

The Shine Cast

Episode 2 – Cayden: Coming Out Saved My Life

Transcript

JORDIE LESCARD:

Ready? Let's get started.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

OK. (MUSIC PLAYS)

JORDIE LESCARD:

Hello and welcome to The Shine Cast, where we're starting conversations about mental health, mental illness, how we cope and how we thrive throughout our journeys.

JORDIE LESCARD:

I'm Jordie Lescard.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

And I'm Linnea Velikonja. The Shine Cast we touch on potentially triggering material, take care of yourself while listening and know that it's OK to take a break or skip onto the next episode.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Check out the episode description for full details on what we'll be talking about. We hope you enjoy the podcast.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Today we are joined by guest Cayden Genik, (MUSIC ENDS) who's in his first year in behavioral psychology and is a data analyst for Anti-data Laundering. So you're an alumni right now and you did finish a bachelor's, but now you're back in school.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah, that's right. Just kind of crazy.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

So how did that come up?

CAYDEN GENIK:

Well, so actually, this is my third time in post-secondary. I just can't quite get it right, I guess. Yeah. The first time around I was in entertainment technology, so it was like music and theater production.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Where was that?

CAYDEN GENIK:

That was at St Clair College in Windsor.

JORDIE LESCARD:

OK.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And yeah. And then I jumped to Guelph where I got my commerce degree in marketing. And then I was just working for financial institutions sort of in between that. Managed a bar for a little bit, just kind of doing everything under the sun.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Oh wow!

CAYDEN GENIK:

And yeah, I wasn't totally sure where I wanted to go career-wise. And I feel like there's a lot of pressure on the school to kind of take a career path. And so I was kind of like, I don't really know what I'm interested in. I've been working in banking for so long. It was just easy money while I was in school to pay for tuition. And then I kind of just decided, OK, well, something I'm actually really interested in is mental health, and that's something I'm a strong advocate for. So I was thinking, you know, how could I even get into that? And it kind of just everything I looked at basically said, well, you got to go back to school because marketing is not enough to really break into that field. So I picked up behavioral psychology degree, but it has a sort of a huge component also in community mental health, which is what I'm most interested in. And the program that I'm currently in also has a co-op.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So it just seemed like it'd be a really good way to kind of get my foot in the door and then just go from there.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Awesome. I think we talk to another guest about how university kind of seems like you figure out what you don't like until you get to a point where like this is it. This is what I want to do(LAUGHS). What do you first get interested in? Maybe a mental health career?

CAYDEN GENIK:

Probably my own struggle with mental illness, and then also I just feel like when you go to university, you meet so many people that are struggling, it just becomes almost just totally normalized. When you're in university, there's almost less of that stigma present. Maybe in the outside world, off your campus, there's that huge stigma. But at least for certain things like depression, anxiety, it's so common amongst student populations, which is kind of sad. But I think just myself struggling and seeing so many of my friends struggling also, it really just gives you that firsthand perspective.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And I've always sort of been that friend that people would come to for advice and ask for help, even

though, like, I had my own struggles. But it's a lot easier to help people sometimes than to help yourself even, I guess. But so I guess that's what kind of just really started the dialogue. And it made me really interested in learning more about it. So on my own time, I was already reading a lot about mental health and things like that. So it just kind of seemed like the next step to go back to school for it.

JORDIE LESCARD:

So it's almost like you were like just kind of so much like the mental health stuff was like so much in your world that it's like, well, I'm spending all this time learning about it. I might as well kind of get like officially active in that community to do something about this kind of.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah. And I mean, I feel like I've been in that sort of community for so long in different regards. So I'm chronically ill physically. And there's a huge correlation between mental and physical health that was overlooked for so long. So even growing up always sick, my mental health did suffer because of it. And I felt like growing up I didn't always have the vocabulary to articulate what I was feeling, even fully actualized, sort of what was going on in my own head. Because at the time, like you can't, when you're that young, you can't always advocate for yourself.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Oh, yeah for sure.

JORDIE LESCARD:

So when you say, you're like physically like ill?

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yes, I have a chronic lung condition and then I'm BRCA2 positive, which is like a cancer gene that runs throughout my family.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And so last two, almost two years ago, as of January, I actually had a bilateral mastectomy on my chest to remove masses. So just lots of health complications and they don't actually know why I had certain things that I had. So as of right now, we're just sort of managing symptoms, but there's nothing that we can actually cure or fix. So there was also a lot of kind of coming to terms with that, that everything is just an unknown. And in itself, sometimes that lack of diagnosis can take even a bigger toll because you can't quite find that community. Like when somebody says you have cancer or you have whatever, like a rare disorder. There is that community of people that also have that thing. So you can kind of reach out and look for that support. But I didn't quite have anything like that, so I just kind of felt like I was on my own in the world. Getting tested a lot at the hospital and we didn't know what was going on. So that kind of took a toll on my mental health.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And as I started to grow, I started realizing, oh, this is mental health. This is what people talk about when they say the words mental illness. And, you know, talking to some of my doctors about it, I started getting more insight. And so I felt like I was already dealing with a lot of this, you know, in middle school

and high school. And then with the chronic illness, I was also coupled with the fact that I was so confused about my gender identity and sexuality growing up. So I'm transgender, female to male, so my pronouns are he/him. But growing up, I had no idea even what the concept of transgender was. Right. So that wasn't even something I could feel like what's going on with my gender identity. So at the time when I was presenting as female, you know, I just never really talked about sexuality. I wasn't interested in dating or exploring that realm whatsoever. I just felt like I had so much going on in my own head.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And when I got to college in Windsor, that's when I decided I was just going to come out as gay and just pretend I've always been out now that I'm away from home. And I was like, no, this still isn't right. And even all through, OK, well, like, I still felt super out of place. So I think all of those things just sort of contributed to my mental health and just never actually really taking it seriously and fully advocating for myself. And as I continue to learn and grow and also just listen to my peers and hear what they were going through at the same time, it's sort of really I saw a whole new perspective in regards to myself. So I did a lot of, you know, internal reflection, I guess. And it was at that time that I ended up coming out and. Yeah, so I guess all of those things together are just what really sort of drove my passion to pursue this as a career and become more invested in it.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

For sure. Because I mean, looking back at our generation's sex ed, like when we were in high school or junior high, it wasn't what it is today or like it's still progressing even today. And so how, what was that like, like being in a class where they're not really talking about what you're going through?

CAYDEN GENIK:

Honestly, trying to recall sex ed? Because I feel like the biggest takeaway is we had in our sex ed class, we had Big Woody, which was the big wooden penis that got passed around. And we all put the condom on Big Woody. That's genuinely the only thing I really remember. everything was just discussed as you know, there's the gender binary. The elders told us that boys and girls and when you have sex, make sure you use a condom. Nothing was really talked about. Even when I think about things like, like I know I'm sure there was an STI and STD unit, but nothing that really stuck. I feel like they kind of try to glaze over all that so fast because they think it's sort of like sensitive content. And I'm like, well, if you can't talk about sex, you probably shouldn't be having it.

CAYDEN GENIK:

The whole point is you got to desensitize that concept to a sense and even just starting with other things. But I remember hearing all about like sex and I guess like when did he even start sex at like grade?

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

I think four..(CROSSTALK)

CAYDEN GENIK:

Maybe, but like...

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Puberty starts like conversations about that stuff.

JORDIE LESCARD:

I was going to say like, what kind of, When I think about like sex ed. I think it was great sex for us where we started talking about sex ed.

JORDIE LESCARD:

And I just remember, like, I was like a young boy, just like making all the sex jokes I could in the world and like and that was like kind of (CROSSTALK) all I took away from it, was that sex was funny.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I feel like I mean, at the same time though, kids are having sex younger and younger now. Which is actually kind of wild, but it just makes the conversation that much more important. And I remember when I was in sex ed, you know, like you, you would giggle, you would laugh. But at the same time, I remember that awkwardness that the teacher is feeling. I'm like, well, this is kind of awkward for me, too, because I don't quite feel like I'm laughing in the same way as some of my peers. Like, I can't totally take it lightheartedly as some of them might be. Like I remember when we were in school, I think I was in actually like maybe like the fourth grade. And one of my classmates, because I was one, because I was a kid, I was presenting as female, but I was a total tomboy.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I just dressed super androgynously and I hung out with a lot of the guys in the class. And when you're pretty young, kids aren't even that weird about it, because it's only if they start kind of getting older that they're really understanding like, oh, no, like there's one way everybody has to be. And that's kind of what society dictates. So it was kind of as we were getting that older point, I think we're in like the fourth grade. And that's kind of when all of that pressure is really setting in also. And one of my classmates, when we were just talking, she was like, do you wish you were a boy? And I was like, wow, what a wild question.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And I remember saying no because, like, how do you say yes to something like that?

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

never been asked that. But that's actually probably one of my most memorable school experiences ever. Just being asked that question. I can't even tell you who asked it.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I just remember this one girl in my class asked me and I probably thought about it almost every day since I was asked that in the fourth grade. And it turns out, yeah, she was right (LAUGHS). Like high school sex ed was probably a nightmare, as was all of puberty since I was gender dysphoria. But what a wild ride.

JORDIE LESCARD:

What was that like, transitioning into like high school? All the pressures that are there.

CAYDEN GENIK:

It was definitely difficult. I feel like everything that would come a lot easier for my peers in terms of like dating, exploring your sexuality, talking about topics like that. I feel like those things came a lot easier. And for me, it was more like I had to put extra effort into almost, just like maintaining this charade. And so I kind of just did really well at trying my best to avoid the conversation whatsoever. I had no problem when all my friends were dating and when people would talk about it. But I just kind of did everything possible to keep myself busy like I did martial arts. Growing up, I was like playing baseball. I was doing diving, like a whole bunch of things. So I was just constantly busy. So when people would ask about dating, I would say, well, I have no time for that because I truly didn't like I was just so overloaded. My plate was full. There is no way I could even contemplate making the time for dating.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And if I didn't have time to do it, then I didn't have to answer questions about why I can't connect with boys my age or something like that in terms of intimacy. So I just sort of really kind of flew under the radar. And I actually had a great group of friends and some of those friends are now also out as gay, so like. But none of us, of course, came out until after we left high school. I feel like high school is just crazy (ALL LAUGH).

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah, the more I've talked to people, the more they like. High school is really toxic and you're just able to connect better with people after high school when they can actually be themselves.

CAYDEN GENIK:

You really do. You kind of have this whole scenario in your head where you're like, if people find out about me.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Like that's it. It's game over. And I know my high school wasn't the most supportive environment or atmosphere like I know there was even like an LGBT alliance, I guess.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And there was like barely anybody in it, our school is super homophobic, just all the things you'd hear in the halls and whatever. So I was like, there's no way I want to come out in this place.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

You're on high alert all the time.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Exactly. So high school was really tough for me in that sense. And I was glad that I at least had my group of friends. Because it's funny because as a person I'm actually very outgoing and I'm rather extroverted and I love to socialize. But it was like this whole other side of me was just dying on the inside. Like, I just felt like I was constantly suffocating, constantly on alert, like you said. And it only kind of honestly just got better within like the past year or so. Like, I feel like I'm still on alert. But I was lucky to always kind of have such a strong group of friends that were all so outgoing. That nobody would ever come up and try to say anything, really, because they were just like, oh, just leave it. He's still cool. Like

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I just got kind of lucky that way.

CAYDEN GENIK:

It's not like I was bullied throughout school, which I'm super fortunate for.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

So how, how would you describe your mental health at the time being in high school versus maybe being in university or even now today?

CAYDEN GENIK:

I would say in high school my mental health wasn't great, but I would say I was a lot more blissfully ignorant to the damage that could actually stem from that long term, even, though even though I knew things weren't fantastic and I wasn't feeling great, I just didn't always, like I said, know how to articulate that. And I couldn't even fully actualize what sort of problem that was going to be for me. But I remember there is plenty of times in high school where I'd go home and just scream into my pillow like every single night. And I just felt like my hair was almost falling out, like it was crazy. Like I was like hair. Like I have like a gray streak in the back of my head now.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Oh yeah, it's insane how stress affects you.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I think at the time I kind of would just chalk it up to that.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I'd be like I'm just stressed, you know, without saying anything like I'm depressed or I was just like I'm just stressed. I just got to manage it better. But it was actually a much bigger problem. When I got to

university, I had a really good group of friends. But by that point I'm like, OK, we're all depressed. At least we all knew what was going on at that point. And it was nice because I could actually openly talk about it with my friends even then, as great as they were, even though they shared certain struggles because I also wasn't out yet as transgender. There was still this huge part of myself that was just in hiding. Right. And it was crazy because I was like, yeah, like like, oh, I get it. Like, I have depression, too. And I'm like, no, but you don't quite get it because there's a whole thing I can't even say out loud to myself, let alone to my peers yet. And I think by that point because I was starting to sort of figure all of that out, it was really hard.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And again, like I didn't know until about a year ago. So it was actually like after I graduated Guelph. That my mental health was probably the lowest it's ever been. Like I was super depressed. I was suicidal. Yeah, it was super dark. And coming out genuinely saved my life.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Really?

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Because, yeah. You were dealing with these feelings since grade four.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

It was, it must have been such a toll on your body. Just trying to stay alert, feeling exhausted from all this anxiety of staying how maybe society would want you to be.

JORDIE LESCARD:

You're right like that constant stress. I can only imagine the type of psychological toll of kind of having that, that full internal world that you can't ever utter or put into words. And how that just inherently, like just separates you or makes you feel other from the community around you and how that must I think, like with high school and so much of it is all just a bunch of apes trying to figure out how to fit in with each other. What kind of got you to, like, come out?

CAYDEN GENIK:

Like coming out story.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Yeah, yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

You're right. You got it. Spot on. It was super isolating because, like, I just couldn't share that part of myself and even that constant stress also being physically ill. That whole time it was just my immune system is already so compromised. That was more stress on top of it. And also like, how do you come out in the health care system, even things like that. Right. So I just felt so perpetually uncomfortable and yeah, it was just such a dark place. And I didn't have that time really for full exploration because I was in the closet for so long, you know, in university, I didn't really feel like I could come out either. And I think it's because genuinely, because these things aren't taught in school or really even advertised in the health care system, you almost live in this heteronormative society. So you almost have this internalized homophobia and especially transphobia, because even when I was identifying as gay and so presenting as female, I remember telling my best friend like she's my roommate.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And I remember saying to her one point when we are kind of just talking about gender identity, I said, men, I would hate to be transgender. And this is just me, of course, trying to be like, that's not me, that's not me. But I was like that like almost like group. That subgroup of this whole LGBT community definitely just kind of almost gets shut on the most like because there's so many people within the queer community that aren't OK with people that are transgender still. Like it's whole own thing. So I was like, man, I don't think I could ever handle the pressure of coming out as trans. And that was just kind of me telling myself, like, that can't be me. I don't want to be different. And just because it's never discussed. So I didn't really know anything about it and it was just taking such a toll on me because I knew it was me, but I didn't want it to be mean. And graduating university, I still just didn't say a word to anybody.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So it was about a year ago and I was kind of like, I would, every now and then say things like jokingly, like when I'd be with my friends, I was like, oh, it's a boy. Like, just really weird, like just like kind of playing around. I would play around with sort of like more masculine pronouns and they would all be like, whatever, like he's weird, just go with it. But it's whenever I use things like that that I would be like, no, genuinely that is how I am most comfortable being addressed. Like when people would talk about things like, oh, like they'd be like, oh like when your mom one day and I'm like, oh like the words in my mouth. I'm like, no way, I'm like if anything I'd be a hot dad. Like, like I would never be a mother. Like what are you saying? Like just anything like that. Or when people would say like the word wife or like even like the word lesbian. I was like, I hated all those words because they just sounded like the complete opposite of who I was.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And so at one point, I when I was dating my girlfriend at the time, I kind of like honestly just had a huge breakdown. I feel like that's how a lot of the time sometimes these things start. And I just had a huge breakdown and I kind of opened up to her about how I've been very dysphoric in regards to my gender identity. And it's actually been happening my entire life. She kind of said, OK, like, do you want to use gender-neutral pronouns? And I've never had anybody asked me that before and I wasn't quite ready to say, hey, I'm transgender. So when she asked me that, it almost felt like a really nice, just step, you know what I mean?

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Just like a good little stepping stone, I didn't have to fully commit to anything. I wasn't coming out yet. And I just said, you know what, sure, we'll try that. And she said, OK, like just when it's you and I or do you want to use when other people on? And I'm like, just you and I for now. And then it kind of branched out to around other people.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And then, like, I think it was another long break down where I was like, no, like, it's still not enough. And I kind of just one night, and like, a fit of sobbing was like, I have something to tell you. I'm actually transgender. Like, I'm not just solely dysphoric, I'm not non-binary. I'm not gender-neutral. Like I'm genuinely transgender like my pronouns are him and like that's who I am. Like, it's not like something I'm choosing. I'm like, this is who I am. And I can't just hide it anymore. And so she was super supportive and she just felt like that safe space at the time where I could come out. Yeah, I guess like that was essentially the story. I just kind of started with the one person, how it usually does, and then it's sort of just kind of branched into. And I was like, hey, now I got to tell my best friend. And I remember telling her and her family I'm very close with and so is kind of nervous. I lived with them for like six or seven months when I needed a place.

CAYDEN GENIK:

At one point I was like, I don't even know how to tell your parents. It's just you have no idea how many people you have to come out to until you start to (INAUDIBLE), you know, like because it's like every person that I've met in the past 25 years that knows who I am. You essentially now, in a way, have to come out to them, whether it's directly or indirectly like anybody. I mean, now you don't have to but anybody from the first 25 years, you're like that's a lot of people actually to. How many people you've met, like even you got your parents, friends and co-workers and all these things. Right. Like that.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Even social media. Nowadays too.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah, you know, I just started the way I kind of look at it is you don't really owe anybody your coming out story. So I said I'm only coming out to the people who are really important to me and who deserved to hear from me one on one just because I don't want them kind of finding out some other way and then have to ask me a million questions.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I'd rather just speak to them about it and they could ask questions that they want to. Like whatever, So I came to my best friend, she's like, You want me to tell my family for you? And I was like, Yeah, I'd really appreciate that, because if I had to come up to every single person I met, that would just so much time and effort. And just be so emotionally exhausting. So it's nice when they say, OK, you want me to tell my family? And I said, yeah, and they were super great. And they were like, oh, we always wanted another son. And it was super cute. And so, you know, you worry, I think, coming out because it's easy for people

that aren't doing it to say, well, if somebody is not OK with it, that's their loss. But you're also like these people are in my life because I want them to be in my life. So if they weren't OK with it would genuinely suck for me.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

It would've hurt.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah. It would have hurt.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So, it was definitely an experience. But even the people that had a little more trouble coming to terms with everything, I think every single person I've told, regardless of their reaction and it made me feel like there was that much more weight lifted off my shoulders. Because even if they weren't OK with it, I'm like, it doesn't matter because it's who I am now. And they can't take that back from me. Now that I've said it, I'm just not hiding. So it's like even if they are OK with it, yeah, that hurts. But it's like I can mend from that hurt as long as I'm not suppressing my entire existence, you know what I mean. And it was just genuinely also giving people a chance to react. Right. Because when you're not you're not even you have all these scenarios in your head like it's going to go so horribly wrong. So it's actually really interesting how much people can surprise you when you just give them the chance to. And then you're like, wow.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And these people that I've actually connected with more now since coming out that I've never bonded with like a long time.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And I think it was just kind of like a new opportunity for like a new relationship and a new beginning with them. So it's actually overall, it's been a pretty positive experience. And either way, it just feels nice to not have to hide. Right.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

For sure. And you brought up having to come out to everyone, such as even doctors. How is that?

CAYDEN GENIK:

That was the weirdest one because I have so many doctors and I was really nervous to come out to them because you also, you don't know your doctors like as much on a personal level. So you want to say they're medical professionals, they will be professional and maybe they will be. But there's still a lot of things like homophobia and lack of education in the health care system regarding like LGBT health and trans health. So when I came out to my doctor, I was also nervous because it was my family doctor. So I was like, oh, God, what if she tells my mom? Like, things like that, even though they're not supposed to be able to, I'm like, I don't know what's being discussed, you know?

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

There's always that little bit of doubt. And prior to that, whenever I talk about anything like sexual health with her in the past, you always just kind of seemed uncomfortable with it. I'm like, how can you be this uncomfortable with it when your doctor. But so coming out to her, she knew nothing about, like, trans health care whatsoever. And I kind of just said, because I did so much research prior to coming out to my first doctor. So I kind of spent months just researching and researching. And I had like notes compiled. And I was like, this is exactly what I need and this is all I need from her. Right. So I came out to her and I just kind of, I called her reception and was like, hey, I need to book an appointment. And they're like, for what? And I was like, I'm transgender and I want testosterone and the administration lady or whatever. She was like, OK, I'll book it for whatever. And the doctor was like, hey, so what are we going to talk about? And I was kind of like, I don't even know.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Why you're asking is if it's not in your notes, like on your little page. You're making me say it again to you. Like.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I was like, well, like I told the lady on the phone, I'm transgender and I want to start hormone replacement therapy. And she just kind of went, Oh. OK, and I was like, yeah, so I looked it up and technically you can prescribe that. And she was like, Yeah, I can, I don't know anything about it. And I was like, well, so that's not helpful for me. And I was like, we need somebody that does. So I need a referral then to a doctor that can do that for me. And it was actually lucky because she did know one doctor that I guess had patients in the past come out as transgender. And that doctor, instead of just saying, I don't know anything about it, said, OK, I'm going to learn about it for you. So I got in contact with her and I guess one pro of having all these health problems that I have a pretty good network of doctors.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I was lucky enough to get my referral in with her within like a couple of weeks of when I asked for it, which usually I know people that have waited like a year to start things like that. But and so that was pretty much the initial coming out. And then it was just slowly coming out to my other doctors. But by that point, I was already on like I had to come up to them so they could check how to would influence my meds and things like that. But I was just very I'm doing it regardless. So this is just something you need to know and then decide if we need to adjust anything else. And it wasn't even really a conversation that I was going to have like a discussion on. I was kind of like, this is what's up. And everybody's going to accept it and we're just going to go from there. And they were all kind of like, OK, sounds good.

JORDIE LESCARD:

I'm kind of getting from you that, like after coming out, the more you did it, the more kind of seems like

you got more and more bold, more and more sure of yourself. More and more like this is...

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

More and more confident.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Yeah. Like which is like the reverse of what happened all those years before where like you were, the stress was bogging you down and then you come out and it's the reverse. Where you come out and you just get stronger, stronger, the more you kind of let yourself be who you are.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah, I think it's a mix, almost like it's funny, because if you ask anybody that grew up with me, they would always describe me as bold or confident, when really it would all just have been a facade. But at the same time, I mean, again, part of my let's call it like the dark days of the mental health, like as low as I could be, overlapped heavily with while I was already old. Because when you're old also so now at this point, you're looking for that community. We talk about community.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I'm kind of like, well, are there other trans individuals who I can look at and say, wow, like that's where I want to be. But that's also hard to do because, I mean, even if you aren't trans, even if you're just cisgender, heterosexual, whatever. How easy it is for us all to go on something like Instagram and compare ourselves to everybody we see is ridiculous. Right. And so looking at these people that were transgender was actually really difficult to see online because although I want to support them and say I'm happy for you, I'm proud of them, which I was, you're almost jealous. And there's like that envy. And it's not even a good feeling because you're just kind of looking at them. And I was still I still had such a strong degree of, like, internalized transphobia. And just this like, I'm not going to make it like I don't think I can do this. Even when you come up to certain people because it's just you're still so unhappy with where you are.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And so seeing all of them, I kind of looked at them and I was like, they are exactly where I want to be. And it feels completely unachievable. Like I just couldn't imagine because you look at some of them and you're like, it took years for them to get the results that they now have. And it's exhausting to think I have years to go of feeling this dysphoric until I can finally have what I want when it's like I've already spent the first 25 years just being so unhappy and uncomfortable in my own skin. And I'm like, and now I'm finally out. And that's not like the end of the journey. I have to keep going. And every day you wake up and you're like, here we go again. I'm still, feel like I'm not in the right body. You're not my own skin or things like trying to have sex with a partner. It just feels so impossible to do sometimes. And like all of my relationships have suffered, I haven't been able to honestly maintain a successful, steady relationship since coming out.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And it's not from a lack of caring about my partners. It was just there's so much that I'm unhappy with within myself that I don't even have the energy to fully invest in a relationship right now. I'm put in that

effort that it deserves because I really have to just almost allocate all that to myself and just to survive right now. So it's funny because it is like in a way you get increasingly more confident. But then there are some days where you're just like, I'm still not there. I still have so far to go. And you still worry. Like even now, like when I go out with my friends, for example. Well, not during covid obviously, but like still like when I'm around other people you worry about, am I passing, do they know? That's the biggest question, constantly wondering, do they know? And I think the scariest scenario in the whole world is going to the bathroom alone like I hate going to the bathroom. I have huge, like public bathroom anxiety.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I don't care if I'm (INAUDIBLE) for 12 hours, I'll try to dodge it at all costs or I'll be like one of my friends should go with me. Because I'm just so afraid to go because I'm like, what if I don't pass and people ask what I'm doing here? What if I have a confrontation? So, yeah, you get more confident in ways, but it's funny how much of me still feels like I'm in that place.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Even as you have come out, there's still like the wider society still. They're still, still judging. You're still in that environment?

CAYDEN GENIK:

It's funny yet simultaneously horrible that one of the first questions or most common questions you get from people is, are you getting the surgery? And when they say the surgery, they mean like, are you going to get a penis? And that's what they're asking you. Like, I feel like a very small number of people when I came out, asked me how I was doing mentally with everything.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And I mean, I understand the curiosity, but at the same time, it would have been nice if those people were just kind of like, how are you doing with everything? Like, what can I do to support you? Like things like that. Those are questions that they just don't ask, which is crazy to me. And yes. So once you come out, when you realize that that's everybody's number one priority, it's just fitting in, looking exactly like.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

What society wants you to look like. So as a man, you should have a penis. As a man, you should have a flat chest, things like that. It definitely takes a toll. And I think back when I said even just having sex with a partner, for example, like you feel so dysphoric because you're like, I feel like I shouldn't even be doing this because society is telling me, like, I don't have, like, the equipment to do this. And like I mentioned, because of health problems, I actually had a bilateral mastectomy. So I had my breasts removed years two years ago. So that would have been one year before I even came out as transgender.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And in a way that was sort of lucky, I guess, because I had my chest removed so I didn't have to deal

with the whole waiting period. Some people wait years to be able to get their surgery and mine was fully funded without me having to apply for anything because I had this cancer gene and I had the masses in my chest. But that also meant I lost the, I guess, privilege of deciding what I wanted my surgery to look like. When you get a trans mass organizing surgery, there's a few different procedures you can get done. And the whole point is to make your chest look as stereotypically masculine as possible. Usually. Yeah. And some of my friends, it was actually hard because even though I had my surgery, it wouldn't at all look like how I would have chosen if I could. And I had to be done differently because I had these masses. So it couldn't have been done the way I wanted, even if I wanted to.

CAYDEN GENIK:

But it was hard, even after seeing some of my friends come out as trans or non-binary and they were getting their top surgeries and their chest looks so good like I am so proud of them, but also so crazy jealous like I look them. And there is a point where I just honestly, like, deleted social media, unfollowed everybody because I was like, I can't even look at anybody that's queer going through surgery and having your successes because I just feel so trapped and unhappy with my results. And I can't even look at any of my cis-hetero friends because they're just so unapologetically, unapologetically living their lives with no idea what I'm going through. And I wish I could have that. So I kind of just had to take a step back because I was just feeling so dysphoric and so unhappy. But it's funny because, like, now I actually I'm getting chest contouring, so that's to make my chest look more masculine. And that's literally the beginning of January. So I have surgery coming up in just over a month now, I guess, and that'll hopefully give me the results I want.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

That's so exciting. Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

It's super exciting because. Yeah, it's hard because even things like my friends want to go to the cottage and you want to go swimming, what do you do. And I can't take off my shirt and go. But you still feel kind of nervous because you look at everybody and you're like, I don't look like everybody else because there's just that voice in your head telling you you have to look a certain way or you have to have certain things in order for everybody else to finally see me as a man. Because if not, they don't just see me as a man. They just can't see me as a transman. It's like being trans defines your whole identity, which is not what I want at all.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

You're still pigeonholed into into a certain ideal.

JORDIE LESCARD:

This is coming from like my what would it be like? I'm not very informed on the terminology cis. Yeah, hetero normal. Like I'm a straight man from my perspective. Like I've always thought of people come out. It's like liberative, like, you know, like here I am like that's like a really, really good thing.

JORDIE LESCARD:

And like listening to you talk about your experiences, I start to realize more is like even just for anyone

like trying to be authentic to who they are, society and whatever roles are around you, whatever people, everyone wants to look at you and put you into some kind of category to make sense of you.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

JORDIE LESCARD:

The more you don't fit in whatever those categories are, the more stress and strain there is.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

JORDIE LESCARD:

That's something that I'm starting to understand a little bit more deeply now, listening to you, Cayden, like it's. One of the things that I didn't want to ask you, though, was cause you say about working through it, like, what are some of the things that you do to promote your mental well-being? And they take care of yourself while you're going through these experiences and challenges.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Really making sure I'm doing things to keep me healthy. So just exercising, even on days where I don't feel very well like I feel ill. I exercise seven days a week and it's not to be obsessive about it, it's just always do something.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I'm not thinking about my sexuality or my gender identity or necessarily even quite what my body looks like. I'm just working out for myself. And so that's just a really good way to kind of like get a lot of energy and frustration out. And then I also feel like I have a journal. I don't know if anybody journals if that sounds lame or not.

JORDIE LESCARD:

No no no. I journal quite a bit.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah, I don't right necessarily every single day, but there could also be some days where I write in it like five times in a day. I do try to take about an hour before I go to sleep to unplug from social media, like my phone, like from like all my electronics. And I just kind of think about like, how did today go? And I actually have like a tracker, see, like I sound like a kind of a bit of a nerd. You just have like I have an Excel sheet.

CAYDEN GENIK:

It's all color-coded and very well organized, but it has like physical health symptoms and mental health symptoms that I commonly feel so I can kind of log how each day is going. So I'll be like, oh, this is kind of like it's almost like a mood check. So I'll be like, this is kind of how it's feeling today. Or this is like three things I did really well today. Like, I caught myself comparing myself to other people and I took a

step back, like I close out all my social media and I did this instead. Or like I distracted myself with this or I message, my friend. And we had a good chat, like just things like that. So that way I can kind of, it's almost like just another way of being more self-aware. So, you know, when you're getting, because I think part of being depressed, too, is knowing what your triggers are and how to manage them before you let things get catastrophically bad. You know what I mean, and as nice as it is to joke around, and be like self care is taking a bath and doing a face mask.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:
(LAUGHS) Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:
Yeah, it is much more than all of that. It's a lot about just being you have to have that degree of self-awareness so you can notice when you're getting bad or remove yourself or prevent yourself from being in situations that you know can genuinely trigger you, knowing how to reach out to your peers. Like just genuinely. I think building your support system is what can really make or break your mental health like you can't constantly take on the world alone. And that's the thing that I always have to remind myself because I hate feeling like a burden. I just think reminding yourself that it's OK to ask for help, that's like the biggest thing for me anyway.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:
Oh, yeah. Sometimes when I'm asking for help, you just need the validation that it's OK to feel the way you're feeling.

JORDIE LESCARD:
For me, it's writing. I just, there's something about writing what I'm thinking that kind of it seems really therapeutic to me. It's like I can take whatever vague feeling I have.

JORDIE LESCARD:
And if I put it into words and it's like solid and there's like something like I kind of like externalized it in a way, mental health is a really dynamic thing. Like there's no, in the same way that physical health is a dynamic thing. Like there's no perfect physical state that you're going to have forever. It's just some days are really good, like where you like you feel particularly strong and particularly fit. Some days you kind of feel crummy.

CAYDEN GENIK:
Yeah. And but I think in regards to your routine, it's having that balance right. Like, you don't need to have every single minute of your day structured. But I think it's nice to kind of say, you know, like, I want to start my day at the workout and I'm going have breakfast and just kind of set myself up for success. And if nothing else comes from it like at least I got those things done today, I feel good about it. But just kind of making that list like this is what I like to get done in a day.

CAYDEN GENIK:
And then you just get those things done and then you still have those other pockets in your day where you're like, I'm doing whatever I want to do. So if you want to do that facemask and you want to take

that bath, like go for it, you deserve it. Like, if you don't wanna eat super healthy that day and you're like, you know what, I need this bucket of moose tracks ice cream like that's what you need that night, like that with me like three nights ago. So it's just making sure that somewhere in your day you're like, you know, in that week that you're still doing things that genuinely contribute positively to your wellbeing.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Yeah. Like something that stuck with me that I thought was really funny. One of my friends said he was criticizing how I was living at the time. I was like, I'd come home from work. I play video games. I think I was like, I'd have like a McDonald's cheeseburger and like a beer. I do that like every day for like two weeks and play video games with my friend.

JORDIE LESCARD:

And he's like, you're just like, would you recommend your own lifestyle to anyone else?

JORDIE LESCARD:

I was like I was like, did you make an excellent point? I would not. So I stopped right there. So that's what I really like the term self care, because it's like it's a little more sophisticated than just like do what makes you feel good. It's like, you know, take care of yourself. Like you're someone who's worthy of, like care and love like that. You, like, love yourself in that way.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Your body is a temple.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Your friend called you out.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Yeah. (CROSSTALK)

CAYDEN GENIK:

I think that's important.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Yeah.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Yeah. That's so important because at the end of the day, like, your friends want you to be the best possible version of yourself, like that's what a true friend is. So sometimes that means telling you the hard truth, like I've had friends before. Just be like, honestly, you're kind. Being an asshole right now, I was like, you're right. Like you mentioned it, like I got to check myself and kind of tone that down.

JORDIE LESCARD:

Yeah.

JORDIE LESCARD:

I just want to thank you for sharing your story with us, and I feel like I've learned a lot.

JORDIE LESCARD:

This conversation has made me more aware, like all the social dynamics, all the kind of dynamics of what it's like to be to try and be authentic, be yourself, and live in the world if I want to say it so poetically or whatever. It really was, it really was a great pleasure to speak with you. I wondered if there's any last moment things that you want to say or.

CAYDEN GENIK:

Actually, the one thing I wanna say, this is something that somebody kind of told me and then I kind of just spun it and a bit of my own way. I guess there was others before you. There's others with you now and there's going to be others after you. It sounds silly, but that was just so impactful to me because it just kind of really put into perspective the fact that you aren't alone, no matter what community you belong to. Like we're all kind of in this one global community where I think we need to take care of each other.

CAYDEN GENIK:

And just like you're never truly alone, like there are so many people out there that want to help you that you haven't even met yet. And I think you just have to give yourself the chance to follow through. So you're there to see it. (MUSIC PLAYS) Thanks for having me. It's actually really fun. You guys are super cool.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

Awesome.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I'm very appreciative that you've given me this platform to discuss this.

CAYDEN GENIK:

I think the whole premise of your podcast is actually really important, and I think it can help a lot of people and reach a number of people that feel like they can openly have these dialogues.

CAYDEN GENIK:

So I'm glad I got to be part.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

If you've enjoyed today's podcast, you can find us wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.

JORDIE LESCARD:

The Shine Cast is hosted by Jordie Lescard, and Linnea Velikonja. We are produced by Rebecca Skelhorn, Shannon Brown, Tony Nguyen, Charlotte Cherkewski and Melanie Bowman. Editing is done by Dawn Matheson. Artwork is by Emma Hak-Kovacs.

LINNEA VELIKONJA:

To see more of Emma's work or to keep up with the Wellness Education and Promotion Center projects at the University of Guelph. Check out our Instagram page @wellness_uofg. For resources and supports available for University of Guelph students visit us at our website, wellness.uoguelph.ca/shine-this-year. Please don't forget to rate and review this podcast. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.
(MUSIC ENDS)