queer person, because obviously, I'm not in a time that I remember what was happening arrived was obviously not alive. So I think that media gives us a chance to relate to a past that I don't want to see buried. And so reading that piece, talking about the preservation of queer culture, along with the expansion on and its fluidity, I think that was really important for me. And then, yeah, again with Micah, like Glee and also like, even kitschy like Teen Wolf on MTV, had a few queer characters and it like meant everything to me. So I'm just, yeah, I think that balancing out the like heavy academia, that kind of acknowledges a history that can be very saddening and very disheartening. And then also these funny dramas that give characters that you can relate to because they're sarcastic or they're being dumb or whatever. So yeah, those two, those two sides of the spectrum.

**Mady:** Yeah. Those are all great responses. Um, personally, I definitely loved looking to grace anatomy's, uh, uh, character. Um, oh, I can't. Her name is Callie, right? Callie Torres. Yes. Yes. Uh, Kelly, um, she came out as bisexual and then her partner was a lesbian. Um, and I remember just like living for that relationship within Grey's anatomy when I was way too young to be watching it. Um, and then realizing that in a lot of media that like lesbians are just overlooked entirely, um, not entire, but like lesbians aren't often the story that like is being told there. Um, and so when I like got the chance to like study more about WGSS and stuff, um, one of my favorite readings is the woman identified woman from Radicalesbians. Um, and one of my favorite quotes is, “What is a lesbian, a lesbian is the rage of him in condensed to the point of explosion." And I just really felt that that almost it's like a rage inside you of like not being portrayed the way that you truly are, that I'm sure like every queer person can really relate to. But those are definitely just some pieces of media that have been pretty influential to me. I remember Patty Stokes assigning the Radicalesbians piece and changed my life forever. Um, but yeah. Okay. Thank you all for those readings and resources that you shared. Um, I just wanted to ask, how did you discover more about yourself or more aspects of your identity through media? Um, and what has that process looked like up to this point? Like where did you know where to turn?

**Micah:** I happened to get a book for, um, a like elementary school graduation or graduation gift. So I was going into sixth grade and an aunt gave me a book by Stedman Graham. Who's like Oprah's partner or boyfriend. And he wrote a book for adolescents called *Teens Can Make It Happen*. And it's not a LGBTQ specific resource, but it has all these prompts that, that you are encouraged to think about your values and your goals for life. And I remember at that time, as early as sixth grade, I had this fierce desire to be a father. And it says like, so what's your goal? I'm like, be a, dad are some things that might get in the way, well, I might be gay and, uh, well, how are you going to maybe like navigate that challenge? And I said, well, maybe I could find a woman who'd be fine with it being like a platonic relationship and were married, but were not gonna have sex. And, uh, and we'll raise a family. Cause I didn't have a concept or any examples around me that there could, well, first of all, that I could, one day be married to that wasn't even legal or even conceived of as a possibility then, but let alone like be able to adopt or otherwise have a child and raise them in a same sex parent household. So I'm, I would actually reflecting on that, say that those kinds of workbooks, whether they're shared as through like a guidance counselor or a gift from someone else. But I think that personal reflection in journaling can be really great too. m

**Olivia:** Yeah. I think that, um, I, once again with the Gen Z, um, I think that, uh, social media also can't be overlooked, uh, especially like in my journey. And I know that a lot of people my age, um, look and turn to social media, um, to try and conceptualize their identity. I know for me when I was trying to determine my gender identity, because I I've known I was a lesbian since I was like very young. Um, my, my grandma has always like her and her wife have always been in my life. I've always had queer examples. I've been very fortunate in that regard, but gender identity was something that once I got to college, I started to consider and in mainstream media, I think that, um, there is, it's difficult to find gender nonconforming, um, representation that is, um, nuanced in, in the way that I was looking for. And then that's when social media really filled that hole for me when I could see people, um, actively engaging in exploration of their gender identity. And so it was like, it was a project that we were both working on in tandem, even though I didn't know this person and they didn't know me and there was no communication, they would say, well, this is really confirming for me. And this makes me feel uncomfortable. And so then I could start to interrogate my own emotions, kind of what you're saying with journaling, Micah it's that same, like self-reflection that happens over and over. Um, so I think that like social media has been really, really, uh, helpful for me and I understand of course there are damaging aspects, but um, for queer young people, I think that it has been a great tool in a lot of regards.

**Alex:** I think for me, it's just been no matter what media I've been consuming, whether it's, I mean academic or not academic, I think that I've found more kind of comfort in being myself and it's okay to share myself and to share my queer identity and not have to keep it a secret. Um, and that I don't have to I mean apologize for who I am and know that I'll keep learning. I will keep changing and it's still, I mean, I will be a work in progress. So I mean the more media I consume, I mean the more I do kind of take comfort in that.

**Mady:** Definitely. Thank you all for exploring that, uh, question with me here. Um, we are now at our third and final discussion question here. Um, so Bechdel recounts, her personal and familial struggles with mental illness, specifically her childhood OCD as well as her father's suspected depression and alleged suicide. Bechdel also in describing her family as an artist colony added that they could “also be even more accurately described as a mildly autistic colony.” LGBTQ individuals are statistically at a higher risk for experiencing mental health conditions. What kind of barriers do you think arise when the stigma of mental illness is compounded with the stigma of LGBTQ+ identities?

**Micah:** Oh, that's a big one. Uh, that comorbidity, uh, in particular, when you have, you know, both depression and you are like autistic, uh, like, like, and then you're exploring like your trans identity. My gosh, uh, I, I think we support a lot of students who are navigating these things and I think that's one of the reasons why affirming healthcare both mentally and physically is so important. My goodness, but I, I think it just, you know, when you think about just from the perspective of college students, since we're, you know, at Ohio University thinking about all the challenges that they often have to face in terms of navigating the increased independence, and maybe you're maybe you're dating, or maybe you're deciding that you aren't someone who's interested in sexual activity with other people, like all these things are then complicated by these additional challenges and barriers. Uh, of like, even if I recognize that I might have depression or anxiety that needs some medical treatment, am I brave enough to take a chance on a physician that may or may not be LGBTQ-affirming? And that's why I'm glad when they actually stop and share their, those concerns and stories in a space like our LBGT Center so that we can connect them with other students who've had positive experiences or, uh, with great counselors at counseling and psychological services or, you know, people, uh, who are medical positions that we know to be LGBTQ affirming it's, that's a really big question, a lot of neurodiversity and people to even understand that we, I think that's kind of like the next challenge for us to make sure that people are really thinking about that complex intersectionality.

**Olivia:** I think also there is, um, I think it's important to approach these kind of questions and these issues, um, while resisting this idea of like layering or like identity on top of identity that need to be addressed independently and kind of, um, affirming to these people that they are whole people in and of themselves and using that language. Um, and if they're facing issues, it's not, um, like in spite of, or, or because of another identity necessarily. It's I think that just like treating people as their whole people and, moving on from there. Um, that's been really helpful, at least for me trying to navigate life as a college student, I am a whole person and my whole person is dedicated to this or this and feels like that. Um, I think that at is also very important when we're thinking about these kinds of these kinds of issues.

**Alex:** Yes, absolutely. I think that it's so important to acknowledge that. I mean, it can be a barrier for an LGBTQ individual to seek services due to fear that you may be pathologized because of your identity and rather than acknowledging that no, it's not because of this identity, it's because of the daily discrimination that you experience because of that identity and because of other people's biases and prejudice. Um, I think too, another big barrier that can come up is just, it's more internal, but just the idea that I have to stay silent and I have to learn to, um, accept an unacceptable situation and not acknowledge and take care of my mental health. Um, and, um, also not feel that I can, um, acknowledge my queer identity. I think too, a barrier that can come up as if people aren't ready to come out yet, they may be, they may fear that they could be forced to come out. They may fear that they could be outed to unsupportive, um, parents that could set up even kind of a more dangerous situation. Um, so those are mean all important. I think, factors to consider in real barriers for a lot of people. Um, and too, I mean, just when, if you're learning that you have to be less like yourself in any way, um, it can increase the risk of mental illness. So I think acknowledging that, um, and so if somebody does come to you for help just being aware of that, that it may not be so simple and acknowledging all of those factors can be really helpful.

**Mady:** Yeah, definitely. Those are all such important points that y'all touched on. And actually what you were just saying, Alex, leads up pretty well to our final question. Um, how do you support people when they come out? I know that the support affect the mental health of LGBTQ people. Um, so feel free to share any personal, um, advice that you have in this realm or just personal experiences. Um, if you've come out to someone.

**Olivia:** I think for me, my coming out experience, um, as a lesbian, when I was younger, um, wasn't necessarily like unique, but I was very resistant to the idea of coming out, um, because I was like, well, straight people don't have to come out, why should I have to? And for the large part, I didn't think people caught on because I would just talk about it. And I was very comfortable and I was very, very fortunate and, um, I had the privilege of being in a very accepting space, so I didn't have to worry, I didn't have those anxieties, um, that I think a lot of people do. But then in college, as I was exploring my gender and, um, wanted to start using, I found that different pronouns fit me, um, differently, and more appropriately. Um, I did feel like it was important to come out because of course I can't assume that other people will know that I want that to change. And so, um, I think that, uh, I was met with a lot of excitement and that was really affirming for me from friends. So, so meeting that, that coming out with, um, affirmation and excitement was really, really, uh, exciting for me. They were excited that, um, they felt privileged in a way to be prevued to that information. And so that felt very good for me. Um, and uh, just trying to meet that issue, head on with someone that's coming out with you and meeting them with excitement and also affirmation I think is, is incredibly important.

**Alex:** Yes, for me, just pausing and giving that space to affirm and listen to what somebody needs to say, give them space to process what this is like for them to verbalize this, what it's like to come out and to be in this vulnerable space. Um, kind of acknowledge all parts of it, acknowledge that this is exciting. There could be fear, there could be unknown and kind of not, I mean, acknowledging and listening to all parts of this. Um, and also asking the person too, I mean, what, what do you need in this moment? Um, do you need just, do you need space? Did you need to verbalize this, did you want to be in a supportive space? Did you need maybe more direction? Did you want, um, pointed toward maybe other supportive spaces? Um, do you need advice kind of what, what is it that you're needing in this moment and kind of just giving that space to.

**Micah:** Yeah. All I would add is that, you, you know, checking in about how confidential this is, uh, I mean, you we're gonna wanna default to confidentiality, but it could be that they are, um, you know, in the process of coming out in the community, that you are also a part of, maybe they are looking for an ally in that journey. Or maybe they're just gonna say, this is just for you. And I'd like to keep it between us and, um, yeah, respecting that privacy can even be a matter of supporting their safety. So that's really important.

**Alex:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mady:** Yeah, definitely. Thank you all for those notes. That's all, uh, very, very supportive responses and I hope that anyone listening to our podcast, um, can learn a lot from those.

So just to wrap up everyone, uh, thank you so much, Micah, Alex and Olivia for being here today. I really appreciate you all, um, spending your time with us to, um, make this podcast and also to share, your experiences and be vulnerable with us, um, about what you you've been through as LGBTQ people and, to help support the broader LGBTQ community.

If you enjoyed today's discussion, um, please check out Fun Home the musical we have linked, um, and you can head to <https://www.ohio.edu/diversity/womens-center> for more amazing programs and events. This has been the Purple Couch Clubhouse from the Ohio University's Women's Center, and we have been reading *Fun Home, A Family Tragicomic* by Allison Bechdel. Until next time folks, have an amazing day and keep growing with all of us at the purple couch.