

Ep. 15: Second Adolescence w/ Brandon Rumaker (they/them)

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them)

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello and welcome to the Second Adolescence Podcast. I am your host Adam James Cohen. On this week's episode, we have Brandon Michael Rumaker who is an artist based out of New York City. And oh, my gosh, was this a special conversation I'm so excited to invite you into it. In sharing their individual story, Brandon offered so many gems about the greater collective queer experience. They share about their story very much from a trauma informed stance. And if I could narrow this episode down to a core theme is healing, healing, healing, so much talked about healing. They were just so generous with what they shared in their story about their childhood, their adolescence to coming out and beyond to healing from intergenerational trauma to healing from the toxicity of being socialized within systems of oppression, and then to the power and joy of gaining what we missed out on to overcoming to so many things. And so I'm just so excited to invite you into this conversation. And as with each episode of second adolescence, I want to invite you as listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are different and unique, and how you might hear something shared on the show that really differ from your experience. Whereas you might hear other things said that absolutely give voice to what you went through or are currently going through. And I really do hope that all of this happens and that together we can continue growing and 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 secondadolescentspod.com For show notes and more where you can follow the show on Instagram at [secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). Welcome to the conversation. Thanks for being here. Welcome to Second Adolescence. I'm so excited and curious to have you here. Before going anywhere. I like to invite the person on your end to give a little mini introduction to give a little context who the person is behind the voice. I'm sure we'll go into your story but a little snapshot to start us off.

B Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 02:21

Sure. My name is Brandon Michael Rumaker. I am 29 years old. I use they them pronouns, I guess in terms of like, what do I do? In my daily life, I identify most strongly as an artist, specifically in writing and performance worlds. But I think the core of what I do is creating

specifically in writing and performance words. But I think the core of what I do is creating space for people to be seen and to see themselves deeper, usually through performance, but also through facilitating workshops. And through community connection spaces.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 02:50

Oh, cool. Okay, wait before going into like your story. Can I hear a little bit more about like, yeah, what this looks like this work and you work as an artist and entertainer, all of that. Yeah,

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 02:59

yeah, it's a number of things. I live in New York City. And it's like, if you're not wearing 18 hats in New York City, then you're probably not living in New York City. So the most frequent way I engage is through playwriting, screenwriting, improv, really avant garde spoken word stuff. And then in terms of facilitating before the pandemic, I was creating community space that was kind of like potluck, ask, specifically for artists and creatives to come together, have like a moment of nourishment, both food wise and also energetically, like, very specific, facilitated conversation, a start and then breaking off and just like being people at dinner together. And the last one we did was the week before New York City lockdown. And we had about 40 people in attendance. And now we're considering, like, what does that look like, throughout the pandemic? And virtual just the vision didn't really work virtually, it was really about having like in person ability to like, feed each other. And so yeah, we're trying to figure out how to make that work now with everything going on COVID wise. And so I really I tend to like, when I have a creative idea in terms of like how to connect people, I tend to pursue it to see where it goes. And so I've like designed escape rooms for people. I've developed creativity workshops, and I'm working with someone on like, I'm working with a psychic medium about developing a workshop and I'm like, I have no psychic medium, but I don't know, like well bridge will find a bridge between us and we've been finding a bridge between us. It's really about as much as possible. Just finding what brings me alignment and joy in a way that's of service to other people. That's not just me, like in isolation, having a good old fun time while the rest of the world is struggling. The last thing that I've done recently is I've become a volunteer for a peer counseling service in New York City identity house and I've been peer counselor there supporting mostly people who are first coming out but not exclusively in that situation. Just people that are like in a space of like, I think I'm queer, and I don't know what to do. So I've been queer for at least a few years. So I can at least say, Hey, we're here to talk about it.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:11

Oh my gosh, I just want to be a little mouse on your back going through all of your days. Sounds like you have such an interesting life. This is so cool to hear. And on that last piece of in this role as a peer counselor, I'm curious, like, what is that like for you to be at this part of your own personal journey now being able to offer support for other folks who are earlier perhaps on their journey? How is that for you?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 05:30

It's interesting, because like, the whole point of this podcast, right is how queer identity can like

occur at any age in life, right? Like our relationship to queerness is different than like the standard sis hetero definition of adolescence occurring at the age of 14 through 19. So it's like, being in space with people who have maybe twice my life experience, but have less queer experience. And so it's really like humbling for me to, to have something to offer my elders, and also people who are younger than me. And it's kind of, I mean, most of my 20s being queer was just like, it was part of who I am. But it really, it's just being in relationship with people physically or sharing experience of how the greater world at large interacts with our queer identity, whether for good or for bad, but it didn't really necessarily feel like a meaning like how do I bring that part of me into the world in a way that's like, not just about how I navigate the world, or in my one on one interpersonal romantic relationships, like what does it mean to be queer, as community and like, builds community. And for a long time, I didn't have queer community, most of my I guess this is kind of like entering my story. Most of my 20s I'm from like a working class background, I have a history of trauma that I'm very open about that will probably come up as we talk. That was my 20s was very disruptive for the most part. So to like, be in space with queer people. I was like, I just gotta like, pay my bills, I'll work wherever, whoever, wherever, do what I have to do to survive. And so the idea of having like, space where I'm being held, and I'm holding other queer people, and we're talking about shared experiences, that wasn't necessarily my full experience, until very recently, when I've gotten really intentional about like, for me right now, it's like, if you're not queer, I'm sorry, but I can't prioritize you. Because that's like, where my healing is, is like, I really need to relate to my people. In a way that's powerful. And so the peer counseling side is kind of like the shame I think I'm going through as part of the queer experience, the sense of perfectionism that I have is part of the queer experience, the doubt that I have, am I queer enough? Am I gay enough? And my gender non conforming enough? Oh, wait, this is part of the queer experience. Great, we're all in it together. So being a peer counselor, almost like, it's been like a gift of allowing me to hold myself with more grace of like, oh, wait, this is this is part of the process. This is there's nothing wrong with me. This is part of living in the world we live in.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:11

Totally. Just like pause and just, I'm just melting over here. Just really just nodding my head and just feeling so. So much connection to what you're saying. And so I'm just so pumped. You're here. So thank you. This is awesome. Okay, I will. I'm curious to talk about so many things. But you're starting to allude to your story and kind of see this evolution you've traveled through? And you mentioned kind of starting off in kind of a working class kind of place and environment. I'm curious, like, where did you grow up? And what was kind of the early part of your story like?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 08:44

So I was born in Westchester County, New York, which is an hour north of New York City, I'll give you like the plot points. I'm speaking like a writer, I'll give you the plot points, then I'll fill them in. So the beginning middle end, we'll fill up the space, right, the picture. So I grew up, I was born in White Plains, one of the bigger cities of Westchester County. My parents moved to San Diego when I was around two years old, which is something that I've been kind of obsessing over in my like trauma work and my figuring out, like how much of this is me how much of this is intergenerational is this experience of when I was to around two to around three, four, my parents divorced I was with my mom. My mom entered a psychiatric hospital. I was with my dad, I was no longer deemed safe to be in the care of my dad's custody. I moved back with my mom, when she got out of the hospital was with my grandma for a period,

apparently in foster care for a period. Then back with my mom, then back to New York, where I grew up in Westchester. So during that pre verbal period, Yeah, who knows what happens? Yeah. And so both of my parents identify as disabled. I'm coming to an understanding of having a disabled identity, which is like fresh this week. I'm exploring so that's like a messy Every time you access a new layer of identity, it's like wow, like a whole new rabbit hole. Yeah, so intersectionality, right, the identity is like a great wild thing. And so I've identified for as neurodivergent for a very long time, but both my parents identify as disabled. And I grew up in conditions that were unique, unusual. And so growing up, I shared a single bedroom with my mom until I went to college, like we shared the same space like beds next to each other. So like, good luck figuring out your queer identity, like sexually when, like your mom is, like, right in the room with you all the time. And so I was already guaranteed I wasn't gonna have any, like, sexual awakening experience, like most other queer people in high school, for different reasons, in addition to the gay identity one and so when I was in middle school, I started having fantasies about like, other boys in the locker room, just like, I don't even know like, I think it was like, This is gonna be so transparent. And so like, a lot, I'm gonna say it because it's important to say is I would have like fantasies of like other boys bullying me. And like, a way that was like, middle school equivalent of our attraction, because I was bullied a lot as a kid. And it was like, almost like a bullying where I was the one in control. Uh huh. Totally, which is like, so I don't know, it's, it's an experience. And so it was like, What is this? Why am I thinking about this all the time? Like, why am I like, kind of like, obsessing over this and like middle school me, was very self aware for middle schooler and was like, hmm, this is probably not normal compared to other people, whatever normal is. And I had a thought, like, I was already like an outcast. I was already one of the weird kids, I was already like, had few friends. I was like, if I'm gay, too, on top of already being an outcast, it's over for me. And like I had like suicide ideation during that period, really heavy, dark time, most of middle school. And my way of navigating was this was like, dial up internet era, big, clunky monitors. I didn't have my first computer until I was probably like, in seventh grade. And I would sit at my computer on that dial up internet, taking up the phone, Jack, so mom couldn't make any phone calls, which she found so annoying. And I would like research, I would be on forums researching, like, Gender Spectrum theory, like reading like about like, the most progressive theories possible to try to justify why I wasn't gay. I'd be like, Oh, gender and sexual identity is a spectrum. That means I can shift and change I'll eventually be straight someday. was the thought I had Wow. Like, it wasn't like, Oh, I'm gonna accept myself and love myself. And like understand myself. It was, oh, this there's evidence that like, this is like just a phase. This is something that's not real. Like I'm the exception to the rule. I'll be fine.



13:00

Is the is the belief I had in middle school? Yeah. And so in high school, after about four years of like, suffer read, like the self loathing, the shame, the self hate. There were two kind of shifts moments for me that were like, I have to come out. Maybe three. I started for some reason, making more friends don't really know how I did it. But somewhere along the way, people saw something in me and wanted to spend time with me even though I was like, such like a broody little like, my hate everyone. Some people like that. I guess. It's relatable, I guess everyone everyone was feeling it? Sure. As I was making friends, I was having opportunities to be in relationship in a deeper way. That had me think like, I can't hide this and have friendships like I can't have deep connection and try to like dance and compartmentalize and like, I would like aggressively check my body. Like if my hand moved a certain way. It's like, Nope, no limp wrist. If I taught a certain way. No, I can't have a list. I can't move my hips this way. I was so body conscious, yes, that it helps me athletically. I like it helped me in like, like, performance wise,

because I'm so aware of my body. But at the time, it was like current, like constant energy of being with people but like, constantly checking myself. And I was like, I can't do this. I can't sustain this. It's not going to work. Like people are going to catch me. And I would rather me just say it than them Catch me outside. Like I would rather have control over how I navigate this. And so I started considering how it would come out. And I guess the third thing is, this was in 2007 2008. So that was like during a period where like YouTubers were coming out Yeah. Connor Franta Tyler Oakley Troye Sivan are the ones that come to mind because I have crushes on them watching them on YouTube. And there are there are all of these like, I'm gay, like 20 minute videos of them crying, and people in the comments like loving them. And it's like, okay, why not me and someone in middle school. So at this point I was in 11th grade, there was a seventh grader who is, same place I was when I was in seventh grade, who came out as trans 2008 coming out as trans, which is like, no one was coming out as trans and like, in like high school back that like, but now it's a bit more normalized. But they were like, the the first person, they were the first trans person I knew. And they came out. And they were a huge advocate in the middle school, like everyone in their grade was like, We don't care we just want to stop hearing about it was like, the thinking of everyone else. And so it was like, if this, if this person is doing it, why not me. And so I started coming out. And started with friends started with peers, did some stuff with my GSA Gay Straight Alliance, where we like a group of us, like went into classrooms and talked about our experience with other kids, which I still have like mixed feelings about this day of like, kind of like being put on like a, like a pedestal of sorts, and like, like, Hey, here's our here's our queer people. Let's ask them about queerness, which is like,

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 16:29

yeah, what do you remember about that part of it, when you're in that role?

B Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 16:32

in that role, I remember I was allowed to be queer enough. Like, there were certain aspects of like, I couldn't like get into like dicey complex aspects of queerness of like, like, not all gay and trans and lesbian and bi and pan and poly people agree, are on the same page, like each other. There's misogyny in the community, there's homophobia, there's transphobia, there's all these things that we deal with internally, to present that to like, a bunch of like, sis hetero, I mean, like it was for, really, it was like, the point for us as students was, there are other kids who don't feel like they can be seen and accepted. And if they see us, maybe they'll feel safer. And then for the rest of the population of this, this hetero population, it was like a dicey playground of like, a lot of questions being asked that were inappropriate, and the teachers not knowing how to properly facilitate and hold that in a way that had us safe. But that's, I mean, how the world is, in a way, like you can't always protect a queer kid from bigotry. Yeah.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 17:43

Wow. What's it like right now, going back to that memory?

B Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 17:47

In my body, there's like this, like warmth, this like fire. I'm like, getting excited talking about this with you. Because it's like, let's unpack it. Let's like, let's process it. Let's unpack it. Who knows how, like your listeners are gonna take it? And it's like, that's not really in my control. But yeah, just like, I don't think I don't think I talked about that specific experience of like being in the GSA space. Because there's like a full day like, we went to every class all day. To me, it's like there's like this bizarreness to it of like, it was both great. And both not Yes. Yes. That's like, it's hard to like rationalize is like, either or, like, it was both great and awful. Yeah. It was both incredibly ignorant and incredibly empowering in the way it was handled. And so I don't think I've really talked about it. So I'm kind of like processing in real time with you. So it's, like, messy, and it's like, what am I saying?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 18:44

That's great. Yeah, I mean, that's what we got to do. We got to process messy stuff. And yeah, that sounds incredibly messy. And like, yeah, I get on one hand, it's an empowering act to kind of be visible and to kind of share your experience and hopefully inspire others to kind of be able to step more into their truth. And that's a lot to put on to an adolescent it's also without like, the safety of like a contained space. We have like adults who are there to like, not only be supporting like the students who they want to be learning but really supporting you all who are exposing yourself like how vulnerable Oh, my gosh, that is messy. That is messy. Yeah. Little you woof. Yeah. And maybe just to back up a little bit to you mentioned coming out to some friends first, and like what was what were those initial conversations like for you to like, give voice? Yeah, this part of you.

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 19:39

God, I was so scared. I can't remember that. It was, again, thank you Internet. The Internet is like, like, I often have issues with the internet for what it's done to us like in terms of our ability to like, at least for me my ability to function like without having like 97 tabs open and stressing out about like everything that's going on in the world. All right. But it is like the biggest gift for LGBTQ i plus folk because like we like there's like the virtual queer space, which is like the first queer space that we've like had from my understanding historically of like, anyone across the globe as long as your government isn't watching what you're doing, you have a space to like be and so that's a huge gift. And so for me, my coming out started on AIM, AOL in summation, or like, it started with like me being on like, chats with friends, and like talking for six hours after school and being like, I need to tell this person I need to tell this person after like, three hours being like, like just typing. So I have something to tell you that that dot dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, and then being like, oh, okay, and me being like Tata Tata, Tata, Tata. I think I'm getting period, and then sitting and waiting and waiting and waiting for their reply, just like, and then be like, okay, cool. Most part for the most part, they're like, Okay, cool. Or, or at the time, it was a lot of Oh, really? I don't see you that way. Because there's like, mostly like to stray people, right? I got very good at presenting. Like, I got very good at masking. And so these days, not so much these days is such a huge compliment, where people are like, oh, yeah, you're like a gay. Yeah, for my guests. Thank you. I am I've worked really hard at like presenting in a way that like, feels organic to me. Yeah. That isn't for me a performance. Yeah, and so it was on a like, instant messenger for a while. And then after, like messaging someone, if I saw them in school the next day, like, we would have to talk about it. Or I would feel compelled to talk about it. And so that the first like, five or six were like, online, and then I got

good enough feedback. Like, I'm still alive. I'm still here. No one's hurt me. Let me start telling people in person. Yeah. And it was mostly just like telling people here and there when it came up in conversation. If queer identity came up, it would be like, you know, I am that right? That would usually be my go to like, when people talked about gay people. I'm like, you know, I am that right? And they would be like, like full exorcist headspin. Like, you are? Great time for you to figure out how you feel about me. And you know that.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 22:34

Wow. And how did the majority of people in your world at that time respond? When you would reply in that way?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 22:42

Yeah, I think um coming out, because every every time, it's like, if there are young people or people who are like new to the coming out process, it's constants, it is never and it's not like you come out once. And never again, really everyone knows I'm wearing a constant design all the time. And so it's this constant reminder, that, like you're about to like, learn who people how people really feel about you. Like at least part of you, it's like a very quick like a five check. It's very quick, like, just like, drop it in the room, like, hey, I'm interested, like, I have a partner, hey, I'm into, or hey, my pronouns, I use they them pronouns. And then like, how they responds, lets you know a lot about how they view the people at large. And they might love I my experiences, most people, they will love and appreciate most parts of me. And there are some people who can't love and appreciate that part of me, but will still be in relationship with me. And then there are people who, because of that part of me can't love and appreciate any of me. And it's it is it kind of just is what it is.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 23:55

Totally. And you mentioned something that really stood out to me that I also personally connect with and I think is true for a lot of folks of, you know, in early adolescence, when we start to either consciously or unconsciously start to discover our queerness there can be this active shift into being so aware of our party, our mannerisms, how we're presenting in the world, and really kind of being just in this state of conscious awareness around movement and sound and how you're speaking, and presenting and so much of our own work later is to look at what does it mean to unlearn that to find who is like the authentic way of being underneath and I'm curious about in your journey kind of on the other side of coming out, coming more into yourself, what does that look like in addressing kind of these scripts of masking yourself and of perhaps of toxic masculinity or whatever those ways of being word that you are embodying, like, what does that look like for you?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 24:57

Yeah, that's a good question. It has been like A deep process I find for me like to like I described earlier, like being neurodivergent. I'm also of Jewish backgrounds but wasn't raised by my Jewish side of the family. And so I've done a lot of work of like, recognizing that, like a

defense tactic of Jewish folk, when they moved to the United States was also to like assimilate. Like there's like a really strong assimilationism. Same with my account, like my mom's family is Italian, my dad's family's Ukrainian, Jewish. And so they came here, and we're like, we're going to be as like American as possible, whatever that meant to them. And so there is like, in taking off one mask of discovery that there's like, there's so many different ways to mask. Wow, yes, at this point, I kind of see it as like, we use the language of masking as like something you can take on and off. But I'm wondering if it's like, kind of almost like, like how genders performance and like, like RuPaul says, like all clothing, his drag is like, we just kind of put on whichever version, like we're like, I go in my closet, and I pull out like the outfit of like, my energetic outfit that's like, this is like me in the gay bar. Like, I'm gonna, like be a little like, I'm gonna just like come a bit like different, you know, I'm gonna be a little bit more like, yes, like, I'm gonna, like, bring in a bit more. And then when I'm like surrounded by like, sis hetero men, I like might not bring that as much. That's just kind of how I navigate and show up as I often adapt. Like, that's my survival strategy is I have to like adapt and pivot a bit. And some people like Don't, don't do that. They just are I am who I am in every setting. And you have to adjust and deal with it. And so I think the the friction comes and like when, when your identity, and your survival strategy is not like, supported by the space you're in. And so if my survival strategy is to like, adapt, and like, that's not what's working in this space, like people are like, like being like, why are you acting different? That's like, a friction, right? Because people want me to be a certain way. And then for people that are like one way all the time, they're often asked to adapt, and to like, mold themselves to fit the space and neither way is right or wrong, but it's this that like, that cultural pressure to fit into, right. That's like, the queer experience is like, we want you to be us, be us. Oh, you're not us. We're gonna just ask you louder to be us. Oh, you're not willing to be us. Now. We're gonna like grab some pitchforks. And we're gonna force you to be us. You're not willing to do that and it just keeps escalating right? Rather than like, at some point, maybe realize there is no being you. I can only we can only be us and you can only be you. But that rationality doesn't seem to exist for many. I kind of answered your question and kind of veered. I don't know.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 28:04

Oh, it answered like all the questions. I like just want to hear you speak all day long. It's just it's so beautiful to receive and so helpful. Like I so appreciate the way you conceptualize this experience. I feel like in this I'm learning so much even in real time as we're having this conversation. And like mental noting things for me to process more later. So I'm just so appreciative. Thank you. And then okay, I want to jump back also into your story to kind of follow your timeline. So you mentioned kind of your first coming out as gay in high school. I'm curious like what happened in like, the next chapter.

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 28:40

Totally. And it's so funny like I am so like, this is such like writer me of like, what I go into, like, when I start telling my story, I like always go into like, tangents. I'm gonna attribute this to being like a Virgo sign. Capricorn moon, like, I'm very much like, I'm gonna like just like, like, use like my story to like to have like a teaching moment that like no one, no one asked me to go there. But I'm naturally going to default. Let me like, tell you something. I'm very earthside. So people listening, prepare for more. So let me see if I can stay in my story. It's our stay in your story challenge. Yeah, so um, high school end of high school. So I fell in love with my best

friend who was a straight male. And I fell in love with him so hard. He was like my first I had had like, Baby crushes. And I also had like, some some woman crushes, which like, I was like, I'm gay. And then it's like, wait, but now I like women. Well, and then I had like a mini existential like, am I straight? Am I Am I Pan Am I what am I? And for many years, I said I was gay with a twist. That's how I framed it is like I'm gay. And I like yeah, sometimes I've been to women. And these days, not it's so interesting. What gender I identity being like, gayness doesn't exist if gender doesn't exist. And so I tend to be attracted to male bodies male jacent people, people who identify within masculine energy usually not always love me a femme too. And so in high school, I was deeply in love with my best friend deeply. And given some of the trauma history that I've implied. I did not I was like anxious avoidant attachment up the wazoo. I was obsessive, I was texting them constantly, and they were like, You need to back off. And this is before I like told them that I was into them. They're like, you're like not giving me space? Like, I don't know what's going on with you. And then I told them, and they're like, Well, I don't want to be like an asshole to you. But I can't like I'm not not answer you that way. And so that was a rough period of my life. Because it like brought up so much feeling and stuff around relationship that is still very challenging for me. And then in college, there's always that choice of like, once you're out and you move to a new space, like, see why go do it out again. Are we doing this? Are we doing this? I'm just starting college out? Is that what's happening? Or am I gonna like am I going to have like a little coming out my junior year senior year after graduation. And so I made it about a weekend and someone turned to me and was like, I ended up living with this person for three years. He turned to me and clearly had not he had like a couple gay friends in high school. But he just turned to me it was like, our UK. Like whispered it, like, like, like a secret like didn't want anyone like didn't want anyone hearing us like just like, are you know, I was like yes, I am. And they're like, cool. Just wanted to check. I was like, I don't know why you whispered it. Right? So weird. This person is an interesting year, but it's so they ended up being one of my close friends through all of college and I was basically out of college as like a gay identity at the time identified as a gay man. And

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 32:33

how was that how was being out of college for you?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 32:37

It was pretty good. I, I didn't really meet that many other queer folk until the end of my college experience. When I started veering into the performing arts, I went to college to study Psych. And was like, because I really just wanted to understand the insanity inside of my family. And inside of myself, in many ways, and so for me, it was like I had to work, I had to focus on figuring out my life. And so there wasn't really much like relating to queer people because they didn't seek them out. And that the college I went to, it was the type of college where most queer folk were in the arts, if they were out, and there were a few people who were out in my psych program, but not many. And it was when I was in the arts, that it was like, floodgates open, let's connect with people. But I still didn't have like, the sexual experiences in college, mostly from like a fear. And like, a lot of shame that I've come to realize is like, intergenerational family, open family history of sexual trauma entered, like, like, my dad is a sexual abuse survivor. His siblings are and so I had a lot of internalized stuff that I didn't realize I had, because my dad didn't do anything to me. But I inherited like the fear in his body and the fear and my mom's body, you know. And so in college, I would have I feel a sense of attraction,

and then this intense, like, you're unsafe repulsion, and I thought it was purely from my queer Sham, and then I've dealt with a lot of the queer Sham. And there's still this stuff here. That's really like parental and so I think there's this belief I've come across some people like because I'm open, that means I'm like, having sex all the time. And that means that I'm like, just this sexually liberated being and it's like, no, we still live in America, America is still a messed up place. For sexuality. I'm not having sex that often and when I am I'm usually having like, freak outs during and after. And I have to be like, really mindful of who I partner with because like, I know it's gonna happen and I have to talk with them about it. And not everyone's down for that. Some people are Some people like us a lot, and that's fine. And so after college, I didn't have my first. Like, I didn't have my first kiss until I was 24 I didn't have because I was what do they call it a gold gold star gaze where like you don't you don't have any physical connection with the expected gender identity. Yeah, and so I didn't have any physical experiences until I was 24. And then once I did, I was like, Oh, this is this is great. This is amazing. I love being queer. I love being able to explore with like other people in this way. Because it for me, it's like when I see like, I'm gonna like be like really gay with you right now. Like the streets when the streets talk about sorry, straight people are listening, but I have to call you who you are. When the straights talk about like relationship, it to me feels so narrow and rigid. And very, like men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, even people my own age, and not some, some are sexually liberated, most of whom are poly, but my like marriage loving, monogamous folk have a very specific view. And I'm like, You're in one aisle of the grocery store, like, and when you're queer, it's like defaults. You have the whole grocery store to like, I'm gonna like go over here and I'm gonna get some spinach because it's healthy. And then I'm gonna go to the snack aisle, and then I'm gonna go, and like, you know, I'm gonna mix peanut butter with Serato because like, I saw someone do that once and it sounds disgusting. But let's try it. You know? That, to me is like what queer? Like, relating can be like, it's messy. It's a full shopping cart. It's expensive. But it's so worth it.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 36:54

I love this metaphor. Oh my gosh, yes. Totally, totally. Well, okay, wait. So like, walk me back to like, first entering the grocery store, like those experiences like so for so many of us, like, who have our first sexual experiences with our desired gender later in life? Perhaps. It can be like, equal parts exhilaration, then like also fear and shame. Like I hear I hear that in your story. Just curious. Yeah. What was that like for you?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 37:25

Yeah, um, my first time was really interesting, because I had a really good friend at the time, who they're best friends. So my friends, friends, and I met at a party and we were kind of like flirting. But we both were like, at stages in our career development, where we're like, we didn't know how to like, there's that like, Koi game of like, like we've learned. So I've learned for so many years, like mask that it's now like, I have to, like, ask you out, like, I have to, like, I have to initiate with you when I've been like hiding in fear. And it's like that, like fear of harm shows up when I'm like, with someone new, who I'm attracted to have like, like, the fear of rejection is like escalated to like the nth degree of like, if you reject me, like, it's not just like, a rejection of like, like, on the scale of like, yeah, like, you're not intimate. It's also like, you are not into me as a queer being, which means that I am wrong. It like can spiral into like the Hall of shame, right? Like you can like live in the Hall of shame forever. I call it the Hall of shame, because it's

place I like to go to and stay in for a really long time and just like not leave. So I can like go into the hall of shame when I'm like, attracted to someone because I'm afraid of them rejecting me. And so we were like, kind of flirting really, really cool. I spent the whole night talking to each other. And neither one of us gave a clear indicator of like, let's do something. And so my friends, I'll just call her B for the sake of this story, because I don't want to name names. But B invited me to we'll call him Dave be invited me to Dave's place to stay over for the weekend, because that's a thing they would do. And this was when I was still living in Westchester, Dave lived in New York, in the city and Queens. And so we went to Dave's place and we like hung out and they all like pre-games because we were gonna go to the gay bars and Hell's Kitchen, and I don't drink but I was like down for the down for the party. And so we leave to go to the bar and Dave comes up to me and grabs my hands and holds my hand. And I'm like, I've never had my handshakes before. What and then we're just like sitting on the subway holding hands. And then we're like walking to the bar holding hands. And then I can't remember which bar it was. There's this bar that I think it's names change, but it's two storey bar. And we stood in the middle of the staircase for four hours make it out, like people had to, like, crawl over us around us, like really like, really, we're making out and I'm like, I'm, like ready for more than just making out if you know what I mean, I don't know how sexually explicit, I feel like getting in this moment because I can go there. But I really wanted to, like, take him and leave the bar and go back to his place and ditch the friends who were staying over, right. But that did not happen. We instead of I instead got the most intense case of blue balls in the history of the planet. And was like, I didn't know what it was. And like, told everyone because I didn't know what it was. And they're like, Babe, we know what's happening. You want to fuck him? And that's fine. We'll go back. So you could do that. And we went back. And we kind of I mean, Dave just kind of made out for a bit because they were really intoxicated. So we tried stuff, but it wasn't. It wasn't the right vibe. Because they were they were also really uncomfortable with like, it wasn't until they started drinking at time that they felt safe. Yeah, you show any physical affection towards me. And so that's like the rest of that. So there's like a whole rest of that story. That's like, not where I want to go in this moment. But yeah, so that was like my first experience. And I fell in love with him immediately. And then three weeks later, we were we were, we're done. And as often happened like that the second adolescence, right, like, this was my middle school. Like, we're boyfriend, girlfriend, but it's like, we're boyfriends. And then a week later, it's like, no, we're not. We just we just like we're into each other that one night. Great. Yeah. And so that was that was that that was probably, yeah, that was kind of my first time.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:51

Wow. Yeah, I mean, that that totally. We all have those first experiences that do feel like this adolescent relationship experience that we never got, that we have in our 20s 30s 40s whenever that is, so I can just like, my heart is just I can feel that experience, because I've had that own experience on my end, too. And oh, it's like messy and liberating and scary and confusing, and all of it. And yeah, so I'm curious, like you were talking about second adolescence. And I really hear that as part of it. I'm curious, like, what else like when you think about this idea of second adolescence, in your story? You've I've heard I have heard so much about healing and about kind of growing through these experiences you didn't get to have and which is all part of the second adolescence experience. What else comes to mind for you in your story about what happened next in your own second adolescence?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 42:42

Yeah, yeah. Um, for me, like I talked earlier, about, like, kind of like, like the stuff relating to sex and sexual, like, intergenerational sexual trauma. And so for me, it's been like, really, for a number of years. And I would say, even up until like, four days ago, even probably later today, like I'm still in it, like syndrome, Adolescence is still ongoing. Totally. We're all works in progress. So, for me, a real challenge is like, feeling as though, like, a huge part of like, queer identity is like gender, how we present gender wise, how we feel gender wise, how we show up sexually, who were attracted to, and for me, what for many years, sex, that I have such a complicated relationship with it on top of, like, like, like, when I when I talk to queer men, especially, I often feel so outside of relating to queer men, because it's like, I know gay men that like they talk like straight man, I like how they have sex. It's like I had I had this many partners this week, I have this many partners the week before. And I'm over here, like, I need to, like spend like seven days with you before I feel safe. Yeah. And I often feel an otherness that as I'm like, engaging in second adolescence, I'm realizing like everyone has their way of navigating. And it's like, I don't mean to have shame for being slightly different than other people, right?



44:17

But the beginning of that process was like, Ah, I'm a defective gay because I can't have sex. Like I'm a defective gay because I freak out whenever I like, I get really obsessive whenever, like, something awkward happens during sex. But but above ABA, you know, and now it's kind of like I've gotten to a point of, okay, I know this is gonna happen. I know the types of people I partner with aren't necessarily the best at being in communication around this stuff. I love I'd like my my biggest turn on is emotional unavailability. Because like how I joke and I'm working on that like I'm like, I'm like speaking into existence like No, I, what's really hot is someone who like will have like will make like a before care and aftercare plan. Like that's who's hot to me as someone who like on a first date is like what's your aftercare plan? That's like really hot to me. Um, and so yeah, so second adolescence is like a lot of like, there's nothing wrong with me. Oh, there's another thing that I think there's something wrong with me. Oh, wait, there's nothing wrong with me. And it's, it's not that I'm sick. It's that I'm a fish swimming in toxic waters. Hmm, I am like the ocean is polluted. We keep throwing plastics in it. And as a fish, I'm like, why can I breathe? What's wrong with me? Do I have defective lungs? Do I need an asthma inhaler? It's like, no, the water is disgusting. Like, that's the world we grew up in. And so for me and my sexual identity, it's really recognizing like I'm a product like this is this is related to environment. This is related to environment. This is related to environment, it's related to culture. It's related to the systems that are at play of like internally, like because I have like a white body, I have a male body. So it's like internalized white supremacy, internalized patriarchy, these are all things I have to like, figure out how to filter through my body, and like purge. And that's like a lifelong, a lifelong second adolescence, that's like, I'm gonna be a teenager until the day I die. Which is great. Because there's a little part of you has to say on I think, even if we are also ageist I'm working through like ages and myself of like, fearing getting older. And it's like, no, I get to both be like the wise elder and like the childish kid in the same body at the same time. Because I have all of it, I get to be all of it. And then we were talking before this interview started, I mentioned how like, I'm going through my third, fourth, fifth adolescence, because my gender awakening of identifying as gender expansive, non binary, which is like very new and very fresh. So I can't really speak that much on like, like, I'm still too in it to maybe even like articulate it. But yeah, it's just been like a real, like entering the matrix, or leaving the matrix moment of like, realizing that so much of what I was taught, was not meant for me to learn. So many lessons that I've received, were not meant for me, they were meant for the boy who's always going to be a boy and is never going to question being a

boy and is always gonna love women like that all the lessons I was given were meant for that person. And it's like, where are the lessons for me. And so now it's really intentionally like being in space with people who are like in the journey and are figuring it out, because there's no blueprint. And so we get to build the blueprint together.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 47:55

"What I was taught was not meant for me to learn." Yeah, that's it. And then yeah, as you're speaking to No, yeah, we have to unlearn what we've been taught and then create space, both internally, and also surrounding ourselves in community to really to learn what's most true for us. And to have that be valid. And to have that be free of the shame that these other lessons that we just like soaked up as kids brought with it. I'm like, buzzing from this conversation. This is just really powerful. And I feel like I need a journal after this. I'm so appreciative of so this is fantastic. And I get any, you were alluding to kind of this more recent chapter of getting more clarity on your gender identity and how you're still in it. And curious if you could just speak to a little bit of I mean, in coming out, it's continuous of course, but like what was like that beginning of getting clear for your own self, and then also perhaps letting other people into that experience?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 49:02

Yeah, I find, for me, it's, as you can tell, I love metaphors. I'll probably drop a few more. Because it's like just how my brain works. I'm having this like image of like, the roots of like a tree. Like when a plant is growing, you don't see the tree burst through the ground for quite some time. But it's like, it's like laying the foundation beneath the surface, you know, like, so like the seed of my gender awakening, like the roots for spreading and growing. Before, like anything appeared on the surface, probably for a number of years. There was like always this question, I felt safest in presence of feminine femme spaces. And there was always part of me that felt unable to access Femme and the way I wanted to because I was man, and I felt that to be man. I didn't necessarily believe that like, man, like it meant anything like the Label Label man. Indigenous men and people attribute what they do to it because I believe that gender is a social construct. And so inside of the boundaries of social construction, it was like, there's something not right here, there's something off. And it's like, what is it, and I kept, like, trying to, like make sense of like, how I navigated space and how I felt in relationship to gay men. And I didn't have many transgender non conforming folks in my life in my mid 20s in my life when I was 2425. So it's like, around like sis queer people. I feel still, like there's something missing. And so during the pandemic, because we all had time that we got to use however we wanted and so a lot of that for me has been like inner work internal internal internal work, like deep deep down like, like, like Alice in Wonderland level rabbit holes, like to the point where like, I'm with the caterpillar, and like, the caterpillar is like, Who are you and I'm like, I have no idea. I'm in the middle of my Saturn Return right now. And like, that's like a period that is like all about like, kind of things being ripped away and pulled away to expose, like what you like you could have learned in the past 30 years. And it's like, I've been completely ripped away. And there is nothing here. I'm so deep in my Saturn Return that I don't even know my gender identity anymore. I don't know what's happening. And it was just like, confetti, it just all the sudden woke up, which is like, where am I confusion, like no sense of understanding? In my entire everything, everything made no sense. I would eat food and be like, Why am I eating this? I would go to the bathroom. Like, why am I going to the bathroom this way? And part of it was I

was writing a screenplay about someone who's non binary. And when I started writing the character, I was like, why I'm not on? I'm not non binary. Why am I writing? For someone outside my lived experience? It just felt like it was like just happening in a way that was like, what why? Why is it? Why is this carrot like trying to make sense of I've never written a non binary character before. All of a sudden, like, so vividly clear, this character is not binary. And as I was working on the scripts, I worked on it for like four or five months, it was like, I did so much work around like, like, on my own of like really having to sit with like this characters gender identity, because it was really me doing the work for myself through a character and figuring out like, wait, I'm writing this character to make sense of gender because I'm trying to make sense of gender. Oh, shit. And then that's when like, the floodgates opened and I like woke up and I was like, Googling, what, how do I know I'm gender non conforming? And the first thing that comes up is if you're asking this question, you probably have a good sign. Like, you wouldn't be asking if you probably and so after about like, two weeks, I was like, Alright, I've I've done this with being gay. Like I've this is like, I've been on this horse. I've been to this rodeo. I know what's happening. Let's just try it out and see how it feels. And if it doesn't feel right, great. Your sis amazing. Incredible. Glad we tried. And so I tried it out and I was like a heat day for like, a few weeks. And then it was like, Oh,



53:34

he doesn't work. He is just me hiding. And that like to diminish other people who's like, like pronoun, everyone's pronouns, right? Like I want to, I want to name like, your parents, your pronouns don't have anything to do with your gender identity and your gender expression. They are how you want to be referred to. So for me, it's like he evokes a feeling that is off, but they my body doesn't get triggered. My body doesn't respond. My body's like, okay, yep. Uh huh. Cool. They, and so I shifted entirely to them. And now it's like, oh, God, how do I contend with like, people could get the gay thing but they can't get the gender non conforming thing. It's just being with that is like where I'm at in the challenge of like, how much do I want to advocate for myself at any particular moment? In any space? And it's like, who this feels like coming out on overdrive. This feels like 15 year old me on overdrive like who it's been a while since I've been here. But I'm like feeling grateful to be in this question. Because it really allows me to like be in space with my fellow queer people in a way that's like far more powerful than I used to be. And really like be in relationship in a deeper way across a much like, like talking about grocery store. Now I'm in like the mall like now I'm like, Oh, wait, I can leave the grocery store and go into Home Depot. Or I could go into the video game store or I could go into the clothing store like and then like, there might be another level of it's like I leave the mall and like I'm just on Earth and like anything, you know, like it just like is continuous like, I don't know I love how I'm using like a metaphor that's like so like, like Americana like this the mall the monoliths of capitalism, right? But there's some equivalent of like, Yes, coming out of the cave or Plato's Republic. Yeah.



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 55:27

I love the metaphor. I love it. Yeah. And I think it's really powerful and it provides just such a good framework. And then that plus I keep coming back to when the phrase of a fish swimming in toxic water. And I feel like I hear even with your experience with gender and in this phase of kind of navigating spaces and having people know your full self and dealing with other people's either ignorance or what have you of the toxic waters that still exist. And but I hear you kind of

creating both space and community but also internally recognizing Yeah, like, there's nothing wrong with the fish, I'm swimming, I'm doing the right thing. It's this external stuff that that is designed to get in my way. And I see you kind of swim it past that. I'm just like, blown away. I'm sure we haven't gotten into all of it. I know, I have to let you go into this a little bit. But like, it sounds like so much healing work has happened in your story. And that's so much of like, what it is to be a queer person. It is like this constant healing, right, because of that, that toxic water that we're all swimming in. And I just feel really appreciative that you are opening up your story to people to get to kind of experience because there's so much healing that happens from listening to other people who've done it. And both kind of who have illustrated where we want to be where we've gone. And it's just really, I feel really touched, that you have shared your story. And I feel so selfishly honored, even if I don't share this with anybody, which I'm gonna just like, I got to experience that. And so I just want you know, like, what a gift it feels like, on my end. And yeah, on the note of your story, was there anything else that wanted to be a part of this conversation that hasn't joined so far?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 57:13

Hmm. Love that question. I feel like what comes to mind is just like, there's a reason why like queer queer folk, like dance like culture, like bar scene club dance culture is so like, important my experience. So the queer like queerness and like those spaces, and no, historically, it's because those were like the spaces where we were safest. And I think there's also something about like, the way we live out, like the fantasy, the way I live out, like the fantasy of like, my healing and acceptance. And for me, it's like, if I can move my body the way I want to move my body that's like for me, and like, that's kind of able bodied isms. But if I can be in my body, or occur in my body in a way that I feel safe, and occur my body in a way that I feel is me, if I'm clear as like, this is me, I feel like so good. And so for me, a huge part of my journey is like, being okay with the times where it's not good because I there's such a desire for comfort and are such a desire for like, I like again, like the lessons I learned were not mine, like I was taught to expect that the world would treat me a certain way expect certain things from like being like the the privilege of being a male the privilege of being white, the privilege of like, my dad's family's class background is different than my mom's even if I didn't grew up with them, like able bodied privilege growing up in New York, like so speaking English, being a citizen, the United States, like all of these aspects of identity I was taught meant that my body would occur in space in a certain way. And so because my body doesn't occur in space, always and that way, a huge important thing for me is like learning to be okay with like, the discomfort and the shame and the grief and, and like really, like lean into it. I really like spend time with it, like I've been going through like I'm like coming out of like a six week long, like heavy depression. And I like couldn't figure out what it was about, and he couldn't figure out what was going on. And it was like when I finally just like laid with it, and like let it speak. It like didn't have to stay at me and so for me like this has been like when I saw like I was in the middle of like my shame spiral. And Instagram was like recommended second adolescence podcasts. And I'm like, What is this? And I was like, this is literally what I'm dealing with right now. Instagram, how do you the algorithm knows me so well? Like because I have I don't think you and I have like any shared connection or any like background like I don't know, like I this is my first time speaking with you. I've never met you before, right Um, and so for me, it's like, Oh, my God is space where I could just come on. And if I want to for an hour talk about my shame and my trauma and then just like, leave it amazing. Ah, like, yes, let's do it. And so for me, it's like really like, the more I resist, the harder it is, in my experience of like, when I really am like, I hate my identity, I don't want this identity. Well, Brandon, too bad. This is your identity. Let's just like let it be and like, let your hate like your hate has it space. Like that's not going to just magically, you're not going

to magically go from like, I'm afraid of being gay, or I'm afraid of what it means to have a gender nonconforming identity given like what's happening in Florida, and the rest of the world, and like to go from that to immediately the next day being like, I love my identity. I love everything about me, like, no, there are days when queer people are like, tired of being queer. Like it's real. And so, in those days, when I'm tired, like I try as best I can to allow myself to rest and I can't allow myself to rest. Or if like, systems that be won't allow me to rest. And I'm like, Okay, this is where I am. And that comes from like, really listening to like, I'm thinking of nap ministry. I'm thinking of Sonya, Renee Taylor, I'm thinking of Asian Marie Brown. I'm thinking of my friend Alex Simon Fox, I'm thinking of like people who have been living it for a while. And so when I'm in doubt, I go look for the people who've been living it. And listen, you know, I think that's yeah, I think that's

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 1:01:43

when it strikes me that you are becoming or you are one of those people, for folks to like, I am so excited to continue following and learning from you. And this conversation feels like just the beginning for me as someone who's engaging with your words and your presence, and I'm tripping out about how you we got connected. I didn't know that. That's so of course, and it's just feels very, there's another entity that's connected us, which is quite cool. And Kismet for sure. Yeah. Wow. Ah, okay. Well, I know I want to hang out with you all day. But I gotta let you go, unfortunately. But if folks wanted to follow up with you, follow you your work kind of continuing in touch what's a good place to direct them?

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 1:02:31

Totally. Um, I've been working on my website for like 9000 years, and it's still not up. So right now the best place is on Instagram, I can give that to you. So it'll be in the show notes. But it's @BrandoTheOriginal. I'm quite a mess on Instagram, I'm, I tried to be as like free spirited and fully, fully like not like, like this, like did like this, like whatever wisdom might be gleaned from this on Instagram, I am like I am that. And then I'm also like, I'm gonna post ridiculous memes. And, like, my, my stories have lately been just me like ranting about playlists I've been making for no reason. I'm just gonna be fully me and like holding people, six people are gonna be into it, and everyone else is gonna be like, Why do I follow you again?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 1:03:19

It's all connected

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 1:03:23

You know, it's all connected. And so if you want to hear about experiences of me, wishing I could afford a \$20 pair of pants that have horses covering them, and instead I just make a playlist of grief about it. That's also on my Instagram. Awesome. That is my latest stories that I've been doing. Because I'm at my core, like a weirdo artist that just happens to sometimes say metaphors that resonate with people. And I have no idea what I'm doing, but not No one

does so. So. If you'd like to not know what we're doing together, you can follow me at Brando The original on Instagram. But it's like the only place right now Facebook is not really a place I'm on anymore. So cool. And tick tock girl. I'm like I can't do it.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 1:04:14

I haven't stepped in there. I know. I know. Well, gosh, Brandon again. I mean, I feel like I've like thrown all my cards on the table of how much I've appreciated this conversation. I'm gonna leave them there because I have and thank you. This has been such a treat. And I look forward to staying in touch as we go from here.

B

Brandon Michael Rumaker (they/them) 1:04:34

Yeah. Cool. Thank you for this space

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 1:04:44

Hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to secondadolescencepod.com for show notes and more. And you can connect further by following the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). If you're interested in being a future guests on the show and you want to come on Then share about your own second adolescence visit secondadolescencepod.com/beaguest 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 and your day, go on out there and keep doing things that would make younger you absolutely thrilled. That is what it's all about. All right, take good care.