

# Think Tank: LGBTQ: Episode 1

## Speakers:

**Alex Camire, Communications Specialist**

**Carolyn Scully, Clinical Strategist**

Alex : Hi folks. Welcome to The Think Tank Podcast. Today we're introducing a new series to talk about communities. What it means to be part of a community and how we can support each other's communities. Specifically, we're going to be talking about the LGBTQ community and what it means to be a person with a queer identity label. And how to foster better conversations and connections with the community.

Alex : Hello, again, to all you wonderful listeners. My name is Alex [Camary 00:00:35]. And normally I might introduce myself by telling you that I am a social worker, or that I worked as a crisis counselor. But today I want to introduce myself by sharing with you all that I personally identify as a queer, bisexual man. I use he/him pronouns. And I also identify as pansexual depending on who I'm talking to.

Alex : And these terms, these labels I hold for myself, including the pronouns I mentioned, are just a few things I plan to address and talk more in depth about over the course of this series. But before I go far, I'm also joined today by [Carolyn Scully 00:01:13]. Carolyn, would you like to tell us some things about yourself?

Carolyn: Of course. So, as Alex said, my name is Carolyn Scully. I go by she/her pronouns and I identify as a lesbian woman in my young 20s.

Alex : Wonderful. Carolyn, we're here today to talk about communities. And so you and I are both members of the Alphabet Mafia, as we are kind of casually known. There's a lot of letters that stand for different identity labels. You and I carry different identity labels within this group.

Alex : I mean, one thing there is we're both members of this group and yet we are both still different. What do you think it means to kind of be a member of the queer community? And how do you think of yourself as among this large group?

Carolyn: Well, I think that's a great question, and I think just the word community almost says it all. I think knowing that I'm not alone is something that I have struggled with for the majority of my life, has provided such a comfort in the past few years. And so from some

additional context, I've been out for the past two years, but have known since as early as I can remember. I remember experiencing these feelings in as early as sixth grade.

Carolyn: So knowing that as I'm joining groups that work to identify these together, meeting people at work or in my personal life during school, just like Alex who share these identities, has provided such support. And knowing we all are different, but we all are the same. And we all going through these together.

Carolyn: And just having that comfort at the end of the day, knowing I'm going to sleep, knowing that I'm not the only one in the world who struggles with this. I'm not the only one in the world who goes to a workplace and gets nervous to talk about some of these things. But at the end of the day, too, I think it really means a lot to be proud. Not everybody has the privilege of being able to come out and share their identity. And having that confidence has provided such support as well, too, and kind of leaning back onto that community.

Alex : Absolutely. You mentioned, not everybody having the privilege to be able to come out. And you also mentioned you've been out for about two years now, but it's something you've known since you were a very young age. So I recognize that in myself of you reach a point where you know certain things about yourself. And it almost becomes like, okay, I'm very aware of this. I know this is a part of who I am, but it's sort of an invisible identity.

Alex : Nobody can see what your sexuality is or what your orientation is. So when sharing that with other people, it's an intentional choice we make. Why make that choice? Why risk sharing this piece of yourself with other people not knowing how that will be necessarily received?

Carolyn: Yeah, that's a great question, and I think it's something I went back and forth with for years. Obviously it was something that I knew that I was eventually going to get to the place where I was comfortable, and I was able.

Carolyn: When I first came out with my family, it was a struggle. It wasn't additionally perceived super well, but I knew that it would get there based on knowing my family, knowing that it was something they would support. So when I went through that, that was about a year long process. I knew I was like, I have to kind of become more comfortable with myself.

Carolyn: And it was really almost, I don't want to say fake it until you make it, but I had to force myself to be uncomfortable in situations because I knew

that at the end of the day, I was going to be okay. My family loved me, supported me. I have wonderful friends in my personal life. So I felt that I had the privilege and the voice to be able to speak for those who could not.

Carolyn: And I knew that there are people, there are colleagues who may be listening to this. There are youth who may be listening to this, where they're not in that space. So on behalf of them, I would really like to use this voice that I do have, and be able to speak up for this community who sometimes can't speak up for themselves due to a variety of institutional reasons, personal reasons, anything.

Carolyn: And I knew that if I was them, I looked up to people who spoke openly about their sexual identity at work. I remember being an intern at a company several years ago when I was struggling through this. And there was a colleague who first mentioned having a same sex relationship. And I had never seen that before. And I remember how that made me feel. I felt welcomed. I felt supported at this company and I knew that I wasn't going to be the only one in the room. And so now that is something that I completely, completely want to be for other people.

Alex: Yeah. Knowing that you are not the only person in the room, I really, I love how you put that. Because there's sometimes safety in hiding those pieces of ourselves, not disclosing aspects of ourselves to other people, or in certain spaces.

Alex: It almost reaches a point where it's not a matter of, okay, I'm going to keep certain things. It almost starts to feel like you are intentionally, purposefully, concealing yourself and hiding yourself. And after a point where it feels like you are obligated to do that in certain spaces, it almost feels like you start to harm yourself. Did that ever feel like something you were doing?

Carolyn: It did, for sure. And I remember, I've been in countless conversations over the years with people who I didn't feel safe with. To where I would intentionally, just as you said, not mention it. If I had hung out with my girlfriend that weekend, I would maybe say I hung out with my friends or family, or make different stories to kind of cover it up without having to come out.

Carolyn: Because I feel like that's another thing too. Is we're almost tasked with coming out every single day by saying some stuff like this. So I think I've really tried to just say it within the conversation and not make it a big thing. Not really announcing it or anything like that. Just saying when we're talking about our weekends with my team, or with my

friends or say, "Oh my girlfriend and I went to the zoo, or we did X, Y, Z. We went to a baseball game."

Carolyn: Or stuff like that to where that has made it more comfortable without necessarily making some large announcement. I think that I have found that that's been perceived well. And just as someone would talk about a heterosexual relationship, that has provided me a lot of comfort.

Alex : Yeah, absolutely. And you're kind of hitting on some points around what coming out is, what that even looks like. Because I think from just a historical lens, we look at it from maybe a decade or so ago, or like the early 2000s as sort of like, okay, if you're going to come out, it's like this big, grand thing. You gather all your friends and family and the people that you know, and you tell them all at once I am queer. Or I have this label.

Alex : That doesn't really happen too much these days does it? Like you said-

Carolyn: No.

Alex : Coming out is not a one stop shop anymore. It's like an intentional, disclosive thing with anybody new that you are coming into contact with. Any new group that you might be involved in, it's sharing those subtle things that might indicate your otherness or what makes you a little different.

Alex : So I totally empathize with some of the things you said. I, myself, I like the word partner when referring to a romantic, or dating interest of mine, because it's gender neutral. It's sort of safer depending on who I'm around. I just prefer it over a term like boyfriend.

Alex : So I understand what you mean about just kind of making certain announcements or sharing certain things about yourself that indicate how you might be different. And you don't want to be in a room all by yourself doing that sometimes, it can be uncomfortable.

Alex : What is something that you've noticed or what's something that you were surprised about after disclosing? After kind of sharing and coming out to members that you were getting to know at work?

Carolyn: I guess I was surprised how, I don't want to make this smaller than it sounds, but I guess I was surprised that it wasn't a big deal. I was surprised that no one asked me follow up questions. I guess I was waiting to be the center of attention.

Carolyn: Expecting people to kind of raise their eyebrow, but they would be like, "Oh great. What does your girlfriend do? Was it fun?" They would just ask follow up questions just as they would with any other relationships. But I wouldn't want to speak on that experience because I know that there are people who would not have that same experience. So I guess I was really thankful that I wasn't, but I know that is not a one size fits all reaction.

Alex : Yeah. It's sort of like-

Carolyn: But I was also comforted.

Alex : What made you feel that way in particular?

Carolyn: That it was okay, honestly. Even though I expected some reactions and some follow up questions, I was the comfort in the fact that there weren't. Because if I were to be in a same sex relationship, they wouldn't ask, or raise any eyebrows, or whatnot. So I was surprised with how accepting they were and that comforted me in the end. And it still does every day.

Alex : You almost expect to be the odd person out. And so when you don't get that reaction, it's almost reassuring in a way. Does it feel like we've grown as a society in this area? Do you think we have become more accepting of LGBTQ people particularly within the workplace?

Carolyn: I think so, but I have only been in the workplace for the past, about year or so. So I don't have too much experience of how it used to be. I am also very young working with colleagues who may not be as young, or may not be in my same generation. And so I often have the bias that everyone is just like me in my own generation. Everyone is very accepting and inclusive, and that's not something that's always the case.

Carolyn: But I'd like to think that some of these conversations are. We see top CEOs across the fortune 500, all talk about the need for diversity, equity, inclusion and starting that conversation. And I think it's there and I think it will only continue to be better in the next year, five to 10 years. I think we're on an upward slope, but I think every day we make improvements and every year we do so.

Alex : Yeah. I am inclined to agree with you there. When it comes to younger people, I think the rates are climbing of those who are more readily willing to disclose of themselves who they are at younger and younger ages. So that gap that you shared of coming to that realization for yourself, of who you are. But the gap between that revelation and

when you actually chose to share that with other people, was a little longer than folks who might be even younger than us.

Alex : They're not waiting as long to come out, or to share their gender identity, or their sexual orientation with others. So I think that is definitely a sign that we are going in the right direction.

Alex : What would you say to somebody who maybe is older? Or has more of a stronger fear about sharing those things about themselves with others? Would you say that they should come out? Or should feel comfortable? Or is it okay for somebody to keep those things to themselves?

Carolyn: I think it really depends on the person. I think I would really encourage them to look at the support system that they have. If they feel like they have a great support system, and then they're really comforted of thing. I think you have to look at it two ways, if things go well and things don't go well. And where are you going to be positioned within your own self and your own mental health, if it goes one way or the other?

Carolyn: And I think I would also reiterate the fact that you don't necessarily have to. If you're someone who is either out or not out, and doesn't share it in the workplace, that is your decision. I have colleagues who speak very openly about it like someone like myself. I have colleagues who are in same sex relationships who never mention it. And they're still out, they just make the decision not to do so at certain places.

Carolyn: And I think that's something that we as a community have to be accepting and making sure we're very careful about it. It's great when colleagues want to do that, and it's great when employers support colleagues who do, but it's also great to know that they're supported regardless. And I think that's why these conversations, and just supporting that inclusive environment, makes it safer for those colleagues and more comfortable who aren't.

Carolyn: So that's why I will continue to talk about my same sex relationship, but I will never ask that upon somebody who isn't. Just knowing all I can do as my one individual is let them know that they're safe. I am a comfortable, safe space for them to talk to. And I want to create that in the environments that I'm in, whether they use it or not.

Alex : Yeah. It's often assumed like, okay, if you're a self-disclosed member of a community, that you all now have this group think. And you all become this monolith that has the same exact thoughts, ideals, actions, impulses, whatever. But the reality is we all are different. We

all have again, different individual identity labels within the umbrella label.

Alex : But also amongst that we have different backgrounds. And as you said, different support systems. So I think it's assumed sometimes that if you are not out, that you aren't proud. Or that you might be self-conscious of your identity. The reality is I think some people just don't want to share or talk about those pieces of themselves. And that's okay too.

Alex : I think that's part of talking about and promoting inclusion is to make room for those folks as well. Just because you have a particular label doesn't mean you're obligated to share that with everybody. It's as you said, it's a personal choice. It's going to come down to the individual. I couldn't agree with you more on that.

Alex : One of the things that you've shared with me previously is some of the work that you do as you are a member, but you're also, I believe a co-chair of the Pride CRG. CRG for those unfamiliar stands, for Colleague Resource Group. I think they used to be known as Employee Resource Groups, ERGs. But what's some of the work that you do with the Pride CRG that you're on?

Carolyn: Of course. So I'm actually on, and the way that we're structured, is we have several chapters throughout the country where we have more colleagues centered. A lot of our company is remote. So there are a lot of virtual groups as there.

Carolyn: So I'm on the Pride Plus National Leadership Team. So there is maybe 10 to 12 of us centered through different areas. Marketing and communications, project management. I serve with a co-chair on the Talent and Mentoring Committee. So we focus on interview readiness, prep. Also, maintaining the talent that we do have and making sure that we're developing as queer colleagues. And making sure that we are aware of resources that our companies provided on individual development plans, professional development, anything with that nature. But I've also done a lot of work off the side of my desk within the LGBTQ mental health space.

Carolyn: In my day job, I work in a mental wellbeing business area at my company. So we focus on anything from workplace wellness, to suicide prevention, and those higher acuity care. And through the CRG, we've been able to make partnerships with large nonprofit organizations, such as the Trevor Project and CenterLink. And we've been able to bring colleague trainings on allyship, as well as identity. And a little bit of, as we're now seeing a youth mental health crisis,

finding those youth LGBTQ resources for our colleagues and their families, has really been a center point and really need a support.

Carolyn: So I do a little bit of everything in this Colleague Resource Group, but I think the one thing for me that is really helped is knowing that it's not only the younger generations who is queer and working in the workplace. My co-lead is probably 30, 40 years older than me, and we work together day to day. And we have lived the same experiences and the same challenges.

Carolyn: So it kind of goes back to what you were talking about earlier being we're so different. My co-chair and I have not had the same experiences. But at the end of the day, we share this and we get to work together to really provide the most inclusive space for LGBTQ colleagues that we can.

Alex : That is just wonderful. Just being able to come together and especially pool resources with one another, to help each other with the different circumstances that one faces, is so important.

Alex : One of the things that you had mentioned about the CRG is just the feeling of belonging. That folks feel of being a part of something that is bigger than themselves individually. And that is helpful for both members of the queer community, but you also mentioned allyship too. And resources for helping others who don't identify with this community, but maybe want to learn more about it.

Alex : What are some things that you might want to share with any allies that could be listening to this right now? What are some things that you'd want them to know about either you or this community?

Carolyn: I think one is just listening. Speaking of allyship, we have probably a chunk of colleagues who just joined the CRG to just hear us and learn from us. Maybe they haven't traditionally understand what it would feel like to be in this community. Maybe they have a family member, or a friend who has recently come out and disclosed their identity. And they want to just hear what can I be doing better to support you?

Carolyn: And I think for me, that's a question I always get from allies, is how can I best support you? What can I do? I'm here for you, what do you need? And I think one is just being there and speaking on behalf of us and speaking along with us too. Fighting for equality, fighting for change in our communities, and really stepping up to be strong. And if that means putting a Pride heart in your signature bio.



Carolyn: It could be as simple as sharing your pronouns in meetings. Hi, my name is Carolyn and I go by she/her pronouns. Would you like to introduce yourself and your pronouns?" And just creating that environment. Well, just because I'm introducing my pronouns, that doesn't mean I'm queer or whatnot. It just means that I am a person and I want to share that. And so doing little things like that means so much to those in the community.

Alex : Absolutely. I think that's a great example that you just shared. I know I've heard this question from straight folks, but also folks that don't identify as trans. Why share my pronouns? That is just a simple thing that if you don't identify as queer, you might not understand.

Alex : But it's as simple as just normalizing those extra things that we go through within the queer community to kind of self disclose to one another. It's just one of those examples of the things I think that gets taken for granted.

Carolyn: For sure.

Alex : And so to be a better ally is to understand some of those things. Like, oh, I shouldn't take something like my pronouns for granted. A simple gesture, like putting that in your email signature, can go a long way in normalizing that part of the conversation. Absolutely. That's a great example. Thank you for sharing that.

Alex : So we've been getting to know Carolyn Scully. Who's been talking with us about her identity as a lesbian woman, and her work experiences while being out and proud in the workplace. Any last minute things that you would like to share with us? Anything that you'd like to share with either a queer person listening to this? Or an ally listening to this?

Carolyn: Yeah, I think I can add, and the last thing too, that I think is most important for me even understand it as I've come to figure out my own identity. It's just knowing that anything that you're feeling is valid. You may be feeling conflicting things on what to identify as. Do you have to identify as anything?

Carolyn: The question is completely up to you. No one can tell you what to be, what identity to have. And just know that you are supported and that people are listening. And there are always people here for you to talk through it. There are support resources to go. There are great organizations specific to LGBTQ community. And just know that you are truly never alone.

Alex : If you're looking for additional resources for yourself, check with your employer to see what's available. You may have an employee assistance program. And maybe look into if you have an employee resource or colleague resource group around Pride or for LGBTQ folks in your workplace.

Alex : If you don't have one, maybe you could be the one to start building that community. Thanks for listening to episode one in this series. Join us next time, where we're going to be talking more about gender, sex, and sexuality labels, as well as stigmas and biases.

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