

Ep. 05: Second Adolescence as...the Returning to What You Lo...

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Jack Hessler (he/him)

- A** Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:08
Hello and welcome to this week's episode of the second adolescence podcast. I'm your host Adam James Cohen. On this week's episode, we have Jack Hessler, who some of you may be aware of after his recent out sports.com article came out in which he shared about his experience as a gay man in the sport of snowboarding. In the article, he shares a ton about his story. And today's conversation really uses second adolescence as a framework to go even more in depth into that story. It was such a great conversation and such a pleasure to hear from him about his experience as an individual as an athlete, and yet all of it so I'm really pumped to share this with you. And as always, as a listener, I really want to invite you to listen with open curiosity. You know, all of our stories are different and unique. You might hear things guests share on the show that really differ from your experience and how you identify and you might hear people share things that absolutely give voice to what you went through or are currently going through. And I really hope that all of this happens and that together we can continue expanding our awareness of what life and queerness and healing can be for folks, if after the show you want to connect further, feel free to head on over to second adolescence pod COMM For show notes and more. or head on over to Instagram and follow the show at second adolescence pod. We'd love to connect with you there. Okay, enough for me for now. Thank you for joining us. Here is the conversation with Jack
- J** Jack Hessler (he/him) 01:35
My name is Jack Hessler. I'm a gay snowboarder and filmmaker based in Salt Lake City and a multifaceted person but that's kind of my logline.
- A** Adam James Cohen (he/him) 01:45
Yeah. What is it like to hear that logline aloud?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 01:48

It's amazing. It's great. Yeah, I think in my personality of being a queer person, it took me a long time to identify as that especially publicly and then also professionally, I don't consider myself a professional snowboarder. I don't necessarily make a full time living off it. But in my journey as a filmmaker and getting to the point to be a professional filmmaker, that also is, you know, similar to coming out like a long process that I'm excited to be at the point where I can identify with it.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 02:17

Absolutely. And yeah, I know you wrote this article for help sports really beginning to share your story as a gay snowboarder. I guess I want to course, go back into storage, learn all of it. But starting right now, like what was it like both writing that article? And also, what's it been like since it's been out in the world?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 02:33

So we'll go into this more later, I'm sure. But my coming out journey began. I'm 26 now and pretty much when I was 20. Getting towards the end of being in college, you know, slowly started coming out to friends and family and then did the millennial thing three or four years ago where I came out on social media National Coming Out Day. So big, National Coming Out Day super close to my heart. I think it's an amazing way to celebrate and to sort of motivate people to have a reason to come out. Then a friend of mine almost a year ago or six months ago, he reached out to out sports and told them Hey, you guys should do something with my friend Jack who's a snowboarder. There's not a lot of queer snowboard representation, right? Yeah. And so then a super nice guy, Jim, who started out sports reached out to me about six months ago, and I wrote the first draft of the story. And it was probably like, 2000 words, just like a vomit. Yeah. My whole journey. Oh, my God, all this stuff. Yeah. And it was in the middle of the summer. And Jim had a bunch of notes. And I was like, Hey, can we table this until we get closer to winter, and then I'll rewrite it when it's more relevant. I was super glad I did that one of my favorite rappers, a guy, Danny Brown. He talks about how so many people release music, especially nowadays, every week, but put a new song out every week, every week, we'll put a new song out and he says I'll release one album every two years. And I'll make a song and I'll listen to it six months from now. And I'll be able to tell Do I still appreciate this song is this still what I'm trying to represent? Not just like what I felt in the moment. And then I grew or moved on and don't necessarily want that to be my public perception. And so I really took that to heart. I was like, let's table this for a little bit. And about a month ago, it just came back into my mind that Oh, winter starting I'm have some goals for the winter, it would be a great way to start the winter. And so completely rewrote the story. And I have been doing a lot of screenwriting for the last six months or the last year and really just getting better at writing. And so then thinking about my story, and how can I put something into, you know, a five minute read, instead of a 20 minute read, where it's not just this jumbled mess of information, but something that's actually digestible, and you know, hopefully relatable, but most importantly, like compelling and entertaining, and so rewrote the story. Saw that read the first story I wrote I was like, oh my god, I would be so embarrassed. Yeah. So since writing it have just had a great reception from friends and a lot of people don't know. And yeah, it's been awesome.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:11

Yeah, I'll share with listeners, that's what brought me to you is I came across the article and I was just really so grateful that you wrote about your story and shared that because as you spoke to, in action, sports and snowboarding, queerness is yes, becoming more integrated, but it's still very much kind of an other experience. And I think stories like yours are what's going to help normalize and change the culture of those spaces. So yeah, I'm just so pumped to have you here. So selfishly, thank you for writing that. And gosh, there's so many things I want to talk with you about, but Okay, can I pause us where we are, and go back into your story, just to get a sense of Okay, where did your story begin? What was kind of the beginning part of Jack's life, and then we'll go forward from there.

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 05:53

I haven't really thought about my life that way, and my journey as a queer person, but I grew up in Massachusetts, moved around a little bit, first 13, 14 years of my life, super loving family, you know, didn't have much to complain about and was in, you know, nice, beautiful, like bucolic towns around Eastern Massachusetts, suburbs of Boston, and got super into skateboarding as a kid and rap music, and really didn't have any queer role models. I don't think I met a person that identified as gay until I was like in high school, and so definitely knew, like as a kid growing up, that I wasn't straight, but really just put it out of my mind for the first you know, 1516 years of my life. And that coupled with falling in love with skateboarding, snowboarding, and rap music, which are all kind of have this era of like macho badass girls type of subcultures. It all really just like steered me away from paying any attention to my sexuality. And then when I was 14, my family moved to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which is super renowned ski town, one of the best ski resorts and mountain places in North America in the world. And so moved there and really had the opportunity to snowboard every day, I was lucky enough to throughout high school, get out of school at lunchtime, and go to the mountain and be on the Jackson Hole snowboard team where people like Travis rice and Blake Paul were alumni guys. So that was really the direction that I was going in and really getting better at snowboarding and just fall in love with them more and more, it became this kind of double edged sword where on one side it was this culture I want to be a pro snowboarder, this is what I wanted to do. And it was really pushing me away from what I needed to do which was accept my sexuality and be okay with it and move on. But then it was also became this escape where like, it didn't seem like a big deal that I had all this inner emotional undealt with trauma and turmoil because I had this way to express myself do the things I wanted to do and to be happy regardless of what was happening internally. Yeah, and that only lasts so long, because eventually it becomes hollow.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:17

Totally. And was that like a conscious thing you did in terms of like kind of shifting more focus away from kind of this budding sexuality and more into Okay, now just my identity as an athlete as a snowboarder? Was that something you were aware of? Or is it kind of in hindsight use? You see, like, Oh, I think I was kind of doing that on the unconscious level.

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 08:36

I think it was totally unconscious. Like I, this might be too explicit, maybe not. Right? When I moved to Jackson, I was 14. And you know, freshmen in high school. And literally, the first thing on my mind was, I was like, I need to get a girlfriend. And like, lose my virginity, because that's what cool kids do. That's what high school kids are not 14. And looking back now, like your 14 year old child. Like that is not where you should be thinking about. But it was really, I think, driven by this internalized homophobia and wanting to convince myself that I was straight and convinced everybody else. And then I think it just turned into that like unconscious repression that I didn't know what I was necessarily struggling against. And so I just put all my energy into snowboarding. Yeah, and then it became almost like a chip on my shoulder where I was like, even though nobody knows that I'm gay, like I want to be better than everybody else. So that sort of like in this covered up super twisted way. I'm like proving it to myself. That is okay. Hmm.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 09:42

Yes. I mean, I don't know if this feels true for you in that but in that I hear like so many of us queer people in different ways. When we're growing up, particularly in adolescence, we even unconsciously overcompensate for kind of maybe feeling some shame or internalized homophobia or just this inner knowing something feels off over compensate by then like further leaning into these other identities we hold and amplifying those as like this is where I get the value as the snowboarder as the artist or as the athlete as the straight A student. And that was part of my story, too of like kind of leaning more into one identity to overcompensate for the other. Does that kind of feel like what was happening for you?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 10:18

Oh 100%. Yeah, that's a great way to put it overcompensate? Because you're like, this bucket is empty, that should be full. But let me overfill this bucket. And then yes, it evens out. .

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 10:31

Right, totally. And then like, What do you remember about the culture of snowboarding at the time around queerness. So like, I grew up in a town that was like, the bedrock of the town was the surf community. And within that community, particularly when I was in adolescence, in like, 1990s, early 2000s, you know, it was just like, hyper masculine, and very misogynistic, and a lot of homophobia and like, a lot of that's so gay, that's so gay. I don't know, like, what was the culture like of snowboarding at the time?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 11:01

It was very similar. Okay. It was a lot of, you know, like, the colloquial term of just everything that wasn't cool was gay. And that was just what you said. And, you know, my whole life growing up, had never seen a gay person on skis or snowboard ever. And it was really one of the, I'd say probably the two biggest things that happened in my life that were completely

unassociated with me was Gus Kenworthy, the professional skier when he came out. And then Brian Anderson, the professional skateboarder when he came out, that was like, the thing heard around the world. And just like the shock wave, because it was very much I don't think anybody was necessarily trying to point fingers or be demeaning, or say anything about gay people or gay culture, when, you know, my friends, no, wouldn't be like, Oh, my God, that was so gay. I don't think they were actually like, I have a huge problem with homophobia, or homosexuals. It was just the terms. It was just ignorance. So it wasn't like this active push that nobody wanted to have gay people that it was just ignorance of like, I think people really didn't understand that gay people existed.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 12:09

I mean, yeah, it's like that identity was erased almost. If there's no, yeah, there's no representation of it. And then through Gus, and Brian, you said, because I don't know. I didn't hear about Brian's story.

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 12:19

Yeah. There's always been this rivalry between skiers and snowboarders. Yeah, where Gus Kenworthy came out and it was super motivating and inspiring for me, but it was still like, but he is a skier. But Brian Anderson, he's, I think he's in his 40s. Now he's like, Christian has soy, Andrew Reynolds, Tony Hawk, like, yeah, that era, like one of the most legendary famous skateboarders ever. And he had been Pro for 20 years. And he came out six years ago or something like that. And I almost identify more as a skateboarder than a snowboarder, so that was just like the straw that broke the camel's back, I think.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 12:55

Yeah, so that was six years ago, when you were 20?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 12:58

Yeah. I was studying abroad into a when he came out. And it was this living in a foreign country living with the host family, making completely new friends speaking a different language living in a different culture. And it was sort of that like a turning point in my life, where I was like, I'm going to come either way, I'm going to come back from this trip a different person. And I didn't quite know that was, what the change is going to be.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 13:23

And the rest of high school, what did that look like? And you know, you mentioned being 14 and 14 year old you really had this determination to want to date and have sex with girls, what happened the rest of your adolescence?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 13:34

Oh, man, it's so funny, because I literally feel like a completely different person. Totally, totally. I guess it's that second adolescence. Yep. But yes, I was, I was always a good student. And I think part of that overcompensating that you were talking about where I wanted to perform well, and it was this situation where I enrolled into like all AP classes every year on the one hand, so that I could perform well, but on the other hand, so that I could continue doing this snowboarding thing where I would be able to get out of school at lunch. And you know, and we would always, every fall, the vice principal would fight us on it to the kids that we're trying to do this no work program, you'd like that you can't leave school halfway through, and I'd like but I'm in the hardest classes you offer. And I have always like one more, you know, what more do you want from me? Yeah. And so there's that side of it. And then I think in like a pretending way, I was completely focusing on snowboard and giving it everything I had, but really deep down was really struggling with my identity and trying to come to terms with and I think it was more unconscious than anything because I hadn't taken the time or the self reflection to actually realize it. It totally manifested itself in like, wanting to be a popular kid and wanting to go to parties every weekend and smoke weed and to do all this stuff that in hindsight is just a complete waste of time, but it felt like that was is the most important thing to do. And I think that was caused by this cognitive dissonance, where I knew in my heart and my mind what I wanted in the truth, but in practice, it was completely different. And then, you know, I'm like, Well, who am I? What am I even supposed to be doing? I think that led me to this focusing on external validation and wanting to be a cool kid and all that. But then I think that really impacted my snowboarding when I wasn't putting 100% into snowboarding. And so that kind of was sort of my high school in a nutshell, and then graduated high school and was sort of on the path to becoming a professional snowboarder. And the more I The deeper I got into it, the more you know, like trips, I started going on with professional snowboarders. And the more I really became a part of the community. In a way it was almost like you see beyond the veil, where it's like this illusion of oh my god, you'd be a professional snowboarder, you travel around the world, and you make a bunch of money, and you sell it all the time. That sounds amazing. But then you really become friends with people that are professional snowboarders. And they're like, Yeah, I work construction jobs all summer, so that I can do that in the winter. And, you know, like, I have a lot of respect and love for the people that do that. But I like I never thought that was what I wanted. Like, I wanted to always be building towards something and didn't want to put all my eggs in the some physical activity where if I get hurt, or one day too old and can't do it anymore, I have no, no other options. I didn't necessarily want to be a ski bum my whole life. So towards the end of high school was looking at you know, I could just go keep milking and working the relationships I have and go snowboard all winter find a job for the summer, I would become a manager at a restaurant so had like a path. But it just didn't feel right. And I always think about it of when you're in the closet, or you're dealing with internal stuff, or you're hiding something like you can't quite see what you want, like you're looking through fog. And so I was just like paralyzed by not knowing what I really wanted, but decided to go to college was lucky enough to have the means to go to college, I was able to get scholarships, my parents were super supportive. And they for sure were like, you know, you'll be able to get a better job and have more options if you have a college degree. So went to college at University of Denver, and then was sort of still tippy toeing that professional world. I want to study business, be an entrepreneur, but I also want to be a snowboarder, so I'm gonna stack all my classes. I don't have classes two days a week, but I still want to like, be cool. So I'm going to party and I hate frats. But like, I became friends with all the frat guys, and they're super homophobic, but I'm still gonna, like, hanging out with them was just like, hey, I'm getting older and like maturing. And so it's just really pulling myself in a bunch of different directions, and really was just like, eventually just broken. I was like, What am I doing?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 17:57

What happened at that breaking point.

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 17:59

So I think one of the big things was I switched my major at first when a school is I want to do international studies, or I want to do international business, because I want to travel around the world and sell stuff and make money. And then I took a couple psychology classes just completely almost accidentally, and really fell in love with psychology. And I was like, This is what I care about business is what people are telling me I should be studying. But it just became a slow process of actually like, I think building an internal compass and really reconnecting with myself and disconnecting from these outside expectations and these things that I thought I was supposed to be doing. And so I really started hanging out with different people, and not spending my time with people that were super homophobic started coming out to people and started filmmaking, like all in the same year, it was just sort of like magically, I sort of started changing the environment around me started changing and then it was like, life just changed.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 19:02

Oh, that sounds like an incredibly impactful year. Holy smokes. You mentioned coming out in that year, like leading up to that what was your own process of getting clarity for your own self about your identity? And then what was what were those moments like of, of knowing, yeah, this is who I am. And then that decision to eventually come out? What was that like?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 19:21

So, you know, I haven't talked to any of, you know, my high school friends, but I had huge crushes on some of my friends in high school and will always, you know, be walking would have sent class together and would like find a way to walk next to them in class and kind of FLIR and now it's so funny, because at the time would never admit that but now it's like to those to those guys that haven't seen them in a while. It's like, Hey, did you do you realize that you were I don't know. But so I sort of knew more and more as things went on. And then soon as I got to college, literally my freshman year I Uh, started hooking up with guys, like super secretive, you know, from Tinder and Grindr and would just like, not tell anyone be terrified if somehow I found out like, I remember hooking up with one guy who went to the same school I did. And then seeing him as like a recommended friend on Facebook and seeing like our mutual friends, and just being like, so terrified. At the same time, I was also like, sort of dating girls, it was this really weird space where I totally knew it in my heart and my head and my whole being, except for what I was presenting outward. And so that was just like, you know, just doing something that's so counter to who you are and what you want to be doing. And it just, like, it makes you feel like shit, where then you start to internalize and you're like, Damn, I'm kind of an asshole like I'm leading people on when I know, there's no chance of anything. And I'm just like,

coward. And so I think that all sort of built together. And then kind of halfway through college, I think I came out to the first person that ever came out too. And that was pretty life changing moment.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 21:12

Yeah, I'd love to hear about that coming up was like, but it can be such a complicated experience in the bit of time before coming out. When Yeah, we start to get to have these sexual experiences. Maybe for the first time that we haven't had which come with both exhilaration and terror, the two sides, there was really a confusing process to hold both of those. And so I'm just like, my heart is just like hurting for a little you who is like feeling all that because it's many of us have been there. And it's a very complicated place to be.

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 21:45

And it's so unfortunate that that's the way it is, or I always feel like things are changing. Maybe that's the way it was, but because I think it really like routes that like almost third person view of your own gay identity. And queerness in this like objectified sexual thing, where really it's all love. There's about love, but in that sort of that tension, and that we're How did you say like exhilarating and terrifying. It leaves no room for like genuine connection.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 22:17

Yes, absolutely. Which is so sad. And because that's what we all want, ultimately, really great point.

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 22:26

Like, I don't regret anything, because you know, if all of that stuff wouldn't happened exactly how it did. I wouldn't be right here right now. And I'm so excited about my life right now that it was all worth it. But I'm so bummed like, damn, college would have been so fun. As just like an out guy. Yes. And with all the other, you know, gay guys who like go into gay parties. That would have been super fun when you have no obligation except like going to school and doing whatever you want to do.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 22:54

Totally. Yeah, I mean, I personally absolutely relate to that. Part of kind of my second adolescence experience has been this idea of grieving what could have been grieving for my high school self who didn't get to go to prom with the guy of his dreams grieving for like my college self, who didn't get to go do these things that, you know, I think in hindsight, there were queer spaces at my school, but at the time, I absolutely avoided them. And yeah, like well could have been. And that grief process is like, tricky because it brings up like, of course, a lot of sorrow and sadness, a lot of like, anger, like, I wish I had that what other people had, but I think it's also a really important part of kind of our gradual queer healing is to go back in time and be

with those feelings and be with those younger selves and grieve for like, Yeah, it sucks that I didn't get to have that period. It sucks. And seems like for you to like, just sucks that like, you could have had a different college experience that you thought maybe other people get to have or you hear about the people getting to have.

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 23:54

Yeah. But I think it also just makes you appreciate the growth. And there's nobody stopping us from you know, making a late 20s prom for queer people.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 24:06

Yes, let's do that!

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 24:09

Yeah, we need more events post COVID...

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 24:15

Oh, count me in! That's great. Okay, so coming out. You came out at that year. What was that first conversation like?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 24:22

It was super interesting and unexpected. It was in the summer when I was working at a restaurant. I'd worked there, you know, like four summers in a row went from like, assisting prep cook to manager and so it was really one of the first more professional working environments I've ever been in. That being said it was a super unprofessional working environment. tiny place where it be like two people working at a time. The owners super good guy but he was like a very loose owner and I met a girl who became a good friend of mine and she had a sort of came out to me but like completely offhandedly of like, Yeah, I'm bisexual. Like, she was probably 10 years older than me. She's like, Yeah, like, date girls day, guys, whatever. And she was this semi professional skateboarders had all these tattoos and was like super badass. And both Yeah, just like, yeah. What do you mean? Like, are you buy it? And I was like, no, no, no way. When she first asked me, and it was actually, one afternoon, we like finished work. And we're just hanging out and had a couple drinks. And we're just literally like sitting on the stoop outside of this restaurant. And I was just like, I need to tell you something. And it was like this, you know, the pulling the chains off myself and like, trying to force when you like, tell yourself internal, okay, I'm going to do it. And then like, you don't do it. And you're like, right, it's trying so hard to do it, but at the same time not to do it. And then I just told her, and I think I told her, I was like, I'm bisexual. And she was just like, Oh, awesome, like, cool. And then you know, went on, I think she kind of like consoled me. I was like, oh my god, I'm so proud of you. Like, that's amazing. But then just like, kept talking about whatever we're talking about. Yeah. So it was this huge, this huge moment for me. And she was just like, the best

person who could have ever told me because she was like, Oh, that's cool. Good for you. And that was, you know, super powerful. But at the same time, she was like, a couple years older than me. And I was just working with her for the summer. So she wasn't really like a part of my core community, my best group of friends. So it's like a small stepping stone. But it was still, like, it wasn't the end all be all. Everything's fine. It was just like, Oh, my God, I did it once. And now I should do it to the people that are more important in my life. Pretty much.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 26:43

So yeah. So when what what did happen next?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 26:45

So that was like, right before I went to Chile, yeah. When I was working with her go to Chile and vividly. Remember, I was with a good friend of mine in Chile, who was from United States. And we were at a bar and they had litros. They're like leaders, but kind of like 40s. But they're a leader. And we're sitting there and we're just drinking one and I had really you know that Brian Anderson, the skateboarder he had come out like a couple of weeks before Gus Kenworthy had and so I was like, I finally started journaling about it finally started writing to myself about what I was going through. And that's fun. I haven't looked at that stuff. I journaled in a couple of years. So because I knew things are gonna change, I was like, I want to one start unwrapping this and work this out. But I also want to like, put a stamp, you know, and like, make a little time capsule so that my 10 myself 10 years down the road can come look at this and like remember what it was like, because now it's, you know, it's kind of hard to imagine being in the closet. But I remember being with a good friend of mine and being like, in my head, I'm going to tell him, I'm going to tell him tonight and we're sitting at a bar, we order Leto to glasses, drink it, you know, a conversation dies, because there's only one thing on my mind. And I hey, let's let's get another retro. He's like, why we got school tomorrow. I was like, Nah, I'll just try to throw along and try to wait for the right opportunity. We finished the intro. I'm like, oh my god, let's get another lake trout. He's like, midnight, we have to be up in seven hours. Yeah. And I didn't do it. I couldn't, I couldn't bring myself to do it. And so I remember walking home just being like, so disappointed in myself. And like, damn, like, I'm not strong enough yet. I can't do it. And I had the rest of the trip. It was a really great trip that was kind of like underlied by this me really wanting to come out, but not being able to. And so then right when I got back, I came out to a friend of mine who was woman and has a girlfriend that was literally like, one of the first times I was around a happy gay couple that was just completely normal. Like, yeah, we're dating and I came out to them. And then a couple days later, a friend of mine came to visit like one of my best friends in college who was the guy I met in college that was kind of pursuing snowboarding the way I was and he came to spend a couple days and snowboard at Jackson with me. And the day he left I was in the same thing with the litros I was like forcing him to stay longer. But I finally in my driveways he's about to leave like tears streaming down my face was like, I have to tell you something if you don't want to be friends with me after like, I totally understand, but I'm gay and he was just like, wow that's awesome. Good for you. And so that I think was the like the biggest kind of individual moment whereas so many times of like trying to come out to people and just not being able to do it and just having all of this expectation of like, I'm going to be so ostracize and everything's gonna change and everything's gonna get worse and then it just being like super mellow,

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 30:00

What's it like right now to go back to that memory to go back to that point?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 30:04

it's crazy. I think it's literally like inner child therapy. Because even now, like I'm forgiving myself for all the times that I didn't come out that I wanted to. And then I'm like, ashamed of myself. And that's part of the trajectory of your evolution, where at first are ashamed of yourself, in my experience, at least at first, you're ashamed of yourself for being gay, and then you become ashamed of yourself for being ashamed of yourself for being gay. And it's just like, I remember when my first boyfriend, you know, like, so came out to my snowboarder friend, he embraced me, you know, we lived together and came out to the rest of my roommates and things were awesome. And like six, maybe four or six months later, started dating the first guy ever did. And he was a couple years younger than me, and we're both in college together. But he came out a few years earlier, like in high school, and I was in that gray area of like, I'm out, but not everyone. I don't have to come out. But like I do. And I remember he said something once where he was, like, I don't know how you've been in the closet for this long, like, how did you serve, like, you know, like, I had to come out in high school because like, my heart was, you know, gonna die. And he was, I don't know how you went as long as you did.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 31:17

But yeah, maybe that's also like another place to bring that compassion and forgiveness to our younger selves, I mean, I to identify with that same experience of first dealing with a ton of shame for being gay. And then later, both after I came out, but also right before coming out, feeling like an additional layer of shame, seeing people who come from much more oppressive context that they grew up within than mine who had to face far more adversity than I had to be able to kind of exhibit this resilience and the strength to come out and experience pride in their identity. Whereas I even though I had family members that I knew would be supportive that and I had a group of community that I knew would also be supportive, it still was such a difficult thing for me. And so I also felt like, fuck, why is it so hard for me like, and so I get this double layer of shame. But then it's helpful, like with age, and also looking back and in as you're speaking to this, like inner child, inner younger self healing work, like I can understand why it was so so hard for him. And that's like, a huge part of the process for all of us is to like, give ourselves our younger selves, that grace and compassion like, yeah, that's why it was so difficult. Makes sense. So yeah, I appreciate you sharing all that. Because I think that not every person is going to have that experience. But I think a lot of people do. And yeah, me, me included. So really important to talk about,

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 32:34

I think a huge kind of motivator for me, too, was actually starting to read and to learn about the history of gay rights. And of people like Harvey Milk, who literally got killed by Super homophobic people died, just existing, and then being and then being like, you know, Damn,

that's the legacy that they left. The martyrs sacrificed themselves so that I could, you know, be ashamed of being the closet, like, that's not the life I want to live, like, I want to carry on their legacy, not drown their legacy.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 33:08

Yeah, that's on all of us to continue the work. And yeah, for again, going back to these, my story that's been super helpful is in developing relationship to our queer ancestors who really fought the fight and paved the way and trying to show up now as best I can to honor that fight. Absolutely. I'm like, loving this conversation. So thank you so much for doing this. Okay. I want to go back into your story. You mentioned that first relationship, that first boyfriend, and I'm curious, so you know about this idea of second adolescence, what in this idea applies to you, and what in this idea of second adolescence resonates with you and your story makes me curious about what that first relationship in particular was like. And for many of us, learning how to date and being relationship and have sex and all the things can be really messy and fumbly and exciting and complicated, and all the things experience. So yeah, just curious, what was your journey like there?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 33:58

Yeah, it was, it was definitely a second adolescence, like it was definitely going back to the immaturity of a relationship and creating these super codependent relationships were the way I sort of rationalize it in my head and in the way I experienced coming out, like I spent so long bearing this identity and never thought that I would have a gay relationship or have a publicly known gay relationship. And so when it finally came, it was like, This is it, you know, I need to hold on to this as tight as I can, because I never imagined that this would actually be real. And so I think that's kind of how it was at first. And, you know, they talk about the honeymoon phase and just like the puppy love, where you're just so infatuated. And like, amazed that this is a reality, which is super nice, but it's not necessarily like real in a sense, and it definitely last. And so then it's all so fun how different things coincide, you know, came out and kind of like fully came out even like a month before I graduated college. And so it was like at this huge existential crisis moment of, you know, I got a social science degree, I didn't get that business degree that people were telling me to get. What am I going to do? I have like a foot in the door in this world of snowboarding, but I'm not, you know, the 18 year old kid that is going to, you know, become the next superstar necessarily, like, what do I do, and I was working in a psychology research lab had done that, you know, for the last couple years of school. And the last study I was working on, it was about early childhood trauma intervention. And so it was looking at under three year old kids in super hard situations. And we do interviews with the moms to really gauge situation and then do developmental assessments with the kids to assess them compared to a typically developing child. And then we had a different social worker who would come in and do different interventions to try to get the child back on track. Because basically what the whole study was based on his kids in really hard situations where you know, there's violence in the house, or they're constantly moving from place to place are not getting proper sleep, they're not getting proper food, everything, their cortisol, their stress levels are just maxed out 100% of the time, so they're just living in fight or flight mode. And so we would do these intervention therapies to try to get the kids back into you know, the headspace that a two year old should be in not concerned about safety, but concerned about can I pick up this block? And like, how do I talk? And I think that it was much different situation than I was in for

these kids. But it could abstract it into myself where I was like, Yeah, I know what it's like, in a, you know, Maslow's hierarchy, sort of things. Like, I was definitely much closer to the top of the pyramid. But like, I spent a lot of my time super stressed out. And I know what it's like to be in fight or flight all the time. And now having since come out, I know what it's like to not be in fight or flight, and how can we put more of the world into not fighter flight, you know, this sort of idealistic, I want to save the world type of mentality, I felt it in that lab and in like, working hands on with these kids. And I was like, Wow, is this match future, and it was all ran by grad students. And they're like, you want to go to grad school to be a therapist or researcher or build your own career, whatever it is, this is the experience that you need, you know, working in labs, and then the head researcher was leaving, and I was super under qualified, but they offered me his position, because I was the right person at the right time. And so I had this opportunity. And then my older brother, he had started a video production company in Salt Lake City. Meanwhile, I was in Denver, and over the last year before I went to Chile, while I was in Chile, and then the rest of the time in Denver got way more into making videos and film and started off with like making snowboard videos and then music videos and event recap videos and was trying to you know, for like, the last couple years of college, really trying to write films had no idea how to write a film, jumping into the void, not knowing anything, guerilla style. And I really like looking back, I really was trying to express these ideas I was going through. But for the majority of the time, I wasn't out. So it was just like this disconnected thing where I was trying to talk to people about it. Because I remember this one idea I had that, you know, I tried to like write a script for I didn't know how to write a script, but it was like a guy running through a tunnel of being chased by a shadow and trying to outrun, you know, his own shadow. And it was completely a metaphor for being in the closet, but like talking to people about it, and then being like, I don't get it, you know. And so I was really trying to express this stuff, but just didn't know how to do it. And then my final semester, like really started getting to know the film department at the school I was going to, and one of the lead professors was super amazing woman who was lesbian. And so started talking to her, you know, she kind of mentored me for a little bit and looked at scripts that I wrote, and I was like, oh my, well, first thing you need to learn how to format a script, nobody is going to read a script that looks like you wrote it in Microsoft Word. And this super helpful with all that clarity I talked about earlier of once you come out and it's like, the clouds disappear, and you can actually embrace your future, and not just like, resist everything that all was hitting at once. And so my brother who had this video production company in Salt Lake, he's telling me he has this big project that they've been pitching for a year, and it's not guaranteed they're gonna get it but he thinks that they're gonna get it and they don't have an assistant editor and he was like, you know, you have enough experience. we'd hire you as an assistant editor. And so now I'm about to graduate college and looking at these two separate paths of one of them. Stay in Denver, stay with my boyfriend, go down this psychology research path, go to grad school. Go back, you know, be in school for another four, six years, whatever, see where it goes, or move to Salt Lake and go be a filmmaker. And yeah, I was kind of like paralyzed at first i think i x, I need to apologize I think I said yes to both. But then quickly had to eat my words and tell the psychology department that I really just felt it in my heart that like, I would feel like I'm missing out, you know, my whole life of snowboarding and music and storytelling, like I've really wanted to do something adventurous and creative with my life. Like I wanted to live my life for myself, and not for, you know, the things that maybe other people would be proud of. But like, I really wanted to make myself proud first, and then I would eventually if I went down this path that I didn't want to go down, it would eventually bite me in the ass. And so I remember sitting at a park next to school with my boyfriend at the time. And you know, he was this first boyfriend, we're in the honeymoon phase super in love. So we thought but in that infatuation type love, and we're sitting at this park, and I remember like, you know, I told him, I was gonna move to Salt Lake, and we both cried, and just, he felt like I was leaving him. And I was like, This is what I have to

do, this is the thing that I think is gonna help put me on a path I want to be on and get me to where I want to go. And if it's really meant to be, you know, we'll we'll reconnect, like, hopefully, we'll still be alive in five years and give me a call. Yeah, and so that was like four and a half years ago, I moved out here, thank God, we got that project. And it was really amazing, because I had some really good friends from high school who lived here. And of course, two brothers who lived here. And so I had a community already, but like, I moved here to Salt Lake and was just in a completely different world in every way professionally, just gotten out of school, you know, the super strict schedule, doing different classes every four months to like work in this one specific job that was way over my head, and really just putting everything I had into it. But move there as a gay guy at all. I've you know, my super like, some of my best friends in the world came out to them immediately. And they were all super excited, you know that I was just living here and everything. So it was really just stepping into this completely different life.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 42:21

Wow. So really starting this new chapter as your full self. What does it been like since?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 42:26

it's been amazing that first year I was here, I really thought my time snowboarding was done as like, you know, I had a nice little run sort of did some things. But like, that's the extent I'm on a career path. Now. You know, there's no room for snowboarding anymore. And especially, you know, being fresh out of college 21 being like, if it's not making me money, I'm not going to do it. Like I need to, I need to make a living, I need to support myself all this stuff. So that first year, kind of like stopped snowboarding and didn't really do it and really put everything I had into film editing. And, you know, it was able to keep the ball rolling. Like when that first project ended. It was a really, really good reality check for us. Because we did this big project and we like awesome people are gonna be knocking on our door. We're, you know, Steven Spielberg, Netflix is going to be calling us we're gonna they're gonna be bidding with HBO. Like, where the shit Hell yeah, that project ends. And we're sitting there, you know, and life goes on. Every single person in the world is super focused on what they're focused on. There's a million production companies in the world. And we had this really nice reality check of you know, success. And a career is having your next job and having something lined up before this one ends. And we were all everybody in the company was 100% invested into the one thing we were doing. So when ended, we were all burnt out, and nobody had been trying to get the next thing going. So like, it's always just fun to reflect on how reality differs from the expectations. But I think it's totally the game of and even the same thing of like coming out of the closet, where it's just a game of keeping your head above water long enough to find a life raft, or to get strong enough that it's not hard to swim anymore. But so you know, that rear ended. And filmmaking is a very volatile, sporadic industry. So it took us a while to get into the project, you know, it was like eating ramen noodles and peanut butter and jellies for a while. But eventually, we got better at the business side of it. And so now, you know, things are still sporadic, but they're a little more consistent. And I finally have a savings. And it's amazing. And so now the past couple of winners really finally got solid footing in the film industry where for one I'm actually like confident in my abilities, any project I work on, I'm going to bring something unique and good to it and that the project will be better for having me on it, but also like got rid of that insecurity of the sort of imposter syndrome of like, do I belong here? I if I'm not working

60 hours a week, like I'm going to get replaced. And so really kind of just matured, and found security in myself, and then got back to snowboarding. And it was like, you know, my dream goal would be to be able to take a month off and go snowboard, like, why not, I'm 26. And my body is like, still in his prime. But like, why not, why not try to push this as far as I can, while I'm still able to. And now I don't have that fear of, but if I try to do something besides filmmaking, then that opportunity is going to disappear. And so yeah, really, like got back into snowboarding, but really started from the love of going out with my friends and having you know, the best days of my life where you're doing this activity that you and the people you care about, know how to do really well. And you just feel like you're in tune with the universe. And that all of the energy is like going to where it needs to be going. And it's just the funnest thing in the world, and then started doing competitions again. And then there's a professional tour for it's called Big Mountain snowboarding, where they basically like, designate a run at a resort with a bunch of cliffs and trees and rocks and shoots. And it's literally whoever goes down at the best. There's, you know, sort of a judging criteria, but it's not time based. It's not the number of spins you do, it's completely subjective, which makes it hard sometimes, but it's like full interpretation of a mountain, and did some last year and did really well and almost qualified for the pro tour, but missed the registration for the last event. If I would have podiumed. At that event, I would have made it they really just got me super motivated to do it this year, and to win the qualifying series this year and go on to the pro tour. Because to my knowledge, there has never been a queer person on that tour. I don't think there's ever been an out gay man in a professional snowboard contest. So now I'm like, Yeah, that could be me.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 46:53

Yeah, hell yeah. Yeah. So when does that take place?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 46:56

I think the first one that I'm going to do is mid February, and then it's like, there's six, five or six events. And I think they take your top three, and whoever, you know, has the most cumulative points out of three events, wins, and then goes on to the pro tour for next year.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 47:11

So what is it like for you now? Like, what's your relationship like to snowboarding now, as an out gay man?

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 47:19

literally better than it's ever been. It's because like I said, when I moved to Salt Lake started a new career. It really disappeared from my life and my identity. But then it came back. And it came back in a personal way where it didn't come back as me saying, Yes, I'm a professional snowboarder. Now it came back as me saying, I will always snowboard. And I'll always love snowboarding. It'll always be a part of who I am, and now starting to come in a professional way too. And it's so funny how things happen in our personal lives that intertwine with how things happen in the world. Because now queer snowboarding is like the new cool thing. And

it's all thanks to a couple people like Tanner Pendleton and Jake Cusick, and Joe Perkins who think two summers ago they came out and they Jake Cusick is a really big name professional snowboarder, and he's been in the game for a long time, super respected in the industry. And he came out. And he and I think like five people were this magazine called, which was a new magazine at the time held torment magazine, they ran during Pride, it was probably the first pride thing that ever happened in snowboarding, and all these professional snowboarders and people around the industry came out publicly. And that's sort of because that sort of ignorance we talked about of where people just didn't know gay people existed, then all of a sudden, it was the most popular thing. And Snowden everybody's social media timeline was riddled with these pride interviews and people talking about these things. And so it's just like a light bulb that went off in everyone's head of like, oh, there are gay people, and they do snowboard and oh my god, my favorite snowboarder is actually gay. Whoa. And so. And now. You know, there's all these companies that do pride campaigns, and whether it's Yeah, queer washing, or whatever they call it, like, either way, if the company is just like, I want to do this, because it's cool. They're still doing it. And they're still showing the little 14 year old kids in high school that there's a gay person Snowbird, and they're super excited about it. Yes.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 49:13

Which is huge. And yes, like this, like the capitalism bullshit of pride. And it also has impact Yeah, in such a huge way. And again, like you sharing your story also has impact, like I'm picturing my little 14 year old self, who was who was snowboarding and didn't feel like I had a place on the mountain. So it's really cool to get to hear you and your story. And I'm picturing even thinking about you competing in February. Like I'm picturing like, little 14 year old you with you on that mountain, as you're doing that. And just it's a really cool thing that you're doing both for yourself, but also Yeah, for so many people. And so again, I just want to express gratitude for you coming on and sharing your story. What was that like going through your story:

J

Jack Hessler (he/him) 50:00

like, oh my god, it's super cathartic. Yeah, I remember I helped a friend with an art project, you know, long term, couple year project. And she's painting queer people and doing like a installation where you're walking, and you'll hear them talk about what it's like to be queer. And you'll see this painted portrait of them, super excited for what she interviewed me for it. And that was really the first time where I spent an extended amount of time reflecting like that. And it's because I think it's very different like journaling, we're just writing it in a place that nobody's gonna see. And, you know, you're just kind of train of thought compared to talking to somebody about it, especially in somewhere that's semi public, where you're half trying to monitor what you're saying, but half trying to be just real, and so let it flow. But yeah, it's an amazing experience. And it feels super good. And it makes me very proud of the growth that I've been through in my second adolescence.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 50:54

Well, if folks wanted to follow what you're doing and connect with you further, what's the best place to direct them?

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 51:00

I think I'm probably most active on Instagram. I always like to go through phases of deleting Instagram. So I'm not just spending two hours a day looking at my phone. But yeah, I'm on there at Jah_he J A H, underscore, H, E is my initials and the first two letters of my last name.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 51:19

we'll be sure to link to that. Gosh, Jack again, thank you. It's great to have you on and great to hear your story. And again, I think it's just going to be really helpful for so many people to hear. So thank you.

J Jack Hessler (he/him) 51:29

It's my pleasure

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 51:38

Hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to second adolescence pod dot come For show notes and more then you can connect further by following the show on Instagram at second adolescence pod. If you're interested in being a future guest on the show and you want to come on and share about your own second adolescence visit second adolescence pod calm slash be a guest and you can submit your interest there. Alright, that's it for me for now. Whether it's morning, afternoon, night, wherever we're finding you in your day, go on out there and keep doing things that would make younger you absolutely thrilled. That is what it's all about. Alright, take good care.