

Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being

Episode 31 – Alicia Crosby

Transcript

Matthias: If you enjoy listening to Queerology, then I need your help.

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Hey friends. This is Matthias Roberts, and you're listening to Queerology, a podcast on belief and being. This is episode 31.

Alicia: So when you look at that from a faith perspective, how many people because of not giving themselves to fail, because of not asking questions have their faith in this space of idolatry? They can hold onto it. They can grasp it.

Matthias: Alicia Crosby is a faith engaged community organizer, activist, and the co-founder of Center for Inclusivity, a Chicago based nonprofit that works to foster inclusive communities through public forums. It's a space for thoughtful dialogue, where people of all faiths, genders, and sexual identities can learn to seek and be fully known.

Alicia has her master's degree in social justice, and has a deep appreciation for dark chocolate, Sour Patch Kids, Jesus, and shenanigans. Before we dive into our conversation with Alicia, happy new year. Welcome back.

Welcome to season two of Queerology. I'm so excited for what this season is going to bring. Over the break, we hit the goal on my Patreon page to be able to start offering transcripts of every episode of Queerology. I'm so excited to debut that with this first episode of season two. There are transcripts now available, and there will be transcripts available thanks to all of your support for the podcast. So excited to make that happen, so thank you. Thank you to everyone who supports Queerology financially. It really does make a huge difference in the sustainability of me being able to produce this show every week.

And, as those of you who follow me on Instagram know, I just got a shipment of Queerology swag in the mail, some stickers, some buttons, super cool stuff. I can't wait

to start toting it around with me. I'm going to be sending those out to people who are at the \$10.00 level of support and above on Patreon.

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In this episode, Alicia and I sit down to talk about inclusive spaces, what inclusive spaces are, what they're not, and then how we might start fostering sort of an embodied sense of inclusivity in the circles that we engage with. So excited for this episode. Alicia asks some beautiful questions that have been sitting with me in this episode. Let's go ahead and dive in.

Alicia, hi.

Alicia: Hey.

Matthias: How are you?

Alicia: How's it going?

Matthias: Good.

Alicia: Oh, good. I'm good. I'm super excited to be talking to you today.

Matthias: Likewise. I'm so excited to have you here. Thank you for joining me.

Alicia: Absolutely.

Matthias: To start, the question that I start every episode with, how do you identify, and then how would you say that your faith has helped form that identity?

Alicia: Wow, that's such a good question. I identify as black, as queer, as pansexual. I'm a woman. I have recently taken to calling myself Christian-ish.

There are so many ways that we identify, right? What have I not hit on?

I guess I would be politically progressive, if not flat out radical in my beliefs. I am from the US, a Chicagoan. I'm a New Yorker. I have so many identities that I can claim.

But that question of how does my faith influence my identities, I think it's actually the other way around for me. It's my identities that inform my faith.

Speaking about things like politics, or like ideology, and being more progressive, like the way that I think about faith, the way that I think about my spirituality goes hand in hand with my beliefs.

I've definitely found myself stretched faith-wise because of things like commitment to justice and working for equity for people, and that being really like one of my heartbeats.

But then, conversely, I think that ... How would I say this? I think that my faith drives me to be loving and compassionate, and empathetic when it comes to others, and even when it comes to myself.

Too often times we forget about ourselves when we talk about faith, and when we talk about identity, everything is external and about God, or people, but sometimes we don't turn our sights inward, and all of it comes together, basically, is what I'm trying to say.

Matthias: It sounds like a very kind of holistic, everything kinda sounds like just kinda flows into who you are. It sounds like there isn't a ton of, maybe, separation between those. Am I hearing that well? Is that-

Alicia: Yeah. I think that that's fair to say.

I wonder sometimes if we think about relationship as it relates to identity, and how different things imprint on each other, right?

My blackness, and one of the ways I identify is as being a PK, so I grew up as a Pastor's Kid within the black Baptist tradition, and so that definitely has an impact on the things that I believe and the way that I've grown, the things that I've held to be my truth, but our identities influence things like spirituality, like faith, like how we make meaning of the world.

I do see things a bit more holistically, and look for the way that everything works together.

Matthias: I was in your workshop at the Reformation Project on sexual ethics. I was thinking about this in preparation for chatting with you, but I feel like this ties in, too, of that I think I went in with this kind of expectation that you were going to teach us something, and instead you facilitated a space where it felt like there was room for many different voices, and kind of room for a group.

It was like we were coming up with the teaching together, in a very unique way. Maybe not unique, but a way that I personally have never experienced before.

I'm drawing ties between the way that you're describing your identity and the way that your faith informs that with how you embodied yourself in that space. I'm wondering if you can talk about that a little bit.

Alicia: Actually it really warms my heart to know that you this was a unique experience for you, and that you felt that invitation in, because that's definitely intentional.

One of the biggest gripes that I have in the world of convening for conferences and workshops and whatever is that oftentimes it's that someone stands at the front of the room, and they're standing while everyone's sitting, and there's a hierarchy there, and it's manifested physically, and this person is an expert and they have all this wisdom to give away, and the people are there to just receive.

I call bullshit on that. I think that we all have wisdom. We all have things to contribute to a space. Even if someone is maybe learned in a given area, there's room for us, as facilitators, as teachers. I think that this is a product of us having good teaching skill, is to extract the knowledge that's already there.

Yes, there are things that everyone needs to grow in, and to deepen their understanding in, but at the same time there are other insights and knowledges [sic], and things that are available to people. It's just that so many times we go into spaces and people aren't encouraged to give of themselves as well as to receive.

It's really meaningful for me as a facilitator to do that, to help people see you've already got things that you're coming in with. I'll help you unlock something new just by asking questions, and then providing maybe some context knowledge that you might not have in this given area, but I'm not the only one who's giving away knowledge here, and you're not the only ones who have to learn.

There are things that I, as a facilitator, can definitely learn and grow in, that I can only get to because we are in relationship with one another in this space.

Matthias: I love that idea of relationship being kind of the hermeneutic of the room, whereas so often we go in because we're used to conferences being done people teaching, and participants listening and taking in, like you mentioned, we often want to be taught to. There's almost a sense of I don't want to say laziness, but it's more of a passive experience than engaging and learning through relationship. I love the idea.

Alicia: You're absolutely right. I don't only think that it's just that people want to be taught to, people want to be told. They want to be told what do I do, and how do I do it. I think that has something to do with people are afraid to experiment, to try, to fail, to admit ignorance, because we don't have a culture that's very open to things like failure. Failure is like you failed, there's no coming back from it, instead of seen as an opportunity for growth, or a way to examine the need for growth.

Teaching can be incredibly edifying. People are pushed to consider things in a more relational manner, instead of it being really prescriptive, this one-size-fits-all method of whatever. If people are pushed to consider these things in relationship with one another, and the relationship experienced in this one context doesn't necessarily translate well into another, I wonder maybe how much better things would run, how much better people's interpersonal reactions would fare if we looked at things contextually. Then out of that, shift gears and make space for those unique experiences and encounters.

Matthias: I'm thinking about my personal journey in thinking about my sexuality and wanting to be told, coming from a context of where I was told, and having to break out of it, and then again coming back into wanting to be told something else instead of having to flail. It felt like there wasn't any space built into at least my church context to have that space to do contextual work. There's so much value in that.

Alicia: There definitely is. This is the tension that I have when we institutionalize anything, but particularly institutionalize faith. Sometimes those structures that give something form are so rigid that there isn't room for growth, for experience, for this contextual work to be done.

Situating this specific to within the Christian tradition, looking at Jesus, how often did Jesus actually tell people what to do? Part of what I think was so dope about him and his teaching methodology was that this cat would go and talk in riddles, and ask questions, but it's very rare that you ever saw Jesus be like this is this, and that is that.

I think Jesus gives a really good model for teaching, encouraging people to look at stories and to unpack them.

Matthias: I'm sitting here with two feelings. Half of me is going yes, absolutely. Another part of me is like that is so much work.

Alicia: It is. It absolutely is. I think it's fair to ask people, do you really want to do the work?

I think spiritual identity and spiritual maturation does take work.

I was talking about this with a friend of mine this morning. We were talking about Christians, and the church, and challenges with interpretation. Of course this is what people do in their free time, we just talk about this because me and my friends are nerdy.

She and I were having this conversation, and we were going back and forth speaking about our spiritual development over the years. She and I met in church almost ten years ago. Both of us were working in a ministry and became fast friends.

We were theologically nowhere near where we were when we met, and there's so much that we question, and so much processing that we do. The conversation that we had this morning led to the space of Idolatry.

It's something that we don't really talk about much anymore, about what does it mean to make things our idol. I think that a lot of people have an Idologist [sic] faith.

I don't say that to be like oh, you're worshipping blah blah blah. That's the context we hear Idolatry in.

Think about what an idol is. It's an artifact. It's a thing. It's something that we are able to hold onto. Out of the [inaudible 00:15:42] to hang onto, we give it meaning, and we give

it our energy. In that sense, we do worship it. It becomes almost a center of our attentions in that.

When we look at that from a faith perspective, how many people because of not giving themselves room to fail, because of not asking questions, only being in a position to hold onto what they've been told versus going through process and sitting with the Holy Spirit and really trying to understand instead of just accepting what's been given to them, have their faith in the space of Idolatry?

They can hold onto it. They can grasp it.

I think there's definitely way more to being a person of faith, to having a rich spiritual identity, that comes with the questioning and with the willingness to screw up, to get it wrong. All those things lend themselves to you being in some type of continual process instead of actually having arrived somewhere.

The moment that you've arrived faith wise, you've now got an idol sitting on your shelf. You can keep hold of God, and of all of this mystery, and you've figured out something that from the beginning of time no one else has been able to.

Matthias: I think that's such a temptation. I'm thinking about some recent conversations I've had with people who don't agree with me on faith issues, and how quickly I feel myself going to that I have to have this all figured out right now, and if I don't there are these dire consequences.

What you're saying is that no, this processing and this space is where beautiful things happen.

Alicia: Absolutely.

I think some of that absolutism, quite honestly, is a function of whiteness.

This is where we speak about other forms of our identity playing into things, when I start looking at things and feel like there's so much more room for mystery in communities of color and in the conversations that we have. I think specific to theology, it's like looking at theologies of liberation, they're so robust and full, and have questions, and challenge systems and norms. They're very queer in that they subvert what the status quo is. I think that's super important work that needs to be done.

When we have specifically in terms of racially this construct of whiteness, where there is this uniformity, there is a sense of conformity, respectability, this thing that's established, it doesn't leave room for anything other than what can be held.

Matthias: I'm thinking about how you're describing mystery, and how often in the context I grew up in mystery was used as an appeal to anything that didn't fit within our belief system. It was like we don't know why God set it up this way, but we have this rigid box. Even

though we see this question that falls outside of it, that must be the mystery. It's all within the function of staying within this box.

It sounds like you're describing something very different than a box.

Alicia: I'm not a fan of boxes. There are so many things in my life that point to that.

I was that kid in undergrad who was like I'm not going to have a regular major, I'm going to make this up myself. I started my own nonprofit. Consistently that's part of who I am, is pushing at norms and expectations, and looking for not even new things, but looking at how to I use the tools around me to create meaning in the world, and maybe in a way that someone else hasn't done, or address a problem that isn't currently being focused on, using the tools that are around me.

Anyways, looking at boxes, I've been actively kicking at the walls of my Christian box for the last few years, and working to trust God to hold me in my questioning and in my critical nature.

I question everything. If I'm in a position where I question everything, but can't question God, then how divine is that God? How much of God is that God for me?

If this is a God, if this is my creator who I believe has given me this inquisitive spirit, and this experimental nature, and I can't apply that to my faith, there is something that is inconsistent, either with God or with me.

Matthias: It sounds like instead of mystery as protection, a stepping into and exploring that mystery.

Alicia: Yeah. What's been dope for me over these last few years of that kicking, of the exploration of that mystery, is that it's pushed me to a place where I can do things like prioritize relationship between people and between things and ideas, and I can look for the interconnectedness of all these different things. It's because sometimes when we are too rigid with the structures that we put around things, we sever the ties that are there. We're not able to make meaning or look for those points of connectedness because that wall, that boundary actually cut it off. We can't see this is connected to that, and then that is tethered to this thing, because there's a wall that blocks you being able to see how these things relate to each other.

Sometimes that's ritual. Sometimes that's dogma. Sometimes that's hierarchies. Sometimes that is just manifestations of power in different ways. I'm all for seeing those things undone, and pushing at those barriers in order to see what's there and get out of what's there. How can we work towards wellness, and being known to each other, to God, and to ourselves? How can we be known?

Matthias: I love that. You mentioned your nonprofit. It seems like in a way what you've committed your life to, is that work of knowing and being known. Could you maybe talk about what

your nonprofit is, and what you're doing and hoping to bring into the world through that work?

Alicia: Sure, absolutely.

Oh, goodness, almost three years ago now, it's a little over two and a half years ago, a friend and I started a nonprofit called Center for Inclusivity. It's a Chicago-based nonprofit that we founded originally to do work at the intersection of faith, gender identity, and sexuality, asking how to we practically embody inclusion. We talk about inclusion, but what does it mean to actually see it lived?

The neat thing about starting a nonprofit and then actually continuing on in the work is that your vision grows. While we definitely pay attention to those things, what's been on my heart more as Executive Director is how do we tangibly see intersectional equity be a thing, and how can communities and conversations be leveraged to see us work toward that end.

What we do with Center for Inclusivity is we host a public forum for dialog, giving people who may share in identity or maybe have vastly different identities the opportunity to sit down and just talk to one another.

That talking sometimes happens through we do this thing called Open Gathering, where we throw a topic of conversation out there and invite people into a space to have some talk around that.

We host something called No-Agenda Dinner, and it's just what it sounds like. It's a dinner with no agenda. You show up, you buy food, you eat, but you have the opportunity to connect with people in authentic community at least once a month. You don't have to be alone, and you can get to know people for real.

Sometimes it happens through something like Karaoke. Tomorrow night I'm actually going to be hosting a Karaoke night, just giving people who come from all different backgrounds, some of them are queer and some of them are straight, some of them are people of faith whether they be Christian or Buddhist or what have you, and some people don't ascribe to any faith tradition, folks coming from all different economic backgrounds ...

Sometimes we don't speak about economic inclusivity, but one of the things we have done with this event in particular is make sure that it's free of charge. We took care of the bill in order to give people having all types of economic the opportunity to sit and be a part of community.

We can talk all day about justice, and all these ways that justice shows up or doesn't show up in the world, but at some point we need to have conversations about how we relate to one another, and how that relationship impacts the work of justice. I think that's what Center for Inclusivity has done and is continuing to do, is help people talk to one another, that itself being work of resistance and justice work.

Matthias: I'm hearing this very real sense of interconnectedness of people, of all things, and this real emphasis on relationship. You mentioned the work of resistance. I feel like if those things are prioritized, things can't help but change if those things are true.

Alicia: I believe so. There's so much research out there that supports this.

People start giving a crap about one another when they're able to see the bond, the relationship, the connection that they have to another person. When we look at people who are suddenly concerned with racial equality and racial equity, it's because they had an experience or know someone, someone they were invested in and cared with, had an experience that catalyzed them to be a part of that. They saw that something was wrong. They saw that there was a relational dysfunction present, but you can only see dysfunction in relationship. You don't have an opportunity to see outside of relationship. You just don't.

When people commit themselves to this work, to seeing that people have access to spaces that are inclusive, and that celebrate their voices and prioritize their voices, looking to see legislation enacted that allows people to have truly equal rights, it's because something relationally happened that made space for the realization something was wrong in the first place. Then out of that wrongness, there needs to be some type of rightness that we work towards.

Matthias: It sounds like this idea in theological terms of how the work of the Holy Spirit is a communal work. This sounds like a very real manifestation of that communal work, of people coming together and God being among them.

Alicia: You know that's part of what it is for me.

Before I started the nonprofit, when I ended up on this leg of my journey of moving to Chicago, where I live right now, and starting grad school so I got a masters in social justice, the thing that made me want to study justice was looking at the accessibility of love, that people have access to love of God, and not in some disembodied frou-frou way.

I wanted people to know God's love because they were treated equitably in a space. I could see the things that would be a disruption to that love, to the full rich life that I think God would have us have, that God's heart wants for us. I wanted to see that be realized, be manifest somehow, through the work of justice.

It's why I care about all that stuff so much. God in God's self I think is relational. God is in relationship with us, which would lead us to believe that we should be in relationship with one another. And if there's anything disrupting that sense of relationship, we need to put in that work. We need to be committed to doing whatever we can to enter relationships with one another.

Matthias: I'm hearing you talk about this, and I'm mostly thinking about all the different lines that I'm going to say we often draw, but it may be more specific to say maybe whiteness. I

would imagine whiteness plays into it a lot, these lines of religion, or sexuality, or dogma, or whatever.

Your Center for Inclusivity is not just a Christian organization.

Alicia: Not by any means.

Matthias: You bring in so much. I'm curious you could maybe talk about that. I think the pluralism, and I don't know if that would be the right word, but relationship drives us outside those lines that at least some of us, or some church bodies, draw.

Alicia: We're very intentionally at the Center for Inclusivity nonsectarian, and it's because we understand that there are very few places where people can go and genuinely connect with one another and bring the fullness of themselves and their identities and their stories in a way that doesn't give preferential option to any one particular group.

There are places out there that do justice work but they do Christian justice work, which means that they don't elevate or prioritize at all the perspectives of people from other religious communities, or who don't have faith identities at all. Everything that they do works out of that Christianity. It means that other voices are silenced.

I think that's part of why I believe in doing the work in the way that I do it, and that the center does the work in the way that we've done it. It's to give people an equal space to be able to lend their perspectives, to lend their experiences, to share out of their journeys and out of their identities, and to know that they're going to be as celebrated for being Muslim as they would be for being Buddhist or Christian, or being agnostic or being atheist. They know regardless of what identity they hold, whether it be a faith identity or racial identity, a sexual or gender identity, that they're going to be celebrated. They're going to be cared for, they're going to be loved.

I think that's important. There aren't that many spaces at least that I've encountered in the world where people are really going to put in this work to honor us all.

Matthias: I think on one hand there's this sense we have this idea unification and coming together in that kind of way sounds idyllic. I'm trying to distinguish here between the idyllic sense of unification and what you're talking about. You're putting in the work to create that space, and it's not this frou-frou, idea of everyone is going to come together and we'll be fine, but it's a very intentional effort on everyone's behalf to create and craft those spaces.

Alicia: Yeah. It's not easy at all.

Part of what happens in those idyllic spaces that are frou-frou, where it's like we are the world, we are the children, what ends up going down is there's erasure that takes place in those spaces. There are people who don't get seen.

Organizations or entities, even if they hear that somebody is not feeling prioritized, that they're not being cared for, that their perspectives aren't being brought to center and being celebrated, they don't actually work to correct it all the time.

I think relationship, real inclusive community building, because that's what we do, is hard because things are constantly shifting. There is such fluidity to that work. It weighs with what you have to do as a facilitator or as a leader in a space. You have to constantly do introspection and challenge your biases, and challenge the biases of people in the space in order for people to actually be included, and for not just this be a place where some ideas and some personhoods [sic] are elevated above one another. It's hard. It's very hard work, but it's possible. I think so, at least.

Matthias: I'm curious about how you would say that commitment to inclusivity interacts with your faith and what you would hold as deeply felt beliefs. How does that work when you're bringing yourself to that space?

I feel like oftentimes when we jump into these conversations about inclusivity, we can feel like we have to give up, we do have to give up a lot. There's also that sense of where are my boundaries of what I believe in. How does it interplay when we start bringing our full selves to those spaces?

Does that question make sense?

Alicia: It does. It's hard.

One of the things that I share is that for every space that we have that's inclusive, we also need affinity spaces.

Yes, we work to be authentic, and to bring our full selves into a space, but the reality is that part of the work of inclusivity, part of the work it requires, is understanding yes, this space is about me, but it's also about us, and so there are some times where I need to be conscious of how I enter into this space in order for someone else to still have room.

This is why affinity space is so brilliant. We have different elements of our identity that we can talk about with people who come from a very similar space.

The way I'll talk about, I'm trying to think about which of my identities I'm going to go on here, the way that I'll talk about my blackness as a black woman in a space with other black people is not the same way that I'm necessarily going to show up in an inclusive space. It's not because I'm being inauthentic. It's because I understand there are people holding other identities there.

If I go on and on and on about my blackness, and talk about things consistently, and I fill up the space, that it means that my [laht-EE-nex 00:37:16] family, and my native family, and my Asian folks, and even white friends, they'll have the ability to share their

experiences. We don't really get anywhere if we're all consuming, and dumping all our things there.

Yes, it's critical for us to be authentic, and to share in a way that protects and honors but also still makes room for other people to share their perspectives and their journeys. Inclusive space, I don't think, can function well without affinity. Again, it's relational.

Matthias: It sounds like this interplay and this mix of on one hand having space where you can go deep into your identity in those affinity spaces, and be able to start learning to open that, to hold it with an openness of where you can then enter into these spaces and create space for others as well even in that rooted-ness ...

Alicia: I think that's what inclusive spaces should be offering. It's not what it does, because inclusivity like many other words, like intersectionality, they become buzzwords to us.

What it means to be inclusive, it means to include. If you are the only person centered in that space, then you're not including anybody. There's give and take, there's reciprocity, there's mutuality in inclusive spaces. At least there should be.

Matthias: I'm sitting with that vision, and the beauty in that, thinking about in our faith communities and in our spaces of queerness and all those intersecting identities that we sit in, what it looks like to step into that radical commitment towards space.

Alicia: I think, and people may disagree with me, and that's fine because it's sometimes in disagreement that we come to fuller ideas and we grow, I think that if we don't prioritize and examine how we're oriented in relationship to each other, to our values and ideas, to place and space, we don't look at the role of relationship in the world, then we're always going to be a little bit anemic in our understandings of justice and what is just.

Injustice happens because there's relational disruption. Something is not right in how we're relating to ourselves, or to the space that we're in, or the environment, or to God. There's something happening there that needs change.

Matthias: I'm just even noticing in this conversation a sense of discomfort, and not a sense of this is wrong, but a discomfort in the amount of how it takes us out of ourselves in a way that feels like growth and change, and how disorienting and yet beautiful that is, that mix of being in it.

Alicia: We're not used to being present. It requires a whole lot of presence, and not being too focused on progression, or too focused on what happened in the past. There's like this balance that has to take place. It's really hard because we haven't done it, and we don't have really good models for it, at least not that I've encountered.

Again, I'm open to being proven wrong. Maybe somebody out there has created something that I've never experienced, where people have done this systemically and socially, and they've gotten it right.

I think at least in an American social context I have to talk about what it means to be in the US in 2018. I don't know if we know how to relate to one another.

I was recently in a space where I actually unexpectedly ended up facilitating, and the reason I ended up facilitating is because there were some things that had happened there and it became clear that people needed to speak about what does it mean for us to establish rules for engagement so that this space is protective of all of us.

I know lots of people talk about safe space. That's not my jam. I believe in protective space. What does it mean for us to enter into this space and commit to protecting one another? Safety is arbitrary. Safety can go away. Anything can disrupt the safety.

There is a consciousness and a way that we can commit to one another that we can enter into a relational pact in this space to try to minimize the harm that will happen here, because we're going to be conscious, and we're going to be present to one another and to our needs, and it requires us talking about that.

This is the work that I ended up doing in this space after there were little challenges that had arisen in different places. We had a conversation about what does it mean to make this space a protected space, and how have people felt not protected.

It was the first time in years that people had been invited into that type of conversation. It's something that isn't prioritized. Even in the most justice oriented of spaces, folks aren't talking about what does it mean for you to walk out of this space, and me to walk out of this space, and us not to be covered in verbal shrapnel and all types of wounding.

If we don't talk about it, how are we going to protect each other, how are we going to protect each other? How do I know what's care for you? How do you know what's care for me, if we're not in conversation?

Matthias: It sounds like a commitment to actually having those conversations to the particularity of how that looks different for every single person involved.

Alicia: Oh, yeah. I think that's part of why this is so hard to get at. It means that there is no arrival.

We love to be like "I got it". Like if you just took the whole deal around the phenomenon of being woke, TM, to be woke means that I'm conscious. Okay. That's cute and all, but actually consciousness is a process. You are constantly awaking. You have not arrived anywhere.

That goes back to what we were talking about a little bit earlier in terms of Idolatry. When you think you have it all in hand, when you think there's this absolute truth that

you've arrived at, the majority of things in life you're missing the point. You're missing that there's still more work to be done, and that not everything neatly fits into every context.

You have to continue this process of getting to know people, and getting to know space, and understanding what are the values that undergird and that shape this environment. If you don't do that, then you do end up perpetuating harm, even if it's unintentional.

Matthias: A particular experience just came to mind of in your workshop. You split us up into smaller groups, and we were talking about sexual ethics, and in my little group there was such a mix of us from older people to younger people to white people and black people, and such a mixing, and we were all coming in with different views. I think the way that the conversation transpired, there was change in our group by the end of that hour, hour and a half. I have a hard time even describing what felt like happened, but there was an openness, I think, that was created as you led us through this creation of protective space.

That was really neat to see happen. I think all of that is to say I feel I have from that experience of being with you an embodied experience of that actually being possible. Maybe it's not as an arrival of it happened, but as the process was happening.

Alicia: That's super encouraging for me to hear.

Us being in that room, as the facilitator let me just tell you I was freaking out. I was so freaked out because so many people came to the session. I'm so used to being able to float around, being able to sit with each of the groups, and to ask questions and see where people are and have a gauge of what else do we need to add here facilitation wise.

This is even an area of growth for me, trusting the process where these are the things that I've done but where we are right now doesn't facilitate me being able to do that thing that I've done, and just being okay with it. Your words right now are letting me know the process can be trusted. So long as we put these basic guidelines, we have these conversational tools there, folks can be okay.

Matthias: Even if we're coming in with radically different, strongly held beliefs.

Alicia: Yeah.

Matthias: It happened. I watched it happen.

Alicia: I think that's part of what encourages me. I've seen it happen too. I've even seen it happen in a way that has definitely helped me personally.

I've had people that I care about, family members and really close friends, by happenstance or whatever you would call it be in spaces that I was facilitating. One person in particular that I'm thinking of was very explicitly, expressively against LGBTQ

equity, like why is gay stuff being forced down our throats, and this this and this. They were just very clear in feeling some sort of way about queer and trans folks.

I don't even remember what the session was, but it was a session that I facilitated somewhere. There were all of these people with different experiences in the space with them, and some of the harm that people experience within our community was expressed there, and even though because of our relationship I had said these are things that happen, them being there with someone who talked about some very deep, sad, really terrible things that they had seen happen to queer and trans folks in their world this person was pushed into a place of consideration that they had never had before, never.

This is someone who I know really well, and I remember the conversations that we had after the fact, and they're like oh, my God, it just never clicked for me, I never realized that this is what happens to people who are LGBTQ, oh, my God.

It was that sharing of the story, and setting the space that was protective, and them being in a place where they listen. Just getting people in those spaces, it really does change.

This person I'm not going to say they're some type of queer-trans advocate. That's not where they are, but they're far more empathetic than what they used to be, and they're a bit of a catalyzing force for people to consider how they treat LGBT folks within their community because of this experience that they had in a space where people could just share. That's what pushed them to consider what justice was for that community, was the relationship.

Matthias: Maybe to end, I know there's a lot that goes into crafting these spaces. For people whose interest is piqued, how can I maybe try to start incorporating this way of being in the communities that I exist in?

Do you have any quick ideas?

Alicia: Oh, God. I'm trying to figure out how to distill this down, and I don't know. In curriculum form, in book form, there's so much here.

If we're going to look at first steps, one of I think the greatest gifts anyone gave me was a professor of mine when I was in grad school shared that one of the things that we have to do in life is consider who's present, who's missing, and start interrogating why that might be the case.

That's one of those things that I do when I consider what does it mean for a space to be inclusive, and what is the nature of these relationships, and why is there a relational challenge or dysfunction, or whatever here. I go back to that question.

Who are the players? Who's involved? Who are the people who could potentially be here, but who aren't? What has happened? What are their histories? What are the

overarching things that are happening socially? I just ask questions, but be careful to ask questions when in actually in relationship with people. I just don't go out asking people in the street random-assed questions. That's a bad look.

Be curious. Be curious and ask these questions about who's there, who's not, and why that may be the case. I think that's a good first step.

Matthias: I feel like that's a step that could probably carry you through and into that work.

Alicia: You're going to learn a lot when you start asking those questions of yourself, and then having formed relationships with other people you start asking it of them.

In looking at spaces to give a specific example, when I started asking those questions of religious minorities, or just people who aren't a part of a Christian culture which is the dominant culture within our context, oh, my gosh, it made me so sensitive to how someone holding a Christian identity, how I showed up in a space, and what does it mean to make room for them at the table.

What does it mean to be intentional about people's high holy days, and about customs of another person's faith tradition? It wasn't part of my consciousness, and because it wasn't part of my consciousness it means that this person can't be included at the table because I wasn't thinking about them. I wasn't showing them that they were thought of, so why would they be there?

Matthias: Thank you, so much, Alicia.

Alicia: Thank you. This has been great.

Matthias: May we ever walk forward into those space.

Alicia: Yes. Co-sign it Amen.

Matthias: You can keep up with Alicia's blog over at ChasingThePromise.net.

She's on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, [@aliciacrosby](https://www.instagram.com/aliciacrosby).

If you're in the Chicago area, check out her Center for Inclusivity at CenterForInclusivity.org. Even if you're not in Chicago, check it out.

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As always, I love to hear from you. If you have ideas about what you want to hear on the podcast or just want to say hi, reach out. I'll get back to you.

Until next week, you all, bye.