

Second Adolescence - Ep. 01: Second Adolescence as...the Dec...

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Ish Ruiz (he/him)



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello, and welcome to the very first episode of the Second Adolescence podcast. I'm your host Adam James Cohen. Now you might be wondering, okay, who is this person in my ear? What's this thing about what's happening here? These are all good questions. And so before going any further into our first episode and conversation with our first guest, let me pause and give a little backstory to both who I am and what this thing called Second adolescence is all about. Like many queer people, I didn't come out and start pursuing dating and relationships with my desire tender until I was an adult. I navigated middle school, high school and college in the closet. And it wasn't until just two months shy of my 25th birthday that I went on my first date with a man I'm 34 now so this was nine years ago. And Holy smokes. That first date and the initial years that followed of pursuing dating men and figuring out how to live in my queerness were the most exhilarating and terrifying and messy, beautiful and awkward experiences of my life. I felt like I had left the world I knew in the closet for one that was foreign, and way more complex than I could comprehend. One dark early morning in May 2013, found 25 year old me eight months into dating men and newly living in San Francisco typing away at my computer screen. In response to the constant unrest and unease I felt at the time I developed a morning ritual of writing out the mess that was my mind into my journal side note, my journal was an never ending google doc lovingly entitled, I feel fucking that in all caps, it was best. But so yeah, I was writing about how out of control I had been feeling in response to having the most deep, unrelenting crush on another person I had ever experienced in my entire life. I thought about him constantly wondering if he was thinking about me, too. I anxiously jumped whenever my phone would chime in both hopes and fear that it was him. I stayed up late at night, dreaming about holding his hand and what it would feel like to kiss his lips and what our life could be like as boyfriends. And then whenever I would return to reality, I would feel the severe stress of wondering, Oh, does he feel the same way about me as I do about him? What do I do? It was just like a constant state of exhilaration and anxiety and impulsivity and erratic emotional flux. I very much felt like an adolescent experiencing love and longing for the first time. And so I was telling my journal, all of this, and then the next line that came out of me was this. I'm 25. But feel like I'm 13 three exclamation points. And then I feel like I'm going through adolescence, again, another adolescence, second adolescence, and then I froze, pulled back

from my computer screen and just stared at those words. Second adolescence. Something about those words just struck me to my core. It felt so true. It was what I had been feeling ever since I went on my first date with the man the summer prior, I felt this nonstop impulsivity, exhilaration, fear and confusion. I felt awkward and insecure. You know, this deep insecurity of self that comes from not fully understanding who you are, and not being sure if you are okay with who you are. I was a queer man who still didn't feel great about being a queer man. And it spent so many years in hiding that it didn't really even know who I was as a queer man. I felt parts of myself that were so severely underdeveloped, particularly when I compared myself to my cisgender straight peers of the same age. I was 25 Yes, but very much felt like I was 13 As I was navigating romantic and sexual relationships for the first time. And so I stared at those two words, second adolescence for several more moments before suddenly feeling the urge to move the cursor to delete the lowercase s to then make a capitalized. I did the same thing with the A also. And then I saw it. Second Adolescence. Suddenly, with the help of capital letter legitimacy. I had a name for what I was feeling. I was going through a Second Adolescence. From that moment on, I began using second adolescence as a way to help me make sense and meaning out of what I was going through using tools and space gained through my graduate program to become a therapist. Oh, yep. So I know, I was in grad school, I started grad school to become a therapist at the exact same time I started dating men literally within a month of each other. And I also had the time started my own personal psychotherapy. And so it was a wild time to be doing all three of those at once but from both my experience in my personal psychotherapy and also in my graduate program, which placed so much emphasis on the budding therapist to get super clear on who they are, how they are and why they are I gained these tools and space to really start thinking about second adolescence. And it became an evolving framework for me a scaffolding to use and continuously build upon as I fumbled through the messiness that became navigating dating and relationships with men, and trying to find myself as a queer person. And then around me, I also started to hear other queer peoples talking about feeling as though they too are going through something like a second adolescence, that they too felt underdeveloped, that they too fell behind and stunted. It wasn't just me. At the time, I thought, what we and what I needed out of second adolescence was simply to gain the experiences I missed out on in my first adolescence. You know, the first kiss is the handholds, the sex, the falling in love, the heartbreaks, all these things that my peers got to experience in middle school, in high school and in college. But as the years went on, I gradually came to realize that second adolescence wasn't just about gaining experiences, I also needed to look at the chronic shame that was inflicted on to me from growing up in an anti queer world, and then heal from that. And as a psychotherapist, I started seeing this experience in many of my clients over the years as well, and realize that the concept of second adolescence was really applicable to their lives, too. And so that leads me here and starting this podcast now. I really think conversations about this experience are so important. On each episode of this podcast, we will hear the story of a new queer person hearing about their experience growing up, discovering their identity coming out, and then what their second adolescence has looked like, each person story will be a little different. Some may have experiences that different from yours. And some may say things that absolutely give voice to what you went through or currently going through how all these things happen. And that we can all continue to grow and community with one another and continue expanding our awareness of what life and queerness and healing can be for folks, because that's what the show is all about. And so that brings us here to this very first episode of the show, I am so pumped to have you here with us. On this episode, you're going to hear a really interesting conversation I had with a man named ish, who shared about what his experience was like growing up as a gay boy in Puerto Rico and within the Catholic Church, and how both of these parts of his experience interacted with the queerness he discovered within him a bit later on. And he shares about how his second adolescence really ended up involving this process of

deconstructing and reconstructing his belief systems and how this ultimately guided him to a path of figuring out how to integrate within him, his faith, his Puerto Rican culture, his sexuality. And yeah, it was just such a great conversation, so I'm excited to invite you into it. After the episode, feel free to head on over to second adolescents pod COMM For show notes and more, or connect further with the show on Instagram at second adolescents pod. Okay, that's enough for me for now. Please enjoy the conversation. Thanks for being here. Great, well, welcome to the second adolescence Podcast. I'm so excited to have you here and dive into this conversation like this. And I guess just to start us off before going anywhere, I'd like to invite guests to introduce themselves just to give a little context for who the person is behind the voice. So I know the who are you as a big question, but who are you?

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 08:28

Well, that's a good question. Hi, my name is ish. I am a gay man. I am also I live in San Francisco. I am an educator and I am originally from Puerto Rico. I come to this podcast after a journey of trying to understand how to juggle mesh synthesize three different parts of my life, which is my identity as a gay man, my identity as a Hispanic Puerto Rican man, and my identity as a Catholic. And I look forward to sharing some of those experiences with you.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:58

Absolutely. Oh, I'm eager to dive into all of that. And I guess starting there, how did your story begin growing up in Puerto Rico? Sounds like growing up within the Catholic Church. Like talk to me about that. What was that like?

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 09:10

Yeah, so as you know, and most people might imagine, Hispanic culture is very closely tied to Christianity, specifically Puerto Rico. It is Catholic Christianity. And I grew up in that I grew up with a very vibrant Hispanic culture with that includes food. It includes music language includes some social roles, some social expectations, very gendered. So the word machismo often gets thrown around with regard to gender in Hispanic cultures. But yes, the word machismo doesn't really directly translates to sexism, but more like male ism, like this idea that the man has to be the dominant provider, taking care of the wife and so that deeply gendered culture was a part of my upbringing. And a key part of the Puerto Rican culture I grew up in was the Catholic faith. So even the cool kids at school on Sundays had to go to church with their families, it was as much a staple of the culture there, as you might imagine, so I went to Catholic schools, I went to a Catholic all Boys High School in which those a gender expectations were very much solidified. But at the same time, this Catholic faith was explored a little bit more deeply. I personally particularly also enjoyed both my Puerto Rican culture, and also my Catholic faith, like I was very, these two things were important to me. And so while sometimes it seems that some people experience oppression, and as a result, they decide, oh, well, I'm gonna abandon move away from this component of my life. For me, it was a little bit more, less black and white, more gray. I both loved and also felt oppressed by both of these components in my life. But yes, when I was around 12 years old, the students in my old boy school, my classmates, were passing around a pornographic magazine with a naked woman. And that's when I realized, hmm, we might like different things. And I started getting the idea that I might be gay. So that

was the moment you were kind of seeing your peers kind of having a certain reaction to this image of a woman and you were not me. Yes, that was a very blatant, poignant moment, for sure. I think I had crushes when I was little, I remember having a crush on Luke Skywalker. And having a crush on one of my friends from grade school. Nothing tied to a sexual attraction until it was very explicit through porn that I was like, Oh, wow, these these boys are into this particular body. And I am not. And that's when and that eventually started presenting some problems, as you might imagine.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 11:39

Yeah. Cuz I guess pause like before that moment, had you been exposed to the idea of being gay or queerness? Like, what? What do you recall for you prior to 12? Seeing or learning about what it means to be queer?

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 11:53

Great question. There. Were some touchstones here and there. Number one, I remember watching Billy Elliot, the movie, and my dad saying something along the lines of ah, these gays have been going at these facts and then walking around one way or the other. And also, before I continue to speak about my family, I do want to set a dislike something very clear. It's like my family and our great term right now. They're wonderful. I love them. They're my number one. supporters, and I love them dearly. But the journey there was not always great. But yes, returning to the story. Another instance that I remember very vividly was my parents like to throw these parties for my dad's employees. And they hired this man who was an event planner. They called him a decorator, he basically like decorated the whole space and stuff, but about also kind of more was an event planner slash decorator. They called him behind his back in a bottle, which is literally translates to the duck, but that's what people call gay people in Puerto Rico bottles. All right. So it's like, like saying, like the fairy or yeah, alright, look at those cream puffs or something like that, like, in the same way that work bottle was, is used to refer like, like, we quack around and have feathers, you know?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 13:04

Is that how it came to be? Because we crack around and have feathers?

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 13:07

if you think about it that way. It's kind of in that in that direction. Yeah. Okay. So my parents called this man and bado. And he was very flamboyant. And he also unfortunately died of AIDS. So I remember that this is like this man. I remember my family hired him interacted with him referred to him that way, he was ever like a part of the family a part of the group, they just kind of like used him for this one thing, which was make this space look beautiful, so that we can throw a party in it. And then when he contracted AIDS, I remember my mom would help bring some food or something like that when he was in the hospital. And he eventually died. And my parents didn't really talk about it that much. And then the last thing that I would say, which is something I was not aware of, until way later, was that I have an aunt who's a lesbian, and she

had a partner for like, 10 years before I came out. But I we always knew her as her next door neighbor slash best friend. And there was no indication whatsoever until years after I came out, my little brother was like, you know, Auntie is a lesbian. I was like, what she is. And I was very shocked by how much like our family like hid that from us that especially from because eventually my family did find out. So no, Yeah,

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 13:07

yeah, well, I mean, it sounds like an interesting experience within your family there. I hear a lot of love for people for both the family and then people in general with the example of your mom really wanting to offer care and offer food to this person that worked with them who was who's sick with AIDS. So I hear both kind of some either fear or unsure feelings about being gay, but also just wanting to be still be in relationship with people and care for folks. What are you What would you say kind of does that feel accurate as a description for your family? Or

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 14:51

I think that's an accurate description. I think when you look at something like Christianity, which my parents are a part of, you have these teachings against homosexual sexual and relationships from the same time you have these teachings about love thy neighbor and take care of the less fortunate. And so my parents in a way, were kind of doing both, they were definitely exhibiting some forms of homophobia and heterosexism, toward this man, but at the same time realizing that he was a part of the needy, and the vulnerable, then they felt like they needed to rise to the occasion and help in some ways. So yes, a complicated, complicated journey. There are many little stories here and there that I can share. i My mom had a gay friend when I when he was she was in high school and never talked about him until later. So my dad had like, a bunch of male friends. They're all very, like, very much like the good old boys. You know, my dad is named after my grandpa, and I'm named after my dad, there's this long tradition of like, passing on this masculinity. So there's all there's there's a lot more in here, but it's definitely complicated. And there are moments where, you know, I can tell like, my upbringing with regard to sexuality was never fully black and white.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 15:57

Yeah, absolutely. So then walk us back to Okay, 12 year old view, having that moment amongst your peers kind of seeing, okay, I feel a different thing than my peers what happened next?

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 16:09

What happened that the Catholic high school that I was in really did a great job of immersing us into our faith life. So I began to really deepening my spirituality. And what that did was it made me try to ignore suppress the idea that I might be gay, I figured first, oh, it's a face, it'll go away. Second, it's a sin. So I better not give this any more thought or fuel in any way. At one point, I had a girlfriend and there she told me she was a neighbor who told me that she found me attractive. So I was like, I'm just I'm just going to go ahead and go through these motions and the girl. And this reminds me of your program, the second adolescence, right? Because

certainly this repression, right, eventually led to a bursting of a gay identity in my 20s. That was very much repressed in my teens. And so yes, I'm in high school. And I that's what I begin to do. I begin to repress this identity, I begin to really focus more on my faith, and on living out the duty and the and the tradition that is that is bestowed upon me by my faith tradition and my culture. It wasn't until I met this one young man, his name was Alejandra was built before the Lady Gaga song, unfortunately. And I met this I met this young man, and he asked me very directly if I like boys, and I took a chance. And I said, Yes. How old were you at the time? This was me being 17. So this is maybe like five years of me either having girlfriends and pretending or repressing. And we started a relationship, we started dating. And that's the first time I allowed myself to feel these feelings that I had been so repressing, right? And the relationships started in a very innocent way. We I remember conversations like what do you like about me? And I was like, Well, I like your smile. And I like how you're nice. And it was looking back on that relationship was very young, very innocent, and very beautiful. But unfortunately, it wasn't. It was it was short lived. And that, because my parents found out that I was dating him. And they found out because they picked up a phone line and listened in on a conversation that I was having through the house phone. Yes, so unfortunately, sometimes one of the drawbacks of or one of the things that I that I guess I found myself pressed under him by in Hispanic culture was the lack of privacy. So you can imagine like a 17 year old starting to explore relationship, not not even a month old relationship, not even having the word side hadn't even admitted to myself that I'm gay. All I knew was that I liked this young man and that I felt attracted to him and I wanted to explore it, and suddenly was thrust into conversations about my sexuality that I didn't know how to answer. So my coming out was quite difficult. What happened was my dad came in and said, I listened to your phone conversation. And then I my response to that immediately was, I think I like boys. And then that led to a lot of yelling, and a lot of how dare you say something like that. And then the month after that I were constant fights about my sexuality, but also conversion therapy, my parents enrolled or not, it wasn't it wasn't anything boarded like these extreme movies like boy raised or anything like that. But it was definitely like going to therapy after school once a week in a therapist would tell me that if I continued on this path, that I would be on an irreversible journey, and that Jesus would not like that. And that I needed to find ways to move toward the path of heterosexuality. And I did that I tried. I tried that I returned to dating girls, I broke up with this young man. And I did that I was looking back on that experience was incredibly scarring and traumatic.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 19:39

Absolutely.

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Ish Ruiz (he/him) 19:39

And I remember a message I got a three fold message I got that still haunts me to this day, is because you're gay, you're going to go to hell. You will never find love and you will never be successful. And those things were very drilled into me like if you continue down this path, you will go to hell never find love and never be six And so to me, it is still, that's the three part voice that still rings in my head whenever I either experienced heartbreak or failure, or a hero or a religious leader saying something condemning toward LGBTQ plus people, I think of that voice. And it's relived so that my teens and my my sexuality were very difficult.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 20:20

I mean, gosh, I just want there's so many things I want to say first off, I mean, thank you for sharing all of that. I think so much of your experience that I think is going to be shared by a lot of folks, and particularly this last bit you just shared about, you know, essentially, we all have these core wounds that often get laid on to us at different points in our younger years, particularly in our adolescence that become our work to then throughout our life have to continue to unlearn and particularly for us queer folks, so much of that is shame based related to our identity, but And as you're speaking to, they can take so many different forms and be so piercing. And again, yeah, just thanks for sharing, because I think that piece is really relatable. It's heartbreaking.

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 21:03

Yeah, it is, it is. And a lot of my work in therapy, which I have been going to for, like four years now has been realizing how heartbreaking and exercising some compassion toward the younger part of me that never really got to have an adolescence and returning here to your to your program, right, having an adolescence like, and how difficult and traumatic that was for sure.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 21:26

Absolutely. I mean, that's the work sounds like you've been doing it of revisiting our younger selves, and offering the healing to them, offering the grieving with them to them, catching them when they're learning disbelief about themselves and helping them see there's a different way. And it's big work, but it's great. A lot of work. Yeah. It's like too much work. But no, it's such. It's such good work. Yeah, totally. Wow. Yeah. Okay, so then what happened after really going through this latter part of your adolescence, kind of forced into coming out before you were both ready to but also had fully made sense of what your identity was, sounded like that added a lot of friction in your experience with your family, and then going into conversion therapy. What happened next?

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Ish Ruiz (he/him) 22:12

Well, what happened as I graduated high school and went moved to the States, I moved to Ohio, but I moved to new progressive and welcoming school. And that gave me the opportunity to explore my sexuality without some of these voices. Some cool things that happened my first year, first I went to confession with a priest and I said, Father, I'm going to hell, because I'm gay. And the priest who was more progressive as a penance, right, the Catholic tradition has this idea that like you confess your sins, the priest in the name of God forgives you, but then gives you this penance, which is usually a set of prayers. And then you just kind of pray that it's your way to like, take something from this session, to say like, I'm going to continue to work on this, you know, so his penance was to educate myself as to what it means to be gay and what the Church teaches about and I remember being very shocked by that. I was like, why pretty sure. I know, like, I'm going to hell. But I've been told. And then I started reading a little bit more and know this idea that there's a difference between an orientation and an action, that the church has not condemned gay people, the Catholic Church makes room for people to to form their contents discern where God is calling them to live their life. And yes, well, the church

does have a strong teaching against things like activity and same sex marriage. It also has pretty strong teaching, on conscience, and on following God's call. And with that, deeper theology, I started really thinking about my faith in a different way. Those who are small seeds, right? Wow, I was not steeped in Hispanic culture. As a matter of fact, the university I was in was 98% White. So I didn't have some of those influences. I was I wasn't trapped in a culture that had a particular mentality about machismo and all that stuff. Not that Ohio was that much more progressive, but at least it was different enough for me to be able to realize like, because I found myself in a different culture, I was now able to understand that I was in a culture, if you grow up in an environment, you don't really realize that that is very much our culture. You just think that that's how the way things are. Right? So so that that allowed me that awareness. And the third thing was that in one of my classes, there was this really cute boy behind me, named Chris and I thought he was attractive. And he said he was a ballet major, so I thought, okay, and then we started dating and that was the time when I was like, really able to again explore a relationship with a boy and my second semester of my freshman year in college, that relationship just lasted a couple of months. But yes, college was the time for me to really start deconstructing some things. There was until my 20s when I started reconstructing something else instead. But yes, my college career which was from this from 17 to 21. So it was that transitional year from my teens to my 20s, a beginning of a deconstructing process. Yes, that was really important. I my sophomore year I entered a relationship with Amanda lasted four and a half years. We moved together to Hawaii after Ohio. I also had some spiritual directors who were very much encouraging me to think of Jesus as a as a gay man, not literally a gay man. But as a queer man, the idea that he was countercultural, he lived a life that was not what was expected, he blurred lines between the divine and the human life and death. And so that's a queer way of looking at Christ. Yeah, so as a transgressive force. And so then I started again, deconstructing, but then reconstructing my faith, and through that separation from my family and my culture, my parents, we had periods of not talking, what happened with my family was that they started to realize that I am gay, and then I blatantly told them, I'm gay. I'm staying gay, and I have a boyfriend.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:52

How old were you? When that happen? Where was that?

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 25:55

That was in between my sophomore and junior year, so that must have been 19, about to be 20. And I told them, I'm gay, I'm saying I have a boyfriend. And there was a period of not a lot of communication or the for money purposes or something like that. And it wasn't until my dad's dad died, then I feel like the relationship started to my grandfather, that they started softening up. And then they started going to therapy themselves. And the therapist I was in the one of the first sessions because there were joint sessions family therapy, and the therapist said that the way she works with families as she her starting point, is the reality of each person. And ish is telling you that his reality is that he's a gay man. So we're starting there. And then my dad said, Oh, I don't know, I don't think that I can accept that. And then she said, and that's your work, not his work. And so I am assuming that months a month later, my parents just slowly started coming around to the point where when I broke up with that boy that I did it for four and a half years, my dad sent me a message saying, Hey, I know you're going through a tough time, a tough transition in your life, just know that I'm here for you. He also at one point

sent an email apology for the way he treated me when I was young. So yes, it was right after as I was graduating college and moving into my life as an adult, and in Honolulu, Hawaii, again, really far. That's when they started really coming around and expressing some more support. Wow, what was that time like for you, when you were seeing this shift happening with your parents, it was hope filled. Yeah, a lot of gratitude. There are some things that I did not realize, which is how much work it was still going to take to actually forgive how much work it was actually going to take to erase the things that happened before I thought at that time, naively, oh, they apologize or coming around, things are going to be just re from now on totally right. wasn't really that way. But then trying meant a lot. During that time, I started seeing another man. So after I broke up with that, in that relationship, I then had a three year relationship with someone and this man I thought he taught he taught me how to love and with him, I felt a lot of just integrity with regard to my culture, my faith and my sexual identity. So with him I saw I remember having sex with him finishing having sex, and then looking up at the sky and saying thank you God for this wonderful man in my life. And so in a way my relationship with him kind of helps strengthen my faith. And with him significantly, my family invited him to Puerto Rico for the winter for Christmas and in summer. So then we would go there and they met my my other time boyfriend and seeing them interact really helped me start being start saying like, I can be a gay Puerto Rican man. And so her early 20s were a beginning of that integrity, living a little bit more of an integrated life integration, or perhaps a better word than integrity and integration.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 28:52

Yeah, yes. And yeah, going back to what you laid out this idea of deconstruction and reconstruction, I love that. And I'm gonna be thinking about that a lot. And it sounds like the end result was finding a way to like, integrate all these aspects of your identity and have them be true and okay. I am a gay Puerto Rican man of faith. I'm a gay. Yeah, we can man. Catholic man. Right.

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 29:15

Yeah. And you can't do that without deconstructing some of the impressive narratives, right? Yeah. So you grew up in a Puerto Rican culture that is sexist, much Easter. That is, you know, that bullies, LGBTQ plus people that calls them moto medical, you know, then that's your conception of what it means to be Puerto Rican or Latino, Hispanic. If you grew up in a Catholic church that tells you that gay people are going to hell, and that's your conception of what it means to be Catholic. If you think that being gay is horrible, terrible thing that makes us different and ostracized, and that's your conception of what it means to be gay. So I had to I definitely have to deconstruct all of that and really start building an understanding of what it means to be Hispanic and Puerto Rican as community oriented, service oriented and attitude Oh CSIP where they, yes, we can this like, optimistic, hopeful, working together attitude, the concept of family and community are central, right. And then there's the these symbols. And if you have that, then you have symbols like food and music that point to that bigger reality of like we're a part of this community that's bigger, and that's vibrant and beautiful and joyful, rather than oppressive, sexist, and marginalizing, right. And the same thing with the Catholic faith. You know, if you construct an understanding of God as a white heterosexual male judge, then you have God in one way. But if you can deconstruct that idea, in its place, generate a new understanding of a supreme being who has radical love that is transgressive, then you

might understand your faith in a different way. So that was my early 20s. And honestly, while while that started, that started that new construction started being those foundations started being laid out in my early 20s. It wasn't really until I moved to San Francisco, when I was 25. I believe that that foundation, that new construct, began to really flourish and explode because this city really allows people to construct an understanding of themselves as more integrated. And it was here where I met other fellow queer Hispanic Catholics. And I saw Oh, we can do this as a community. And it was here what I saw, well, queer Hispanic Catholics, I have like a group of gay Puerto Rican friends here have a group of gay Catholic friends here. And that's where I started now experiencing disintegration as a community. And it was it was, it was a messy process, too. But the end result has led to a sense of actual pride and contentment with all the fullness of who I am not perfect, but at least a degree of contentment, and pride.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 31:46

So Wow, gosh, again, I could just listen to you talk all day long. You sharing your story, and it just like, so that was all happening. There's been this, all this work around this integration of identity, finding yourself and owning that, and then being immersed in a community that even further allows you to feel that within you. So that was all happening. I'm also curious, like, maybe even backing up a bit like your What was your then process in terms of relationship that was all happening within yourself and kind of your identity, but like, as you were, like, navigating dating and relationships when you were younger? And then kind of into like your 20s. Moving to San Francisco. I know you mentioned kind of flagging in your adolescence there was this repression happening and then that later there was a need to kind of counter that or work through that. What was your journey there?

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Ish Ruiz (he/him) 32:34

Okay, that one was a little bit more. That's for what I said that it was messy. That's where the messiness took place. It always is messy. It's always messy for all of us. Yeah, I'm sure you and many of the listeners here might be familiar with Alan Downes work on the velvet rage where he talks about different stages that gay men go through and the first being repression. The second one being a degree of like being out of proud with glitter and feather boas and all that stuff. But what's interesting about that is that he is still saying that while there's an external exuberant expression of gayness in gay culture, subconsciously, that is still a way to overcompensate for an internalized sense of shame. So that's what a lot of that process looked like, while I was yes, deconstructing all of these understandings, the process of reconstructing my identity really took a long time, it really took all of my 20s. And how, what did that look like? Well, it looked like this, I was now in a place where I could be out and proud. But I knew that deep inside of me that voice that said that you will never be successful, never be loved and go to Hell was still very much present. I just wasn't really fully aware of how it was present. And that manifested itself in relationships. So I had a period of maybe like three years, two to three years where I had a lot of sex with a lot of people, open Grindr, and I said, You know what, let's go around. Let's meet people, let's explore our sexual, my sexual self. My conscious mind was saying, you are doing this because you're proud of being a gay man. And because you are really just now finally able to express and explore the sexuality that you've been repressing. My subconscious, however, was saying, at the end of the day, you really want to feel love, and you don't feel like you are worthy of love. So you are constantly looking for this external validation and to numb this pain, you have no way. And so it was messy. It was a messy process where I

had to Well, I accepted it, and I wouldn't change a thing and I'm really proud of myself during that time, too. Because, you know, I didn't do I didn't engage in high risk behavior. I you know, I was on PrEP. I was, you know, using condoms or protection as needed. I was having consensual sex. I was not inebriated. Um, so it wasn't it wasn't like, like a thing where I'm like, Oh, let me completely destroy my life. No, it's more like my life is stable. I have a good job. You don't have a good faith community. You have a Hispanic community and now I get to be a gay man. And because I had that those stability that I was able to, you know, pretty safely, but also big, big exploratory, I was able to do that. But yes, two things were happening at once. Number one was trying to be proud of myself. Number two was trying to numb that pain. That was that voice that came to a head where when I started realizing that having sex with all these men wasn't really filling the void that the subconscious was trying to fill. And that's when I started going to therapy I was when I was 28 years old. And yeah, this therapist has really helped me understand these constructions and deconstruction that have taken place in my life. And really put into perspective, you know, what kinds of actions and what kind of patterns I've created to protect myself what kind of patterns I've created, to try to fit in to try to numb myself from feeling unworthy of love, understanding what the patterns came from, and then finally be able to, and that aware that awareness is freeing, liberating, because now I'm aware of the pattern, I know that it is not a set way of being, but rather something that was created for a purpose. And then I can make different choices. My 30s have been a time where that integrity integration and community has been really, really lived out in a much more fulfilled sense. That doesn't mean that I stopped sleeping around or anything like that, but a little bit more intentional, a little bit more connected. And I was a little bit more aware of what was happening. And I could say, Oh, I feel like I could use some validation today. Yeah, you know, or, you know, right now, I feel like I'm looking for validation. Let me find it some other way. Then we go to my friend's apartment instead of watching a movie. So these are things that we that that I was able now to do in my in my 30s and have some relate. And I was able to like actually dedicate time to the relationships that I want to cultivate, rather than trying to just be, you know, all gay, out and proud. And so that's, that's kind of where I am right now is just really dedicating time to the things I want to dedicate time to.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 36:53

Gosh, wow. Yeah. What's that like for you in this moment, after going back through your story up until this point, and seeing all that went down for you? What's that? Like?

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 37:06

Hmm, I think the word that comes to mind is I'm always afraid to sound a little cocky. I think like, I sometimes don't come up with like a very humble person. But But yeah, a sense of pride.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 37:19

Yeah, absolutely. Love, self love, pride. self worth. Those are the words that came to mind. Yeah, absolutely. And I don't mean that in a in a, you know, sometimes there's this stigma about like, praising ourselves and your heart of who we are. Right. But you like there I'm thinking, I'm still thinking about 17 year old you and and going through everything with your parents finding about your relationship and then navigating what it means to be a gay Puerto

Rican man, a gay Catholic, like, you did a ton of work and you talking about the deconstruction and reconstruction like, holy smokes, I would be proud to, like, I must be so interesting for you to think back to kind of who you were and how you were back at like 12, 17, 24, now and just seeing that evolution like, what I also love doing sometimes it's always get curious, like, what would it be like for like, our younger selves to see us now? And what would they think? And that's a whole other piece like, what do you think that would be for like, 17 year old you to see you now? Cuz How old are you now?

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 38:19
I'm 32

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 38:20
17 year old You - What do you think he think?

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 38:24
Hmm, I think you would find comfort, I think you would find hope. There was always hope. I think 17 year old me always had a little bit of hope that things would eventually be better. I think of some of the young people that I sometimes work with or know who struggle with mental health, suicide, and all the unfortunate statistics that we now hear that our younger LGBTQ plus siblings suffer through I didn't necessarily suffer through those. This in the same way any sort of like mental health issue I wasn't really aware of when I was younger, and any sort of if I if I if I if I ever contemplated anything serious, such as suicide or anything like that, it was it was definitely very fleeting. And not a not a serious thought. So I was I think that part of me, the young, young, young ish, always had hope. But maybe if if I wish that were 17 an hour to look at myself, or know what I would be like a 32 that hope would be would drive me to a little bit more decisive action. I would have come out sooner I would have been a little more secure myself I would not have drank that conversion therapy Kool Aid, the sort of things but then maybe I would not end up where I am right now. 32 So you know when you were saying like, Oh, it must be so great to look back on all of this and like realize this like this is again just touching on your project is I wonder how much in common this experiences I might I wonder how many of us gay people gay men and or other members of the LGBTQ plus community have had some sort of similar journey, some similar themes, but the second adolescence itself right, we don't get to explore our sexualities through relationship fully in our, in our in high school so we have to do that in college. I mentioned that I'm an educator and and I work with LGBTQ plus youth. And I noticed that some of the young people these days are very much having an adolescence that is quite similar to their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. Yes. And so I wonder, I wonder two things, part of me is grateful, because I'm like, Oh, I wonder if these students are going to not have the same traumas that we are now having to work through. But then the the other part of me wonders if they're going to have the resilience and the in the sense of self that only comes from the scars that we've had to treat and heal through decades. So I wonder how the LGBTQ I mean, that's how it their lives right now is how it should be, you know, the community is our community should not be traumatized. We shouldn't have to leave

our families to find ourselves. We shouldn't have to do that. But I wonder, you know, always looking for the silver lining. I wonder how our community would be different if we didn't have to go through that?

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 40:59

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, yeah, we don't wish upon anybody any suffering and tap to navigate through trauma, particularly, you know, the trauma of shame, that is part of so many of our queer stories, and how insidious that trauma can be. And as you're speaking to, it does often when we can really be with that shame, and work with these wounds, and come out on the other side with it, not necessarily through it, because it stays there. And the work is continuous, of course, but come out on the other side of that pain, there is this resiliency, and there is this strength that is so pervasive in the greater queer community. And that's what makes it really powerful to be part of this community to find other folks who we've all been through it in some way. And there's also a lot of strength amongst us all. So very cool.

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 41:45

I agree. I think if I were, if I could choose to be born gay again, now a 32. I would totally do it again. I don't think I don't think I would have said the same thing at 17, even a 20 or 25. But a 32. Yeah, I've loved this journey. And I've loved the wonderful people I've gotten to meet. I love this idea, right? That the queer community has chosen family, the idea that we you know, we form a family wherever we are my parents, as I said, we've have come up significantly come along, I've brought three boys home and I'm bringing my current partner home over the holidays, they're gonna meet this person was really dear to me. And it's really wonderful. This one time I was applying to a job in Philadelphia. And I was I was considering moving from San Francisco to Philly. And one of the questions my dad asked was, does Philadelphia have a gayborhood? I say, well, that actually, thank you for asking. It does. Why'd you ask? And his response was, you need that stuff. Like I understand that you and by you, I think he meant me. But also, I think he meant us like queer people, we need these spaces where we can create our own community and create our own chosen family. And that moment was a moment of being seen by my dad who realized this, like, oh, my gosh, I had to leave. But then I created my own family here in San Francisco, like gay Puerto Rican friends, like a Catholic friends and, and have Grindr in the Castro but you know, like, chosen families chosen family, regardless or

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 43:10

Wow, gosh, and yeah, like you're speaking to this being seen by our people being seen by our families, our parents, like, those moments are so powerful, it's everything. It's what we're needing. I agree. That's like the antidote to shame is like being seen and loved for what shame previously told us was not okay.

I Ish Ruiz (he/him) 43:30

Yeah, we had to hide Absolutely. 100%. And, you know, what's important, too, is that this process of like, daring to be seen, because being seen, you have to put your you have to put something out there for it to be seen, right? Oh, yeah. And I'm thinking, you know, all these

something out there for it to be seen, right? Oh, yeah. And I'm thinking, you know, all these young gays have moved to the city, they still come here, like, yeah, back in the 60s, Harvey Milk time. 70s. They, they came here trying to find a place that they knew to come to San Francisco, that's still happening, like a lot of people are leaving places and they're still they're coming here, they're choosing to come here so they can do that. You know, contrary to being black or being a woman or being any sort of other form of demographic where you realize who you are from an early age, you know, like our sexual orientation or queer identity isn't with exceptions, right. But by and large, something that's largely discovered later in life during puberty and and then with the rejection that's experienced, that means we don't have mentorship. So that's why programs like these with the second adolescence, I think work like Ellen downs work is so important because to a degree, all of us, I mean, even talking about us as we were older gays, US gays in the 30 Grand that depended on the daddy gays in their 30s we have a responsibility that to help the people going through the first and second adolescence, the young lens, I call them the babies, you know, navigate this world, which is you know, it has wonderful things and dangerous things as well. So that's why I'm so passionate about projects like these because I realized like older games carried me through when I was in my 20s. And now I feel like now that I have something built, it's important to look back and see, you know, there, there might be younger gays who are looking for these chosen families, and they might benefit from understanding how some of us did it.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 44:10

Ah, gosh, well, on that note, that feels like a good place for us to wind down. But I want to talk with you all day on this topic. I just so I'm taking personally so much away from this conversation. And I am really excited to have it marinated. And I just so I feel so much gratitude to you for coming on and sharing your story. I think, as you spoke, I was just seeing how there's going to be so many moments that I think kind of be both relatable for folks. But also as an invitation for folks, as someone who's done the work like you've done to start to really, maybe there's more places where they can further examine their experience and see, was there more healing that I need to do? Is there more things, I can deconstruct and reconstruct? Poof, powerful. So again, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your story. This was so great. Yeah. Thank you.

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Ish Ruiz (he/him) 46:02

Thank you, Adam. And thank you for all your projects and all your work. I think it'll bear wonderful fruit for many people in their lives. So thank you so much.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 46:10

Yeah, so if any of the listeners want to follow up with you, or reach out after hearing your story, what's a good place they can connect with you?

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Ish Ruiz (he/him) 46:19

Oh, yeah, thank you. Thank you for asking that. So one of the things I want to share is that on top of my practice, as an educator, I actually do offer conversations, consultations, or simple

guidance on mostly questions of Catholicism and inclusion for LGBTQ plus people. So a good way to reach me is via email, and my email is ish RUIZ eleven@gmail.com. So that's H Ruiz. One one@gmail.com. And if anyone wants to talk about what it's like to be queer and Catholic, I'm always open to having that conversation.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 46:54

Hmm. Awesome. Thank you so much. I so appreciate you and the work you're doing in this world and sharing your story. Awesome. Thank you.

I

Ish Ruiz (he/him) 47:03

Thank you likewise.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 47:09

Thanks, folks, for joining us for this conversation. Feel free to head on over to second adolescence pod COMM For show notes and resources highlighted in today's episode and 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 secondadolescencepod.com and you'll see how you can submit your interest there. I'd love to have you on Alright, that's it for me whether it's morning, afternoon, night, wherever we're finding you and your day, please go out there keep doing things that would make younger you feel absolutely stoked. That's what it's about. All right. Take care.