

# Ep. 29: Second Adolescence w/ Khye Tyson (they/them)

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## SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Khye Tyson (they/them)

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello and welcome to this week's episode of the Second Adolescence podcast. I'm your host Adam James Cohen. On this week's episode, we have Khye Tyson (they/them). Khye is so many things, but among them are being a reproductive rights activist birthing worker and founder of coolin to reproductive justice center where they and their team work towards a world in which black women and femmes can live, thrive and raise healthy families freely within a healthy community. In addition to sharing about their work, Khye also lets us into their own personal journey of healing and liberation as an unapologetic southern queer black femme. Get your notebooks ready, I swear, you're gonna want to write down so many things that chi shares, and will likely inspire in you. This was just such a great conversation, I feel so grateful they wanted to come on and invite us all into their work and story. Oh, and those of you who want to dive deeper into work with Khye, check out the show notes, where you'll see information about their new self love card deck, that is such a great resource to support one's own journey of healing and liberation. And as with each episode of second adolescence, I want to invite you as a listener, to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are different and unique. You might hear some guests share things that really differ from your experience, whereas other guests might share things that really speak to what you went through or are currently going through. And I really hope that all of this happens, and that together, we can continue 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 head on over to [secondadolescencepod.com](http://secondadolescencepod.com) for show notes, and more. Or you can follow the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). All right. Welcome to the conversation. Thank you so much for being here. Welcome to Second Adolescence. I'm so excited and really curious to have you on and see where this conversation goes. But before going anywhere, I know a little bit about you. But for those of the listeners who may not be familiar with you and your work, I'd love to give a little mini introduction to give a little context to who the person is behind the voice. And I know the "Who Are You?" question is a weird one to kind of answer in like a snippet. But I guess when you're in places like this introducing yourself, how do you usually answer that question?



K

**Khye Tyson (they/them) 02:41**

Yeah, well, first, I'm really excited to be here. But my name is Khye Tyson, my pronouns are they/them, I usually identify myself as a birth worker, a doula, a childbirth educator. My background is in education. So I don't necessarily call myself a teacher, but I do call myself an educator. I'm black, I'm gender expansive. I'm queer. I am decolonizing the ways that I look at everything and attempting to build something that that's a little bit better than what we have so far. So yeah, that's it. That's the big picture overview of what I do. I do a lot of things. But I'll stop there.

A

**Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:21**

Sure. Oh, my gosh, okay. I want to dive into so many pieces of that. And yeah, I guess you mentioned first kind of your work in the birthing world, maybe even just to start there were and how did you find yourself in this work?

K

**Khye Tyson (they/them) 03:34**

Yeah, so I moved to Atlanta in 2015. And when I moved to Atlanta, I was looking for like a political home, quote, unquote. So like, I was looking for somewhere to, you know, spend my time outside of work and contribute to something and I was learning about a lot of great organizations here. And I have learned about the name of it previously, but I really learned more about it in Atlanta around 2015 2016. But I found out about reproductive justice as a framework for looking at the ways that we can improve the ways that you know that we live and that we relate to each other. And so I learned about that, and I was working in education. And I could see I was saying the overlaps of reproductive justice was so many things and reproductive justice is the right to have kids to not have kids, to parent, the children that you have in healthy and safe ways, and the right to bodily autonomy. And in most reproductive justice spaces. It's really, I don't use the word inclusive lightly. But it's really inclusive of folks with all different types of identities. It's really about centering the most marginalized people centering the people who are most harmed by these systems. And so I was learning about reproductive justice. And at the same time, I was also getting burnt out from my career in education. So I was trying to figure out what do I want to do next? I do not want to go back to school. I do not want to get any more degrees. I'm exhausted. And while all that's happening, my sister It was having her first kids. So I was like seeing her experience. And she's, you know, one of the closest people that I had seen go through this experience. So I got to ask her a bunch of weird questions. And I got to, you know, talk to her about her experience. And I just realized how much I didn't know about birth, and how much I didn't know about our bodies, not just people with uteruses, but everyone like, but there's so much we don't know about our bodies, not even reproductive, and just in general, like, these normal natural things that happen to us throughout our lifespan, you know, why don't we know a lot about this information. And so 2018 I decided I was burnt out, like I said, for my job, and I was ready to like, I gotta do something else. And so I kind of thought about it before, but it was kind of on a whim. I was like scrolling Instagram, and I saw like an ad for a doula training that focused on black birthing, folks. And I just clicked on it. And I was like, let's do this. So yeah, I became a doula. I also did a hug them to become a childbirth educator at the same time. So I was doing both trainings. It was a lot. But yeah, I decided in 2018, like, let's do this, become a doula and see what happens. And then, as I was building up my Doula business, I was realizing where my education background in my identities and my politics could all come into play. Because, you

know, they say the personal is political. Everything is political. And birth is also political birth, as you see a lot of inequities played out in the birthing space. And so I kind of found a niche there of really looking at how do these larger systems play out when it comes to birth? And what can I do as an educator, I really see a doula a childbirth educator as like a public health educator. So what can I do as a public health educator to help people be prepared for this experience that can be really, it can just be a lot like whether it's good, bad or ugly, you know, it's a lot either way, it's a huge transition, there's a lot of medical stuff involved, our bodies are doing things that maybe they haven't done before. And of course, while I'm building my Doula business, and I'm learning about, you know how to apply reproductive justice, and birth justice to my work, I'm realizing like, I'm the only queer person here, I'm the only or at least the only visibly vocally maybe queer person here. So in a lot of birth spaces, it's you know, there's a lot of gender essentialism, there's a lot of like, Oh, we're also happy to be women and women have the sacred duty to give birth or whatever, which, like, we know, there's a lot of nuance in that. And so I was just having a conversation with a potential client a couple of weeks ago, they were like, I really don't connect with like the divine feminine, you know, all that of birth. And that's really big right now. And you know, that even if you are cisgender, even if you are not queer, like you might not identify with that. And that's okay. And I wanted to take up space for the queers for the trans folks for the non binary and gender expansive folks, but also for the cis folks who don't necessarily fit into a nice, neat box, whatever that may be. And so a lot of the folks that I work with are folks with disabilities, folks with chronic illnesses, folks who are not just queer and trans people of color, but folks with different family structures, even if they're cisgender, heterosexual, just that they don't quite fit into the stereotype of what you expect a birthing person to look like, or a pregnant woman is really what they say. But you know, we're trying to shift towards birthing person trying to get the says, Hey, folks to get on board with this, it's been a really wild journey. And it's just been a lot of learning about not only about our bodies, but about how we interact with each other, and community, how we celebrate these transitions, across cultures, you know, so many people have different cultural practices around birth, and so how does queerness intersect with all of that, and especially with queer and trans folks, one of my friends has a theory and it really goes along with second adolescence that like, where people are, like, 10 years behind, so set people socially. And so you know, when you're 16 and you're dating, and whatever else wants his head folks are doing that we're doing that at like, 26, 27 and so then we don't have kids until like, 37, 38, 40, whatever. And, you know, we don't necessarily go through those same milestones at the same time. It's just hit folks and how does that then color our experiences as well that we might be older parents, a lot of us use assisted reproductive technologies. A lot of us have, you know, queer ways of building family that it's not this nuclear, you know, mom and dad and 2.5 kids. So you know, how does all that affect how we experience birth and build our families and create meaning out of the families that we do have that may or may not be blood, you know, chosen family, family of origin, whatever the case is? So yeah.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 09:38

Oh my I've so many thoughts and feelings running through my mind and body right now. I'm just so excited that you're here. And I just want to pick your brain for hours on so many different levels. I mean, you're catching me also, like having lots of conversations about if I want to kind of bring a baby into the world with my partner and I had no other queer couples who are having the same conversation. So I'm just like, I'm just so pumped. You're here. Okay. Quick pause. It sounds like it's been such a cool journey to get you here and you're doing such incredible work. Like, what's that, like, in this moment? Just even look back at the trajectory of your evolution to get right here.

K

**Khye Tyson (they/them) 10:13**

It's been kind of wild. I'm 32. I think I have to think about it. Yes, I'm 32. And so like, after a few Saturn returns, you know, after a few, like, iterations of my life, a few different chapters, I'm starting to see you know, how they say, like, all your experiences, and I don't like when people say it to like, justify bad things happening, or trauma or whatever. But when they when I think about, like, all your experiences kind of coalesced to get you to where you're supposed to be. I do agree with that to an extent like, yeah, there's a lot of, you know, negative things that I would like to have not experienced. And I see the learning that happened in a lot of those experience positive or negative. And so yeah, looking back, I'm like, even looking back at like my childhood, and looking back at in college, or different parts of my life that I'm like, wow, I've been kind of preparing to do this type of work my whole life, even if I didn't realize it. And so, yeah, I'm just looking at the past like four years because actually, October is our anniversary technically at Kuluntu Reproductive Justice Center. So that's been three years since October 2019. Yeah, even looking at the past like three or four years. I'm like, wow, I've, I've done a lot. We've done a lot and built something that has really meant something to people, which I'm really proud of. So yeah, I'm great. Yeah.

A

**Adam James Cohen (he/him) 11:30**

So cool. Okay, and you were mentioning, okay, "I can see some through lines in my own personal story that led me here." So I'm curious to kind of dive into that. And you mentioned your childhood. Where did where did your story begin?

K

**Khye Tyson (they/them) 11:42**

Yeah. So I am from Nashville, Tennessee, born and raised most of my life in around Nashville. My mom is one of seven kids. So I have a big family. And then her mom was like one of eight kids. So it was just like, the further out you go, the bigger the family gets. And so I was always around my family, we would get together, you know, at least every couple of weeks, if not, like once a week. I was like the older cousin that would babysit all the younger cousins. And I was the kid who was always like asking 1000 questions. And so like, I was always observing and analyzing things. And the older I got, the more I just experienced things, I started to realize that having a support system and having a community isn't a given the way that I grew up. I was like, Yeah, of course you go to your cousin's house or you, we used to live across the street from my grandparents. So we would literally like get up, eat some breakfast, put on clothes and go across the street and like go hang out all day, just realizing that like not everybody has that experience. And that that experience isn't necessarily a given even if you have family, or even if you have a support system, like do your values align and things like that. And so yeah, like I was in college, and I was a resident assistant, and I was an RA. And I feel like a lot of people were RAs in college, and I kind of forget about the experience until I think about community building. So Kuluntu actually means community in Xhosa, which is a language spoken in South Africa. And so like community is kind of the foundation that I kind of approach a lot of things I learned in college, and I learned in some experiences after that, that, you know, just because you put a bunch of people in a room doesn't mean that they're automatically going to be community or they're automatically going to support each other. And being in some queer

community spaces. I kind of learned that in real time that just because we're all hanging out and partying together does not mean that what should hits the fan? You know, are they actually going to be there for you? Or are they just like party friends that you go to brunch with? And, you know, go to the club or whatever. And so I spent a lot of my life I think looking at, like, how do people relate to each other in healthy and unhealthy ways, and that only those one to one relationships with the larger community relationships, and I tell people like, you don't have to be best friends with someone to be in their community, like, I might not want to hang out with you every day. But if you say, Hey, I'm hungry, I need a couch to crash off for the night. I need a ride, you know, we have the type of relationship where I can ask you that. And you can ask me that. And even if you can't do it at that time, are you still going to be there for me? Are you going to you know, ask, let me ask someone else and see if they can provide this thing or I'm not sure but I know this organization? Or is it just like nope, sorry, I can't help you. You know, I could get into all the different things about my childhood. But I think the biggest thing was just seeing how my family supported each other and supporting each other not only with like, raising kids, but also just life, you know that we come together and we celebrated each other we mourn with each other. We just did regular Tuesday afternoon stuff with each other, you know, it wasn't always a we come together for a big holiday or whatever. So I think that's the biggest thing that I take from my childhood and even like my parents, because we usually live maybe like an hour or so away from my grandparents at certain points of my childhood but like we have friends across the street and their kids were the same age. Just we were and we would like ride with each other to school and like, look out for each other if one of our parents was at work when the bus came home, and then we would all go to one kids, you know, one of the houses to look after each other and things like that, that, yeah, looking back, I'm like, Yeah, that's that's community and we do we need that help, we need that assistance. And it doesn't make you a bad person. It doesn't make you weak or you know, a burden, to rely on someone in a way that can be reciprocated in a way that can be poured back into you. And so, wow,

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 15:31

oh, that is just a wish I have for everybody to be able to grow up with that type of support and community that sounds so incredibly special, invaluable. And I can really hear how it's planted within you like this connection with this idea of community as healing community as growth community as everything and it sounds like that's been a big part of your journey at these different phases of your life, this element of community and really starting from your family and your experience growing up. Yeah. Oh, okay. So then, I guess I'm curious, like, when you think about the evolution of your queer journey and queerness, in your story, I'm curious about, yeah, within that context, growing up, like was queerness, anything that was around you were exposed to like, what was that like with regards to growing up?

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 16:16

So grew up in the South Christian church, every Sunday type of family. So I'll say two things. One, I do have an older cousin who is queer, I feel like she's maybe like 12 or so years older than me. So we were not necessarily like hanging out. And by the time I was old enough to realize that there was something a little different about me, I don't think we really were in communication. Like when I was super young, like four or five years old, I remember she would be around a lot. But then the older I got, you become an adult, you have your own life. And I

wouldn't necessarily say like, I had a strong queer role model just because and she also had her own journey, and she married a man. And, you know, her life has been unfolding ever since I don't want to put all her business out there. But like, she wasn't necessarily being out and proud, for obvious reasons. When you're a black person in the south, it's not always the safest. And so she was definitely like a tomboy and played a lot of sports and all that kind of stuff. So I had definitely picked up on like, the more subtle pieces of queerness that I was able to pick up. But yeah, there's that piece. And I think that there's something to be said, for the inherent queerness of performing gender as a non white person. That yes, I was taught like the proper, quote, unquote, ways to be a woman or to be a girl, or to be a lady that was my mom, she was always like, be a lady. But, you know, I was taught all the things, but within a, and one of my favorite topics to ramble about is the system of gender and how it's a tool of capitalism and colonization. But like, if the gendered ideal is a white woman, like I'm never going to meet that, my mom is never going to meet that my auntie is never going to meet that. And I saw so many black women in my family doing things that wouldn't necessarily be considered a woman's work or whatever, but they were doing it because they had to, or because they like to, or whatever. And so I think there is a level of just being not a white person, and in the ways that gender can be expressed in different cultural ways. And so I think I learned a lot about like, things that you can take and things that you can leave, like, you know, you're expected to wear a dress, if it's a nice event, but if you don't shave your legs, it's not necessarily the end of the world. Or, you know, I'm sure there's other things too, like a short hairstyle might make someone look at you differently, unless it's a specific type of short hairstyle that's really popular, or whatever the case is. And so yeah, I think there was a lot of as a child, I noticed a lot of ways in which people just queered just the ways that they lived, like I remember we had caller ID I know I'm like dating myself, but we had caller ID and I thought it was the coolest thing when we got it. But like, when the name popped up, it'll be my mom's name. And not my dad's and they were married, they lived in the same house, but like everything had her name on it instead of his and even if my mom has a shirt as they come as soon as they come like, that's queering, right, that she can say like, No, this is my household. I can put my name on this. I don't care who's in the household. I can put my name on this. And so there's things like that, that I still picked up on, even if it wasn't capital que quiere. Yeah, but you know, growing up in the South, there's always other queer kids and a lot of my friends growing up, or whether it was in like high school college, ended up coming out later, and we just kind of gravitated towards each other. Even if we didn't have the words for it. Even if none of us came out to each other. We all gravitated towards each other. And I look back and I'm like, Yeah, we were all really gay. Like we really didn't even realize it.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 19:55

Wow. Oh, how cool you found each other. Sounds like you had this little community. The mood though Yeah, at the time no one was really talking about it even perhaps no one was aware of it themselves about this part of their identity. It sounds like unconsciously there was this unconscious communication of We are the same in some way. Well, for sure. Because yeah, like what's been your evolution in terms of your conscious awareness of gender identity, sexual identity, like, what? What is that journey been?

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 20:22

Oh, we'll try to keep it short.



A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 20:24

So say what you got to say

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 20:25

when I was little, like three, four years old. So I have an older brother. He's three years older, and I used to follow him like I was his shadow. One time we were playing out back at my grandma's house, and he had to go to the bathroom, he decided to pee on a tree. And I was like, Hmm, maybe I can try that. And I was convinced that I had a penis, but it was just smaller because I was younger. And my family was like, an open door type family, like use the bathroom, take a bath, whatever, the doors are open, not necessarily like nudist family, but just very much like, we've seen it like whatever. And so I'm a kid, I'm like three or four. And yeah, I just think, oh, I have a penis. It's just smaller than his because I'm younger. Like I was convinced. I didn't necessarily say like, I am a boy. But I was questioning it. And I asked my mom a few times, like around that age, like, Are you sure I'm a girl? Like, are you sure I don't know if this is right. But the older I get, the more and more I suppressed it. I do remember being in like, pretty young, still, like four or five, six years old. And like the Power Rangers had just came out. And I had a crush on the pink power ranger, of course. And that was my crush as a kid. And like the little mermaid was also sort of like number two. So I was definitely like, Who do I have access to? Oh, they're pretty I like the huh. And then yeah, the older I got, the more I was suppressing it. Honestly, up until my first year of college or so was when I really started to question it. So I'm like 18 or 19. And thinking about like, I don't know, if I am straight. I have been told that this is how I'm supposed to be but it took, you know, leaving my parents house leaving that environment to really question Who was it that I like? Who am I attracted to? Who am I not attracted to? What does that look like? Sexuality, I was kind of figuring all that out. And I was coming out to again, a lot of my friends were already queer. In college, some of them were outwardly queer. And some of them were not. But I would come out to like my friends who are already out, or I would come out to a handful of people here and there, but not really widely until I was maybe 2324. And I came out as either queer or bisexual depending on who I was talking to. I have feelings about non queer people using the word queer. I feel like it sounds funny. I don't know. Oh, well, yes. Say more about that, you know, as a reclaim, slur, you know, I kind of look at it that way. Like, we can reclaim it, but can you reclaim it? I don't know. But also acknowledging that queer is an umbrella term as we've been using it as an umbrella term. And then I hear like a suicide person stay clear. And I'm like, I don't know. It doesn't fully sit right with me. I don't hate it. I don't feel harmed. I don't confront them or anything. But I'm just like, I don't Something about it just doesn't sit right with me. But also, I get that saying LGBTQIA Plus is a lot. So I think maybe it's a concern of it been weaponized against us that someone gets quote unquote, too comfortable saying it, and then they say something, and it's like, that didn't come off the right way. Or like, you know, do you feel comfortable having your teacher or your parent or whoever say like, yeah, my son is queer. My child was queer. Like, I don't know, if I want my mom to say that. I have mixed feelings about it. Totally. Yeah, yeah. And I, when I moved to Atlanta, to I met a few people who identified as bisexual politically, which I thought was really fascinating, who will like very purposefully say, I identify as bisexual. And that was around the same time too, that we were redefining bisexual to be trans inclusive, I guess, and to be a little bit less like gender essentialist. And so you know, the the definition of two or more genders are attracted to other genders and your own gender, or whatever the case is. And so I was learning about like politically defining myself as a particular way so that was

part of it too, that like, if I'm talking to assist that person, I might say I'm bisexual particularly to D stigmatize it or particularly to fight against the erasure of by people. And so I was there for a minute and I kind of stopped identifying as bisexual necessary not for any particular reason, I think I just stopped explaining my sexuality at some point, but also, my sexuality is evolving. It's still evolving and I'm looking at like, and considering do I lie somewhere on the a spectrum, it's probably more of an umbrella than a spectrum, or like the a romantic spectrum or umbrella, that there's a whole different dimension of sexuality there. It's like, yeah, who are you attracted to? But is that attraction static or is it evolving? And I think for a lot of folks, or at least for me, the older I get, the more I see the nuance in my sexuality in my, how I identify, yeah, it's kind of my sexuality, evolution journey. It's definitely still happening. But as far as gender between asking my mom if I was a girl, and like using they then pronouns and identifying as gender expansive, I think I just kind of did my best to try to be a girl and I was a tomboy for a while and I had a lot of friends who were boys and I would like me and my mom, every year, we would fight over Easter dresses. And like, if I had to wear a dress for something like it had to be very particular, I didn't hate dresses, but my mom just picked out the ugliest ones. And like the ones with the most flowers and the most ruffles, and I'm like, Can we at least like strike a balance here? Like, I know, you're not gonna let me wear a pantsuit? But like, Can we at least cut down on like the lime green, at least right? So yeah, that was always a struggle. But I think for a long time, I just kind of was trying to figure out how to be a cisgender girl or woman in the ways that everyone was telling me I needed to be but just so much of it. I was not I didn't identify with I didn't like it, there was some parts that I liked, like, I've always been really into, like fashion. And so there's some things even like certain hobbies, like I like to sew, like I learned how to sew because I wanted to be like fashion designer was a whole thing. You know, people will see that and they're like, oh, wow, you know, such a traditional feminine hobby. And I'm like, I just like making things I had a lot a lot of, like internalized Finn phobia, I guess I know, not necessarily fin phobias and like, the fear of identity, but I guess like femininity phobia of like, if I do something that's considered, quote, unquote, feminine? What does that mean about me? If I'm not like other girls, which was the only language I really had access to for a long time, right? So yeah, if I like to sew, or bake, or if I like kids, and you know, being around younger cousins, and nieces and nephews, then people like, Oh, you're gonna be such a great mom. But on the inside, I'm, like, cringing. And so I really had to reconcile, like, the things that I do that may be our stereotype to only belong to a certain gender, like I do them because I enjoy them not necessarily because they are gender affirming, or, or what have you. And so like, instead of rejecting these parts of myself, it was like, I'm going to embrace these parts of myself, and all the other parts of myself that don't quite fit into any box, either. And, you know, yeah, it was like a reclaiming, I guess, of the things that I enjoyed, because I felt like I couldn't enjoy them because I didn't want to be seen as a stereotypical woman, especially certain things that are like, I've definitely had people call me like Suzy homemaker. And I'm like, that's like, not just a woman, but that's like peek stereotype of like, the perfect barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. Woman, like I don't, you know, I have feelings about being, I guess, seen as that or like, so my friends who aren't from the South would call me like a seven bill. And I'm like, No, not at all. Like, that is disgusting. But yeah, so having a lot of feelings about Yeah, the things I do, or the way that I present myself or whatever, and, and my gender identity. And so I've spent a lot of time reconciling all of that. And I kind of realized that I was gender expansive, specifically. So I was I went to grad school in Texas, which I would not recommend Texas just as a general concept, but we had an assignment and one of my classes is about like, cross cultural theories of something, something something so the assignment was to, like do something outside of your identity, like something that's different or other like basically be other on purpose, because at that point, I was identifying as queer or bisexual and so I was like, Well, you know, I'm a cisgender woman, I'm going to dress mask for a day or you know, however long and write my paper and whatever else and then I like, you know, went shopping for the clothes and then I



put them on and I was like, Oh, hmm, I didn't expect to feel you know, this baby level of gender euphoria today. Yeah, and that's even changed throughout my life like how I feel dressing masculine or dressing feminine or a little bit of both or neither or you know, whatever else but at that point in my life, I think I needed I know gender is not a spectrum but like something on the opposite side of the pendulum swing of like, oh, let me put on these like masculine clothes and see how I like it. And so that was kind of a toe in the water of gender expression and So ever since then, I've been kind of the type of person who will I'll put on like Monday I'll wear one thing and Tuesday I'll wear the next thing and people can't always pick me and that makes people uncomfortable. Because I'm depending on the day I can quote unquote pass for a sis woman. So then people think like, oh, yeah, you know, she her pronouns and like, they just kind of put me in a box and then the next day I'm wearing like men's clothes or a suit or something like that, and they're like, I'm confused. I kind of enjoy that. Confusion.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 30:03

Oh, yeah, I was gonna ask you what's that? Like when you see that response or feel that response from others?

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 30:07

Yeah, it's really great when people get flustered and they start, like stumbling over their words, or like they call me sir or something. And they're like, oh, sorry, ma'am. And then I'm like, it's still wrong, but you know, yeah, I think it's really interesting. As an observer of life, sometimes I feel like I'm like observing humans, gender is one thing that can get people flustered so fast, whether it's accidentally misgendering, a baby or a dog. Sometimes people freak out when they miss gendered dogs, it's like, okay, like, if you don't perfectly fit into one of two boxes, they just kind of start to short circuit. And it's fascinating to see it, there's always a I don't want to say a level of harm, but there's always the threat of harm, I guess that someone could, you know, have big feelings and embody those big feelings towards me or towards someone else. And so I don't want to say like, it's fun to watch people get worked up or budgeting or because there are real consequences to it. But for the most part, it's just interesting, just watching people's I guess, reactions.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 31:13

And I'm thinking about the politicization of identities and and this also this idea of like, laboring around, kind of like, I don't know if it if it feels like laboring for you, but there is also for some folks, perhaps it feels like there's an effort exchange in those spaces, when you are kind of allowing yourself to kind of be this person holding these identities and like inviting people to be sitting with their own discomfort, or activating that discomfort for the sake of hopefully change and work. I don't know if that's been part of your journey to this idea of laboring or Yeah, yeah,

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 31:47

yeah. Like every day, there's the question of, you know, where am I going in? There's like a checklist, like, do I feel safe dressing in a certain way at this place? Is it practical, because I as much as I love fashion. I like it was not practical. I'm not gonna wear it. So you know, there's

much as I love fashion, I like it was not practical. I'm not gonna wear it. So you know, there's some things that I see people wearing, I'm like, that looks great. But realistically, the like, five minutes platform shoes, I cannot wear those. There are plenty people who can rack those. But, you know, certain things like that. But then what conversation, I guess, is this outfit or this appearance? Or this presentation going to inspire? And do I have the energy for that today? Do I have the mental space? Do I have the I guess security in my own self to stand up to people if they say something that is harmful? Or something that, you know, whether it's harmful to me, or to the larger community, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. But like, do I have it in me to explain things because even if people aren't being rude, or you know, nasty, or or acting a certain way, like, just the explanation of this is what queer means. And these are my identities. And here's the gender unicorn, and you know, all these different things like that takes labor. And there's such an overlap, at least in my circles, like maybe not everywhere, but there's such an overlap with queer folks with chronic illness with disabilities, poor queer folks, right? Like, so many of us have multiple marginalized identities to the point that like, there's a solid chance that I'm exhausted before I even showed up. So like, what, you know, what does it mean? For example, if I'm going to space with other millennials, and Gen Z versus if I'm going to space with older folks with with Gen X and Boomers, like if I'm going to space with Gen X and Boomers, and I'm going to be one of few younger folks, I'm probably not going to put myself out there because that's like, true 101 level, like gender and sex are not the same, you know, sex and sexuality and gender expression, gender identity, I don't, I don't have time for all that. And especially if it's, you know, I'm going there for a work thing, or I'm going to a family wedding or you know, something like that. It's like, some days, I'm into it, some days, I'm not or some days, I'm like, you know, what, I don't care what anybody says, I'm just gonna show up. In some days. I'm like, I don't want to stand out. And I think too, it's a balance of like, okay, if I'm going to be in this super conservative space for three hours, how can I balance that out with some extra queerness? You know, today or tomorrow? How can I balance that out with like, going somewhere where I can feel affirmed in my identities in my presentation, you know, how can I make sure I feel gender euphoria, if I especially if I'm, you know, haven't had that feeling in a while or from wearing something that I'm not excited about? Or if people keep assuming certain things about me? How can I make sure that I balance that out with like extra self care? Or maybe I make it a point to go to a certain place with other queer folks?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 34:36

Yeah, totally. Well, I know you mentioned earlier about seeing with, you know, some of your clients how, yeah, this idea of their second adolescence, leading them to the timeline of exploring birthing options and what that looks like and I'm curious for you and your own journey, you know, with second adolescence, other components of your own experience of that what comes to mind when you think about your own journey Yeah,

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 35:00

lately I've been on a big inner child focus. And so like healing my inner child, which includes my inner first adolescent, who didn't get to do a lot of things, my, my family was very overly protective. And I was very much the oldest daughter, and again, in the south, so it's like, you don't get to do anything, we're gonna lock you up in a tower until you're old enough for us to not be responsible for you anymore, basically. And so I wasn't allowed to do a whole lot, I wasn't allowed to dress, you know, anything besides whatever they're selling at the mall, and only in certain stores never had topic. So, you know, I look back at my childhood in my first

adolescence, and really think about, like, I may not have any practical need for this to win, I'm gonna buy it because I never got to where to to on a regular day. And I want to. And so you know, there's things like that, that I tried to balance out being a grown up with healing the first go round of childhood and really acknowledging like, what did I need that I didn't have access to, then? And how can I give myself a piece of that now, even if it's not a whole process, I don't, you know, have a whole wardrobe but maybe it's like, one outfit that I that I really my inner teen would have been really into or something? Yeah, I think about that a lot. And I do a lot of just that emotional work of Yeah, what did my inner child me What did my inner teenager need? And I think just giving myself the space to really thoroughly explore myself to I think, is a really big piece of my, I guess my second adolescence, because like I said, my, my sexuality and my gender are always in flux. You know, some days, I'm like, I would be okay, never dressing mask again. And some days, I'm like, I really want to pull off a nice top button situation. And, you know, and I look really good. And so every day is different. And just acknowledging that, like, I'll go through, I don't like the word phases, but I'll go through different things that I'm into. And you know, one day I'll be into a particular color or a particular hobby, or whatever, and it might change. And that's okay. I think that's the biggest part of of just adolescence in general that like things can change at the drop of a hat. And that's okay. And it's still valid, and you're still you. Life is life. And I used to like when I was younger, I would look and you know, I'd be talking to someone older, and they say, oh, yeah, you know, when I was in my 20s, I was into X, Y, and Z, or I believed XY and Z. And I used to think like, Well, what happened? What changed? You know, how did you get from point A to point B, and now I'm getting older. And it's like, sometimes you outgrow things, you get more information, and you you change your opinion, sometimes, you know, you have an experience, and you're like, oh, you know, this changes the way that I view a lot of things, right, the changes the way that I view my life. And so I can definitely see where in life, you know, a lot of things can change. And that I think sometimes with queer folks, because we fought so long, maybe not Gen Z so much, but especially millennials and older, we fought so long to be visible, that then your identity changing or your presentation changing or something being different with your outward presentation, then almost want to say we feel like a little bit like a threat like it's a threat because I think so many of us have seen people who were there's like a whole acronym for it like lesbian until graduation or like, you're queer, and then you know, they decide I'm gonna go marry a man and have my 2.5 children. And this idea that queerness is a phase. And so I think a lot of us shy away from the exploration of our identities because of that of like, we want No, this is a valid identity, or this is evaluated live. And yes, it is. But it's okay, if you've outgrown it, or if you you know, your life is taking you in a different direction. That doesn't make you any less queer unless, you know, unless it does make you less queer. And that's cool, too, I guess. But, like, I'm sorry that you're not you don't get to be queer for the rest of your life, I guess. Yeah, I think that there's a fear of our identities being invalidated. Maybe if we have the freedom that we should have to explore what those identities look like. And so yeah, that's kind of that's how I tend to my inner child. Yeah,

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 39:06

I love that and like, just like what an invitation for all of us to just create all this space, we need to allow for kind of our identities to ebb and flow and basically whatever's authentic to always have space to rise up to the surface. That's a really great an interesting point how there can be this attachment to Okay, no, well, this is my one box. I am a gay man. This is my one box I thought my whole life to have this one box. I don't want to give any more space to kind of explore if that's still true and or like you're speaking to within the umbrella of the ace community like I so appreciate you bringing that part of your your experience into this

conversation. Because I'm hearing that happen more and more for folks to actually pull back and to let themselves really examine like, Well, where do I fall? What is most true for me? How do I experience both relating to another person, but also sexuality and closeness intimacy. All of that. And by just giving ourselves more space, we've all been so trapped for way too long. Why keep doing that to ourselves? And that's what I'm hearing from you. It's like such an invitation to really look at where we might be trapping our own selves still, and just create that space. Oh, love that. Thanks. Wow. Oh, my goodness, there's so many places I want to go. I also want to be sensitive to your time and not take up your whole day. But I guess like shifting into your work, and particularly with queer people, I'm curious, like, if you can speak to, like, what are you seeing as people are stepping into even these conversations about birthing, and also navigating these systems, as you're speaking to that, perhaps don't have a lot of space for all queer people and don't have a lot of support necessarily, for all queer people? Like, what are you seeing in your class?

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 40:47

In my clients, I just love queer people so much, because my clients, you know, they're different. Every single family is so different, and the ways in which, you know, a doula is a short term relationship. So I don't necessarily know them before they get pregnant or before they, you know, start this process, and I don't necessarily interact with them a lot after and so just seeing what the queer families that I work with, come to the table with already, like they've already thought about what's the kid going to call me they've already thought about, what pronouns are we going to use to identify our child, they've already thought about, you know, gender roles and expectations in child rearing, which is a huge topic that we need to talk about more, because why else? Would we uphold the system that's obviously harming everyone, unless we were indoctrinated as small children, but that's a whole nother I could talk about that for another hour. But yeah, like they've already done. So many of the thought exercises that honestly a lot of SciTech couples take for granted, or don't even acknowledged. And so a lot of the queer and trans families, they they're thinking about who is our extended family, who is our chosen family? Who are the other folks who are going to support us as we're building this family, whether it's a two parent household, whether it's multiple co parents, whether they're romantically involved or not, whether they're a single parent by choice, they're thinking about who is in this community, who are going to be the people who I trust, in partnership with raising my child and my children, where people are thinking about what are all the different ways to build a family, whether it's using a sperm bank, whether it's using a known donor, a friend, a family member, or a loved one, whether it is gestational carriers, which that's what I was gonna say, like, the larger birth space is kind of old school. Like that was a big, just position I was seeing when I was involved in reproductive justice space that will I'm still involved. But when I was first becoming a birth worker, and getting in these birth work and doula spaces, and everything was very, like reproductive justice, you know, we have our community agreements, and we're talking about how can we support you to be your best self in the space? And what needs do you have as a whole person? Like, that's one of the biggest things we always talk about as whole people in whole movements. Like, we're not just talking about this one particular issue, we're talking about, how can we help you and your family, your community, live your best lives, and so then you go to these birth spaces, everyone's assumed to be a woman, a cisgender. Woman, everyone's assumed to be in a heterosexual relationship, everyone is assumed to have gotten pregnant, the old fashioned way, for lack of a better term, like when we know that assisted reproductive technologies are huge, not just with queer people, right? We know that people are using these technologies, we know that people are doing things to build their families outside of just the old fashioned way. But there's not a lot of

acknowledgement of loss, you know, the experiences that folks have had previously, we're getting better at some of these things. But this was especially true four years ago, you know, talking about loss, talking about the complicated nature of building our families. So in a lot of reproductive justice spaces, we talk about abortion, and there's a such thing, it's like, 40% of people who have abortions already have kids. So this idea that like, oh, you know, you're having an abortion, because you're an irresponsible teenager, or you're, you know, you're 25 or whatever you're irresponsible young person know a lot of people, they might have three, four kids already, and are choosing to have an abortion, and what does that mean? Then maybe if you decide to have another kid, and you're in the spaces, and nobody's creating space for the complexities, in that it's all you know, again, it's all assume that everyone has a similar looking family. And so then by juxtaposition, these queer families, I meet queer families, and it's just I'm always just amazed at the ways that queer people are queering just the things that we do in everyday life and learning about queer history as well. When it comes to raising kids like back in the 70s. It was very popular for queer folks, you know, the lesbian couple and the gay couple both want to have kids. We have all the parts between the four of us. So let's, you know whether it's we're raising one family communally, or you're gonna be a surrogate for our kid, and the next time we're gonna be the sperm donor for your kid or whatever it is, like, there's ways that queer people have questioned the normative ways of building families, as long as queer people who've been around, right, but working with my clients in real time gives me a chance to see what are some of those historical things that have survived? Or what are some of the ways that we are asking questions as a generation of queer millennials and older, queer Gen Z years of how can we build our families outside of these, you know, two or three ways that folks know about one of the big reasons why assisted reproductive technologies and other ways of building families has been coming to the forefront? I think, in my opinion, is because queer millennials, we're coming into that age where we're starting to think about this, and we are demanding more of these conversations. That yes, of course, again, people have been using these technologies for however long but queer folks specifically are like, Hey, I would imagine I haven't seen numbers on this. But I would imagine that queer Millennials are a really large generation that we may, even if we're not larger than our elders, we are the most visible, you know, of the past few generations. And so our visibility is forcing some of these conversations to happen, which I think is way overdue, because the things that were inaccessible to queer folks, even 10 years ago, are more accessible. Now, because we're having these conversations. Health insurance is a big one, especially around conception and pre-conception of fertility, that a lot of health insurance, you have to be diagnosed with infertility in order for IVF, or some other assistive technologies to be covered. And to be diagnosed with infertility depends on who you ask, but you either have to have been trying quote, unquote, to get pregnant for six months or a year before you can be diagnosed with that. So of course, we're queer folks, you know, that you can't even what is trying mean when there's we don't have all the ingredients necessary to try or even you know, folks who want to conceive a baby in some other way besides intercourse. You know, what does it mean to be trying in the fact that there's a lot of class conversations we can have around, you know, how accessible a lot of these technologies are, you know, how many of us how many GoFundMe is Have you seen for? We're trying to have a baby? You know, I've seen I've seen a good amount, you know, who is this accessible to? And when one vial of sperm is like \$1,500, then who is this accessible to and if it takes you more than one or two tries to get pregnant, then that's just going to add up. If someone in your family doesn't have a uterus, like I say, the ingredients, you need sperm, you need an egg, and you need a uterus to hold it. And so if you're missing one or more of those components, how does that journey look for you? And I think for queer folks, there's no one answer, which is the beauty of queerness that we're constantly queering the ways that we can make it happen. And I think that I think it'll be really interesting to see queer parenting continue to unfold, transparent and continue to unfold, because now that a lot of

again, a lot of queer and trans Millennials are getting older, we're getting more advanced degrees, and we're doing research and dissertations on queer trans family making like, five years ago, there was not a lot of research articles about trans parents. And now, there's a good amount it's not now it's not flooded. There's not a ton, but we know more than we did about queer and trans folks, chest feeding, queer and trans folks, and the intersection of hormones and gender affirming care, and fertility. For example, a millennial who, when they were to say 20 years old said, hey, I want to go on tea. You know, if this was 1015 years ago, they weren't asking, Hey, have you thought about your fertility? Have you thought about the maybe want to have a baby one day, even if you're not sure, do you want to freeze your eggs? Do you want to freeze your sperm before we start the hormones, because if you start the hormones, and then you want to, you know, be able to have viable sperm or viable egg or whatever the case is, you have to go off your hormones for a few months, you have to do all these things. And that can be really gender dysphoric, and really harmful for folks. And so honestly, I don't know if doctors are having those conversations with young queer and trans folks who do want gender affirming care. But I would like to think that that conversation is more common now than it was 1015 years ago. And now we have some research to say transmits fertility is not necessarily negatively impacted by taking T trans women's fertility after coming off hormones for X amount of months. Their fertility is similar levels as it was before starting. We know that now. So that it's not just a blanket assumption that you can't have kids, which is what it was before either an assumption that queer trans folk can't have kids or don't want to have kids. I've had a lot of thoughts about that too, about how a lot of queer and trans spaces are not necessarily kid friendly or family friendly or that They say their kid friendly or family friendly, but like a Pride Parade, for example, even if they say it's family friendly, you can't control what 20,000 People are going to do, right? There's a lot of people at various levels of undress, you know that people may or may not have feelings about having their kids around certain expressions of people's humanity. And you know, that's your right as a parent, but a lot of these queer and trans spaces are not necessarily kid friendly. And I think there's this misconception that like, those aren't compatible that like queer and trans people, and having a family having kids are not compatible when really what we know now. And what we're learning now is that we're just going through a second adolescence before we settle down and have kids. So just because you don't see like a 28 year old queer parent doesn't mean that queer people don't want to have kids. It just means that, you know, maybe not that group, like, of course, you're around a bunch of people in their late 20s, queer people, they're probably not thinking about kids, because they're just happy to have their second adolescence. They're not thinking anywhere near that, but ask them 10 years later might be a different conversation. And so yeah, I think there's a lot of layers to that. And as the conversation is more publicized, or more common, we learn more information, we share more information with each other, and we're able to build our families, and we have role models to look up to that, like, wow, this family adopted their kids, this family, co parents with someone else, like we have all these different ways to look at it. And it's not always this gender essentialist, like my child has to have my DNA. But it's really a queer way of building family and that we don't have to be blood related. I can choose you, I can choose my children just like I choose my siblings, or I choose my mother or I choose these other members of my family. And so I think that's really beautiful. And I just love queer people exist in queerly, because there will be a queer person doing something that I never even fathom. But now that I've seen it, it might not be my cup of tea, but it's something that I can at least like think about. And like, as an option of I have 12 different options of how to do this thing as opposed to just one or two.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 52:02



I can't wait to re listen to this conversation. Like I feel in this moment. I'm just feeling so much gratitude for you coming on sharing your own personal story, sharing your experience sharing your perspective. And I feel so inspired to personally kind of dive deeper into reproductive justice work. I feel so inspired to dive deeper into like my own personal healing and self reflection. I just feel so inspired in this conversation and I feel so, so appreciative to you but Okay, before I stop, I'm gonna stop gushing. But before I let you go, was there was there anything else that wanted to be a part of this conversation that hasn't come up yet?

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 52:38

Yeah, one thing that I am, I try to make sure I at least mentioned once is the intersex identity and intersex folks. So intersex is an umbrella term for a variety of whether it's hormonal, chromosomal, or physical differences that folks may have. So as an umbrella, one in six, I believe one in six babies is born intersex and we don't talk about intersex folks enough, we don't talk enough about intersex issues, because for example with an intersex baby who has external genitalia that looks different than what people assume it should look like. The most common treatment is genital surgery, basically. So they don't have any form of consent. They're not able to choose quote unquote one gender or the other and that was the treatment for a lot of these physical conditions was pick one basically, do you want your child to be a girl or a boy or maybe it depended on what their genitalia look like, as opposed to this person living life as an intersex person. So I know a lot of intersex activism is around genital they call it genital mutilation surgeries. And so I always want to uplift that because I think that we don't talk about it enough. When we're talking about all the different variations of normal and all the different ways your baby could come out, your baby can be left handed, your baby can be redhead and your baby could, you know have one hand your baby could be intersex. It's not necessarily disability, it's not necessarily something that's going to negatively affect their lives. Not all intersex people are unable to have children. It really depends on the condition and all these different things. And so, I always want to uplift intersex folks, the intersex folks exist, the intersex babies are born and they exist and they deserve to be able to have a say over what happens to their bodies. And so even when I'm talking to especially when I'm talking to cisgender folks, cisgender women about whether they're expectant parents or their people who work with expectant parents, like intersex babies exists and if you're not surprised that intersex exists if your baby is diagnosed with intersex, I would imagine that you would have more time to think about surgeries and personally I don't think anyone should you know subject their children to these surgeries but at least thinking about what are your values, your ethics, doing your research to learn about the different conditions and different treatments and things like that and not to be bullied by a doctor or may Have you not bullied but to know that there are other options? Even if your doctor says, oh, let's do surgery that, you know, you can say no, I'm going to, you know, let my child exist the way they are, and I'm going to love them and care for them. And so, I don't identify as intersex. I'm not an intersex activist, but I try to uplift that work when I can. There are a couple of really great organizations that are either doing advocacy for intersex folks, or are doing the educational piece as far as educating parents on having intersex kids, educating intersex kids about what this means for their lives and their bodies. And so I will always lift up folks who are doing the work with intersex folks, because that's a huge area that we miss, when we have the conversation around gender and sexuality that intersex folks are often erased and assumed to not be in the spaces when you know there can be an overlap with queer and trans this or maybe there's not an overlap of queer and trans but either way, the very real harms that are being enacted on intersex folks bodies are real. And I always want to lift that up.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 56:01

Thank you for absolutely for highlighting that experience. And I agree there's absolutely more need to bring intersex folks in the intersex experience into the conversation. Absolutely. I so so appreciate you doing so. Okay, I do have to let you go. I don't want to but I guess if for folks who are listening, if they want to follow up with you or hear more about the work you're doing or connect? Are you someone who invites that and if so, what's a good place to send them?

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 56:31

Yeah, I'm always down for connection. But right now I am kind of anti social media. So you can follow us on Instagram, we may or may not post anything but @kulunturjc Instagram, you can always email me at admin@kuluntu.center. And then our website is www.kuluntu.center. So you can see like podcasts and YouTube videos that I've spoken on, you can see a giant like resource list, you can see some of the things that we offer for birthing families and for other people who work with birthing families learn a little bit more about me and the work that I do and some of the details of the work that I do. But that's probably the best thing is either email me or go to the website. But yeah, we may or may not post on Instagram, but it is there. That's a whole nother conversation to my feelings on social media. But I always invite connection. And I love to have more of these conversations. So I'm always down to keep talking about the ways that gender and sexuality and queering those things and queering the ways that we live our lives is not only important and should be visible, but it's crucial, because the United States is really bad about like, it's always been done that way as a concept. And a lot of the things especially around gender, that we assume have always been done that way have not. And a lot of those things have really only come up in the last like 50 years or so especially when it comes to like marketing and toys and the ways that we teach children gender, it's been really influenced by like the toy companies, honestly. So that's a whole nother thing. But I won't go into that. But yeah, I love having these conversations, because I think it's crucial for us to rethink the way that we relate to each other. And gender is one of the most foundational ways that we relate to each other. Even before we meet each other you see somebody's name or you see a picture and you assume, and the way that you interact with that person is completely changed based off of what you perceive. So

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 58:32

yeah. Okay, thank you. Again, this has been such a gift such a treat. Again, I so appreciate you being so generous with your own story and your own experience and your work and really letting us all in to it. I can't wait to read listen to this multiple times. I feel the need to go journal right now to kind of process a lot. And so I just really Yeah, I really, really appreciate you. And I'm excited we were able to connect in this way.

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 58:58

Yeah, thank you for your time and the platform. And I would love to come back. If that's on the table.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 59:07

There's so many. There's so many when you were like, Oh, that'd be a whole other hour. I'm like, oh, let's go there right now. So yes, I would love to have a part two, part three, all of that. Let's definitely make it happen.

K

Khye Tyson (they/them) 59:18

Absolutely. Well, I can't wait. And yeah, I'm really grateful for this podcast. I think these conversations are so so so so necessary.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 59:27

Thank you Hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to [secondadolescentpod.com](https://secondadolescentpod.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 guest on the show and you want to come on and share about your own second adolescence visit [secondadolescencepod.com/beaguest](https://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 in your day, go on out there and keep doing things that would make younger you absolutely thrilled. That is what it's all about. Alright, take good care