

Ep 31: Second Adolescence w/ Jake Fedorowski (they/them)

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Jake Fedorowski (they/them)



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello, hello and welcome back to the Second Adolescence podcast. I'm your host Adam James Cohen. It is January 2023. And we took a break after the end of last year. We do 10 Episode seasons here on second adolescence and today we are kicking off our fourth one of these and I am so excited to share this guests and this conversation with you. We recorded this a few months back and I knew I wanted this to be the kickoff episode of this season because our guests is just the best. This week's guest is Jake Federowski (they/them) who I personally believe is absolutely changing the running industry with their advocacy for non binary inclusion in that sport. I am a runner. And so this is deeply personal and something I care about. But I think that you don't have to necessarily be a runner to really appreciate the work that Jake is doing in the world. And yeah, this conversation isn't just for runners or people who like to sign up for 5ks, half marathons, marathons, though, if you are one of those people, you'll absolutely want to listen. We talk about Jake's advocacy work, which is yeah, incredible. But we also dive into their own personal story and their own journey of finding themselves they embody such an arc of queer healing that I think is really helpful for folks to be witness to. On this episode, Jake shares with us about their youngest most purely them self, who was so playful and expressive before the world tried to socialize them into the box of boyhood, they then share with us about their own process in college and beyond of finding that playful, free self again, and their journey of identity understanding and affirmation. This truly was such an impactful conversation for me. And I feel beyond grateful for both the work that Jake is doing in the world. But also they're offering their own personal story with us here today, just the coolest. And as with each episode of Second Adolescence, I want to invite you as listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are different and unique. 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 for show notes and more. Or you can follow the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). All right, thank you so much for being here. Welcome to the conversation Welcome to Second Adolescence. I'm really excited to

have you on and curious to see what comes up in this conversation. But before going anywhere, I like to invite the person on your end just to give a little mini introduction just to give the listeners a little context to who the person is in their ears. So who are you and I know that who are you question - like I giggle whenever someone asks me that, like, there's so many ways to go with it. But what comes up just as an initial who are Yeah,

J Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 03:25

Yeah. Well, thank you so much for having me. My name is Jake Federowski, my pronouns are they them, and I am a non binary individual currently residing in Seattle, Washington. And I would define myself as an advocate for non binary inclusion specifically in the sport of running, but I'm also a huge musical theater geek and love anything that has to do with the outdoors, whether it be the mountains or the water.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:50

Cool. Okay, I have already a list of questions I want to just like rattle off, but I have to like, center myself, I guess first to begin, I'd like to kind of begin here with centering on why did you feel pulled to coming on here to share your story and talk about this idea of second adolescence, what pulled you in?

J Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 04:09

I think, just like any queer individual, you know, our stories are so intricate. And you know, there's just so many different layers and moments in each of our stories. And I personally, you know, even like I was saying, listening to the previous guests who've been on the podcast, just getting to listen to all those little details and find those moments where, oh, that resonated with me. Like, that's something that I went through, or, Oh, I never really thought about it that way. Or, Oh, I wonder, you know, that must have been really challenging. We learned so much through storytelling and through putting ourselves in, you know, that other person's shoes or, you know, in their experience, and I think there's so much strength and there's so much that we can take from people's stories and you know, specifically around this idea of the second adolescence, I think, and I'm sure we'll get into this, but like, mine is you know, First, I came out as gay thinking, like, Ah, did it check the box? And then all of a sudden was like, Well, wait a second, actually, something's still not right, you know. And that got into then discovering my gender identity and just realizing that like my second adolescence, and really kind of discovering who I am, wasn't this one moment in time, and it continues to be this long journey that can be really challenging, it can be really exciting, it can be really emotional. And so just, you know, super excited to be here to talk about that. And I don't really talk about that journey a lot. I've got a few friends that I'll talk about these things with, but I've never really had those in depth conversations with my family, or just kind of with the general public, I guess. So I'm just excited to kind of actually learn from myself, really put words to what my experience has been, and hopefully, you know, kind of figure out where it might go from here.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:55

Yeah, and I love that idea of learning from myself. Because there's something powerful that can

learn, and I love that idea of learning from myself. Because there's something powerful that can happen when you like, just allow yourself to step into a space to reflect and like, oftentimes, things come up from the unconscious, or we make new meaning out of something, or we see a through line in ways that maybe we didn't see before, just through this act of reflecting on our own stories and telling our stories. So who, okay, I'm excited to get to have you here and dive into yours. And I'm finding myself in this moment pulled because I have so many questions about your professional life and all the work you're doing in the running industry to really like shift the running industry and make it more of an inclusive space. But then I'm also so curious to also start with your personal story. And so okay, I'm going to put a pin in your professional world, because so much of this podcast is about diving into our own personal stories. Let's maybe start there. And so I guess when you think about your greater queer journey, where do you start when you reflect on the beginning of that story?

J Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 06:51

Hmm. I mean, I go right back to when I was a young kid, we always joke about how there was this moment, when I was a kid, I was always helping like my great aunts and you know, kind of my some of my family members with like cleaning, we would go to like my great grandmother's house and we would help clean her apartment or her condo. And I specifically remember getting like my own little mini dustpan, and like apron and broom, you know, like, just those little tiny things. And there's a specific moment that my parents tell me all the time about how I was walking around with you know, the apron on and you know, my cleaning things and hand singing man, I feel like a woman by Shania Twain. And like, that's where I just always go back to is this like, you know, this boy, this baby that was assigned male at birth, and you know, therefore raised as a boy, you know, walking around singing man, I feel like a woman and just like that dichotomy, right there is like, what a great place to start.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 07:57

Yeah, totally, totally. Oh, yeah. What's it like? I'm always fascinated, like, as adults looking back at these different moments in our stories, like, in this moment, looking back at that little you what comes to mind? What do you think about or what you experienced as you just look back at that image, even of little you singing that song?

J Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 08:13

I think happiness, I think I wasn't at a place where I was the expectations of society, or even just my family, right. And the people around me those expectations, they hadn't had an effect yet, I was still so young and still kind of in that playful moment of my life where I just got to play with who I was, and the things I was doing the things I was interested in. And I think, you know, right there is like, that was the source of so much happiness, and just like pureness in a way, I would think, right, like, none of the, you know, society and the things that life throws at you, none of that had really, you know, affected me yet had really come into play. And so, pureness and happiness for sure.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:55

Totally, I really appreciate that you started here, because I feel like a theme I see so much both on the show, but also in so many conversations I have with queer people about their own healing journey is we can kind of firm not everyone, but a lot of us can look back and almost see like, the most pure version of us before the world told us we weren't allowed to be that. And there can be this powerful image and memory of our younger selves, just as you're speaking to like experiencing just play and curiosity and freedom. And for many of us, our path is back to that person in adulthood, right, finding who we were then and kind of shedding the shit that the world put onto us. And I guess I'm curious if that resonates as part of your arc and you're so

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 09:40

100% I mean, I went to school originally for musical theater performance, and that, you know, year and a half that I was doing a lot of like acting and musical theater type classes. You know, so much of that is kind of shedding those things, those weights, I guess, and getting back to that playful self getting back to that child, that inner child that is able to just kind of let go and explore and have this open, curious mind. And I that was one of my favorite parts about that time of my life was just getting to be in a safe space, you know, in a, in a studio in a classroom, and get to let a lot of that go and just play and discover with those around me who were doing the same thing. And so I totally resonate with that. And now as you know, I'm out of school and you know, kind of doing other things. But I still like to go back to that, especially like, as I start to discover, you know, my love of makeup. And the ways that I get to express myself a lot of the time feels like that child again, feels like that kid that just got to explore and didn't have a worry in the world about what anyone else thought they were wearing, or you know, they had on so definitely resonates for sure.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 10:58

Okay, yeah, I'm really excited to get to that part of your story. Okay. But yeah, let's let's first jumping back a little bit like kind of catching this younger you first kind of existing in the world in this like playful, expressive, curious, free way. And then the world kind of added some stuff onto your plate. And I'm curious about what do you remember about kind of the soup within which you were socialized and kind of baked in and kind of what do you remember kind of being told both about gender, about sexuality, like what happened in childhood into early adolescence around kind of what messaging you were getting about who you are, and who you quote, unquote, should be.

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 11:36

So when I was a kid, you know, I was raised in a very cis heteronormative family, I was kind of always raised in this house, where I had this vision of, you know, you're gonna grow up, you're going to marry a woman, you're gonna have kids, you'll be happy, right? Like, that was kind of what I was witnessing. And that's just kind of what I always envisioned for myself. You know, my parents got divorced when I was like, six ish. And that kind of started to throw a wrench in like that vision, right? Like, oh, wait, Okay, interesting. And you know, at the time, we were going to church, and I was being raised in this Lutheran setting. And as I started to get older, starting to realize that like, I didn't necessarily subscribe to that, and I didn't really believe in

the things that maybe my parents or my family believed in. And then as a kid, because I was raised as a boy, I'm from Minnesota, so hockey, like, first thing that comes to mind. And so played hockey forever, not forever, but for a few years. And, you know, played a bunch of different sports, there was baseball, soccer, tennis, and eventually, none of them really panned out, I never stuck with any of them for, you know, an extended amount of time. And at the time, I think I was just like, oh, like, I just don't really enjoy this, I'm not really into it, and then eventually discovered theater and art and music. And that was super exciting to me. And so I kind of veered off into that direction. But what I realized was, like, I look back on that time of my life, within that sporting world, that athletic moment of my young childhood, and I realized that it wasn't that I didn't, I mean, yeah, I didn't enjoy the time that I was spending with those sports, but I look at like the community that I was operating in or playing in, right. And it was a very masculine setting. And as a child, like, I was definitely more on the feminine side. And so I didn't see myself reflected in you know, my peers. And I saw this a little bit too at school, you know, with my friend group, and the people that I was getting along with, I just for some reason, I think at the time was like, ah, you know, I'm just not that sporty kid. But I think like, I'm a runner, like, I am athletic, like I am into those sorts of things. I am competitive, but it was more a reflection of the other kids that I was with in those settings and me not really seeing myself not being really welcomed or accepted in those spaces. And obviously, at the time, I didn't have the terminology. I knew very little about what gay meant, let alone queer non binary, like those were not even things on the radar yet. And so yeah, so as a child, like, I just I knew something was off. I knew I wasn't really fitting in. But I didn't really have the language to explain that. And, you know, I was living with this family within this setting that kind of always just told me that I was going to fall in love with a woman I was going to get married, I was gonna have kids and that was how I was operating at the time. And then it all started to unfold, and I started to make lots of realizations.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 14:46

Okay, yeah. And what was that process of making this realization because like, I feel like for so many of us, there's a similar theme of like, this general feeling of different nests, but we don't again, like you're speaking to, we don't have the language we don't have the understanding, to understand what we're feeling And why we maybe we're not feeling like the box as people are putting us in or the world is seeming to put us in, but then that can gradually kind of as we get older, we start to gain a little bit more conscious awareness to really what yeah, that different is perhaps is about and I'm curious, you and your story like these realizations, what was that process?

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 15:18

So when I was a junior high, high school, that expectation of like finding a girlfriend, and you know, asking that girl to the dance, or to prom, or whatever the situation was, I just kind of felt like, Oh, those are things I have to do. That's what's expected. And so I did those things. And like, I had girlfriends, but it never really felt, right. It just kind of felt like, oh, okay, this is just what I have to do. I don't know, like it. It's hard to describe that because it, I don't know, it's just like that time and the way that I was thinking about those relationships and those expectations, like, it's just, it's hard to describe, but definitely did those things. And then, once I was kind of toward the 11th grade time of my life, realizing like, oh, okay, this makes sense. Like, I'm starting to learn what gay straight bi you know, what those things mean? And starting

to realize, Okay, I think I know what's going on here, I started to realize that I was actually noticing and being more attracted to men or to the boys that were, you know, around me, and so I knew for college, because so growing up there, you know, along with all this being different, right? There was definitely like some bullying and you know, just the typical, like, this kid doesn't really fit in. And so I don't really, I mean, it wasn't the worst experience, right? Like, it wasn't like any sort of like physical bullying, but it was there's definitely a lot of like instances of verbal bullying happening. And I just don't really look back on that time, as you know, like fondly? Sure, totally, I knew to like after getting to high school, and like starting to figure out who this kid was, I was like, Oh, I really want to go to school out of state, like, I really just kind of want to get out of this town, sort of small town, not super small. But a lot of people knew a lot of people. And I knew I just kind of wanted to go to a new place and kind of just be able to discover who I really was, and really get to explore that. And so that's where I look to Chicago, and went off to study musical theater. And that to me was I look back on that decision to move to Chicago as one of the best decisions I've ever made. Because I was able to enter a new city, a new space where nobody knew me. And I was able to really dive into this exploration of myself and not have to worry about who was around me and what they thought of me or what they knew of me. And it was just such a wonderful experience. And I really am so thankful for the people that I met in Chicago and the teachers and the professors and the people that I got to interact with, really helped kind of shape who I now am. And during that time in Chicago is when I started to learn a lot more about one of my favorite courses was the queer literature course. And like, that taught me so much about the queer experience, and my professor was queer and like getting to see a person just living their life authentically. I was like, What is this? Yes, so yeah, it you know, Chicago really taught me so much and really, gosh, you know, was a key moment in my life. And, and at the time, remember, like, I'm still thinking, Ah, you know, I figured it out. I'm gay, like, I'm gonna live authentically as my gay sis self. Little did I know, I hadn't quite figured it all out yet.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 18:46

Right. Right. Okay. But before jumping to that piece of your story, I'm curious, like, in this because I hear how powerful Chicago was for you on like, so many levels. And I'm so happy that you got to have that experience. And I'm also curious, like, Okay, going into Chicago, what do you remember believing about queerness and your own identity? Like, I'm always curious about these internal beliefs, we're holding both about ourselves, but also what it means for ourselves to have these different aspects of identity and what do you remember going into that chapter? Sounds like you were set on okay. Yeah, I gotta get out. And like, perhaps consciously or unconsciously, you were thinking that it'll be a place where I can just either find myself or feel better or what have you. What do you remember really thinking about all that?

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 19:27

I remember going to Chicago with a completely blank slate. And I remember when I you know, because I came out to like my immediate family kind of right before I graduated high school, so only a few months before I went to Chicago. And I do remember like, during that coming out process, I even contemplated like not telling my mom until I was in Chicago like because I thought I can just do like a quick phone call and you know, it'll just be so much easier, and then had the real They have like, Okay, now maybe you should tell them in person, like before you go. And I'm so glad I did that, because that allowed me to really go with this blank slate, like, at

the time was like, okay, you know who you are, you are this gay sis boy that's, you know, headed off into this new world, and you're just going to kind of open yourself up to experience you know, experience new people, new practices, new cultures, new everything, right. So really just kind of going into it with an open mind. And, you know, studying something that I was and still, you know, super passionate about. And, you know, just really got to learn a lot about queerness, both through like the courses I was taking, but also because I was at an art school. So a lot of the kids, you know, a lot of the people there, were also queer, right, and really just got to learn from different people, you know, because when I was in high school, like, there may be a couple other gay kids, but really, it was kind of just all I knew of was my experience. And so in Chicago, all of a sudden, I was like, oh, like, I'm starting to learn about the trans experience. And I'm learning about the gay lesbian bisexual experiences, those were all kind of new things to me new concepts. And God, I just, I was able to start to really form a like a vocabulary for what these different identities meant, I guess I would say, like, Chicago served as kind of the foundation for like my advocacy work now. And the queer history that I was learning and like that general understanding of the queer experience all that began in Chicago, because yeah, in high school year, we weren't learning about, you know, there's no queer sex ed back in that time. And there still really isn't for the most part. So I guess that's another thing too, like, I had to learn a lot. As I experienced it, right? Like, well, first of all my parents, I feel like I didn't really get like the talk, or like, I didn't really get like that sex education at home, like I got what they teach at school, but, and for sure, like, didn't get any sort of gay sex education, or queer sex education. So all of that was learned on the internet, and, you know, through experience and through my friends, and a lot of it was kind of centered around my experience in Chicago, which, you know, is a great place for a lot of that to happen, right?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 22:17

And how was that for you to start having those experiences? Liberating, terrifying. Above and, right,

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 22:28

it was really cool. I mean, I, I made lots of mistakes. I learned a lot. I really grew as a human and specifically as a queer individual. Yeah, it was exciting. It was scary. But I have this sort of confidence, I think, because I didn't have to worry about what other people thought, right? I didn't have anyone there that was going to judge me. I mean, sure, maybe there would be people judging me, but I didn't know them. Right. And it's, you know, I think about all the time, like, I never really wanted to settle back down in Minnesota. You know, I go home to see family and stuff. But it's kind of hard for me to think about going home because it is that thing of like those people there know me as that sis, straight boy, right? Quotation marks. And I think whenever I go home, there's always this anxiety, this sort of kind of fear about like, what are they going to think, you know, if I show up with earrings, or with makeup on or heels on, like, what are they going to say? What are they going to do? And in Chicago in I mean, I lived in Dallas, Santa Fe, and now Seattle, like, Those aren't things I really worry about anymore. Because these are spaces that I've entered as that queer individual. And so that worry doesn't really cross my mind. But when I go back home, that immediately clicks in and it's hard. It's really hard to go home. Hard both because like, I'm excited to see my family and to see my friends, but it's also this conflict, right? I would just describe it as anxiety. That's always anxiety inducing when I go home.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 24:06

Yes, totally. Gosh, I mean, I'm just like nodding my head and like, I can relate to elements of that, too. In my own personal story. My word is depression not anxiety when I go home, because I can still feel still it's been a process for me I've been someone where I've like felt a need to kind of repair my experience of my hometown, which has been a lot of work ongoing still but it's been so my experience where I step back and I just feel what younger me felt which was so much of that depression which was so much of that kind of smallness and trap miss having to really work with this younger me and let him know he's safe now, and he's okay now and like this, perhaps can be a place where he can exist. That wasn't true back then. So like, I share that just because in my own journey, I can relate to like hometown being complicated. I think for so many queer people hometown is complicated. A lot of people have had to make a decision where you know what it doesn't serve me to like have any relationship to my hometown, it serves me best to kind of have that boundary there for other folks for various reasons, they have to step back. And so, I mean, I just really appreciate you sharing that part of it, because I think we all get it.

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 25:15

I think you also add in the elements of just like, you know, shame and nostalgia and like, you know, all those different things really kind of factor into that equation. And so, you know, I remember when I was first kind of starting to travel and like, you know, going to school and living in different places around the country. And my mom was always talking about, oh, like, You're never home anymore. And I think I was super busy working and like trying to start my career as a stage manager at the time. But also, I think, subconsciously, like there was this Yeah, but I don't really feel comfortable coming home. Like, it's not, it's not necessarily my family, but it's just like, it's hometown, as you said, like, it's that environment, I just, I still don't feel comfortable going back and revisiting and having those memories of of that kid that just didn't feel normal, didn't feel accepted. And, you know, with that comes a lot of sadness, and like, you feel bad, like I feel for that kid, right? Like, that kid is a completely different person now and are not I wouldn't even say like completely different, but like that kid has discovered who they actually are, and able to live authentically in these other places, you know, so going back and revisiting that is really challenging.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 26:27

Absolutely. Awesome. Okay, so I'm thinking about you and your story about Chicago, really jumpstarting so much of this healing and expansion is what kind of the two words that are not popping up for me, and then you were alluding to this other part of really developing more awareness of your gender identity? Tell me about that piece.

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 26:45

Yeah. So and I'll start to weave in some of the running here, because it kind of Yeah, kind of is a parallel, which I've discovered in the recent, you know, weeks. But when I was in Chicago, that was when I started to do more running on my own, because I hadn't been doing sports or

anything, I was doing all theater and art and whatnot. And I think first of all, it was like, I needed something to just stay active and like, take care of my body. And so I was doing like biking and rollerblading and running. And to me, at the time, you know, running was something I could do because it was an individual activity, I didn't have to worry about fitting into a team or group. So when I was in Chicago, started to run started to you know, bike and all that because to me, those were individual activities, those were things I didn't have to worry about fitting into a team or you know, a culture, right, I can just do it on my own. And really kind of discovered, like, this was a great way to, yes, take care of my body and stay active. But like it was kind of a reset for me mentally and emotionally. As I was kind of going through this process of figuring out who I was, it was a way to kind of ground myself and be able to kind of escape, you know, school, work life, just be outside and you know, be with myself and my own thoughts. So eventually, a couple years later arrive in Seattle, and I stumbled upon the Seattle front runners, which is an LGBTQ ai plus running and walking club. And for the first time realizing that, oh, this thing that I love to do by myself can actually be done with a group of people that will support you affirm your identity, and celebrate you and your existence. Right. So that was a super exciting moment for me, because I got to really start to get myself back into that like competitive sport mode that I was trying to get to as a kid, but I was never really clicking. And so that was a really exciting moment for me. And while that was happening, this was in 2021, I'd always wanted to host my own podcast. And so I started to get ready to launch my podcast, which was titled queer by birth, proud by choice. And this podcast, the whole idea of it was, you know, yes, we as queer folks are coming out to our family or friends, whoever. And that's really important, but to me, that's a very external thing. It's something that's always about like, Oh, how did it go, you know, who did you tell? What did you do? How did you say how did they react? And I'm more interested or I was more interested at the time in figuring out the next step, which I believe is this moment or series of moments where you finally feel proud in and of your queer body. And so the whole point of this podcast was to really focus on those moments. And as I was getting ready, you know, doing some research and kind of getting ready to have different guests on started to, once again learn some of that terminology, learn about different people's experiences, who were you know, gender non conforming, and all of a sudden was like, oh my goodness, there it is like that is the thing that I have been trying to figure out this whole time. This existing outside or between or even beyond? On the gender binary of men and women, and so that's kind of where all of a sudden I was like, oh my goodness, this non binary identity that I never really knew about. All of a sudden I have the language and it finally clicked for me. And so that was kind of, you know, I look at college was like, Okay, this gay sis boy is figuring it all out. And then as I was operating over the next few years, there were little moments here and there, like I always talk about, I was in Dallas, Texas for a contract. And I remember, I was at a Trader Joe's, and I had on my, like, I had like, these Chelsea boot heel things on I had like, my black trench coat, and I had a purse. And the person at the register when I walked up was like, oh, like, how can I help you, ma'am? Or, you know, said something about like, ma'am, and use she her pronouns. And I remember, like, it was a bit jarring because I hadn't really experienced that before. But at the same time, it didn't necessarily feel wrong, right? Like, it just was like, Oh, that's interesting. Like, it was kind of playing into, you know, the more feminine side of my identity. And then, you know, kind of from there started to have more instances of like, people would say, like, ma'am, or, you know, refer to me as if I were a woman. And then they like, they look at me closer, and they're like, oh, wait, oh, sorry. Like, I'm so sorry. And I'm like, it's, it's fine. Like, you know, it's but then once I got to Seattle, finally then realizing, oh, that thing I was feeling that difference, right? That I don't really, I'm not really subscribing to what society is trying to throw at me. Finally, having the terminology to be able to say, This is who I am. This is who I've always been. I just wasn't ever able to describe that with, you know, the vocabulary that I had at the time. So. Yeah.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 31:50

Wow. Yes. Oh, my gosh. Okay, so now I'm jumping back to what you mentioned earlier about, like the power of like discovering makeup and expression and like as deeply connected also, with really affirming your identity and perhaps reconnecting you back to that younger you like, tell me about, on the other side of this awareness of recognizing your identity in this really new deep way, like makeup or otherwise? Like, what were the things you did to start to play to find yourself more? What does that look like?

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 32:21

It goes back to even when I was a kid, like, there are pictures of me, there's this one photo of me with like these. They're like gloves or something like you know, long gloves going up my forearm, and they're like this glittery, sparkly thing. And like, there's this photo of me like, with my hands up and just super happy. You know, I remember to when we were kids, we would play like house and I would always want to be the mom, or oh my gosh, the game pretty, pretty princess. Oh, yeah, I loved that game I loved like living on the earrings, you know, putting the bracelet and the ring on. Just this fascination with dresses and heels. And I remember to always imagining I would have like super long hair someday, and what that would feel like. And so as I got older, and as I started to kind of discover my queer self, you know, in Chicago, even like, that's when I started to, like, pick away at like, Okay, I'm gonna get this trench coat now. And, oh, I'm gonna get these heels. They're they're really you know, it's a pretty, you know, thick heel doesn't really feel to stiletto II, like, I can get by with this. And just like those little changes to my look, or to my identity, you know, at least the expression side of it, was able to really start to play with that. And actually, it wasn't really until recently that I started to play with makeup. I mean, we, you know, I used makeup when I was in like high school and college and doing theater, but I would have never worn makeup like out in public. But now I just, oh, it's one of my favorite things. Because I'm at heart, like just this creative person. And I think makeup is a great way to play and to explore and to express and I, you know, I think like a lot of us was doing a lot of tick tock watching and, you know, whatever it may be over the last few years during the pandemic, and all of a sudden was like, why am I not just trying this out? Right? I know that this is something that I do in other parts of my life, like why wouldn't I play it in this situation? So it wasn't something that happened overnight. It was definitely like a phase process of like, you know, I'm going to try this I'm going to try that like I really am obsessed with like the high waisted pant look and like oh, I got some pearls recently and you know, just these things like I start to play with and start to just show both my friends my family you know, my immediate surrounding here in Seattle, like clothing makeup these things like they're not gendered like these are they're just ways for us to express ourselves. And I think that's really what a lot of my even my advocacy work has now become is just showing that like this constructed binary of man woman and you know all the expectations and roles and things that come with that. It's all constructed, it's things that we've just made up as a society. And how can I start to break some of those things down and show that you can be sis right you can be a man or a woman, or even trans and different elements of those identities can be played with, but specifically like within the non binary, gender non conforming experience, like you're definitely playing with those lines, right, and playing with those different elements of both identities. So anyways, that was my long winded answer, I think, trying to deny

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 35:35

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 33:53

that, gosh, thank you for that. I feel like your story is such a great example of, you know, within this framework of second adolescence, I often think like a task for us as adults is like, connecting with our authenticity, like our truest, purest selves, and then like showing up in the world from that space. And in that process, when we can do so in a way that we feel safe to do. So there's so much healing that happens, particularly for our younger selves, who maybe came to hold shame for that authenticity, shame, for certain desires, shame for certain interests. Like I, myself, I loved pretty, pretty princess, I want to play with my sisters all the time. But then like, I like wouldn't tell my friends that I wanted to play like, I'd have to keep that aside. And so there has been, in my own personal story to like this reclaiming of, it's okay to have these interests that like, make me excited and curious for it. And so I just feel like your story is such an example of the art of queer healing of like, stepping into who you are, and having these moments like these little moments over time, like you're saying, the different changes, okay, I'm gonna get this heal, I'm gonna get this coat. And I'm gonna try makeup like each of those, I hear you also sending this message to younger you like, Hey, you are okay. Okay, as you are. And ah, I don't know, if you identify with that word healing. But I made because I love healing, I just like to see it all over your story. And it's just very, it's very cool. It's very cool. And I mean, I don't know if this has been part of your experience, but it can bring up some stuff when whenever we step out in our authenticity, I don't know, if you've had to like, step through fear and shame or whatever has been internalized, that can also happen for some of us, when we are learning how to be in our queerness whatever that means. For us, there can also be some resistance, we have to navigate.

J Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 37:19

Oh, yeah, probably the hardest thing about all of it is is my family, and like showing up to them or to, you know, with them and incorporating these different elements. Like when I started to kind of play with makeup, my mom was like, asking me questions about like, what does this mean? And I was like, it just means that I'm playing and that I, this is another way for me to express myself, you know, I get to help educate my family and those closest to me, because, you know, I was kind of the first queer kid in the family, I guess. And, you know, really getting to help them understand the experience. And I feel like I've gotten to open them up to a lot of different things as well, which is super fun and exciting, but it's also exhausting. Yeah, it definitely, like brings up a lot. And, you know, it's just once again, it's exploring, it's discovering, you know, I think at first I always thought, I'm gonna discover who I am, I'm gonna, like, be able to put a name to it, and then like, the work is done. But we all know that this is just, it's a lifelong journey. Like, this is not something that like, you're gonna get to it and be like, Alright, did it check what's next? It's going to be a constant journey of evolving and changing and redefining and rediscovering right, like, that's the exciting part about living is that we don't have to arrive at like an endpoint, we get to keep doing those things. But I will also say like, I feel like society kind of pushes us to get to that endpoint, right? Like, even like, when you're in Junior High in high school, it's like, oh, what are you going to be when you grow up? Right? Like, what are you gonna go to school for? What are you going to study? It's like, they want you to have all of that figured out at 1718 years old. And if like, 10 years later, I am nowhere near what that kid thought they were going to be right. Like, I was gonna go to medical school, I was gonna, like, do all these things. None of that has happened. And I look, you know, completely different from what I thought it was gonna look, you know what I mean? Like, all those things that I was kind of envisioning as, like, that's where I'm going to be, that's what I'm going to get to. That's not reality. And it's just so frustrating. And I could go off on a tangent to about like, how we're raising kids and you know, this whole idea of like, you're assigned male or female at

birth, and therefore you're a boy or a girl. And that means pink or blue, you know, sports or whatever the opposite of sports is our dance, whatever it's like. Like I just I personally can't wait to have my own kids and raise them in such a way that they are allowed to just play and not have to worry about those different expectations and just get to discover you know who they are, and find themselves and just be exposed to different activities and people and experiences and let them really come into their being on their own and not, you know, us having to prescribe that for them.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 40:18

Totally, totally. Yeah, it sounds like you're, of course going to be doing that within your own family. I'm also thinking about the work you're doing in the world right now. And your advocacy work. I'm curious. Yeah. Could you share about when did that start? And how did you get in to it? Yeah. Oh,

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 40:32

goodness. So as I said, like, discovered Seattle Front Runners. Yeah. As I walked into that space, it was a very sis gay centric community. And I was like, Well, hey, you know, for those of us who are non binary, who are trans, who are women, you know, we don't really see ourselves reflected, what can I do to help change that. And that kind of inspired me to run for the board and to really start to be an advocate within that community. And then at the same time, I'm, you know, I'm registering for races, I'm running, you know, longer distances, because the front, I mean, I really am so thankful for joining front runners, because it pushed me to run my first marathon like it pushed me to, like, attain these goals that like, I never thought were possible. But as I'm registering for more races, I'm starting to realize like, wait a second, like, all of these races are forcing you to basically say, you know, I'm registering as a man or a woman? And what about those who aren't men or women? Like, who are non binary? Or who are any, you know, because I, I identify as non binary, but I know that non binary isn't can be an umbrella term, right? And has all these other identities beneath it. So what about all those folks, right, those those folks who aren't subscribing to that man, woman binary, so I think with the confidence of like, being on the board, and you know, kind of being an advocate within that community, I was like, Okay, well, I'm gonna write to the race director of this one race that I wanted to run. And I just said, like, hey, I really want to run your race, but I don't see, you know, my identity isn't included in this space. And I don't want to continue to pay for races and, you know, be misgendered or forced into these boxes, in which you know, I don't exist. And that race director came back and was like, oh, because at the same time, we were seeing news on the east coast with like, the Philadelphia distance run the New York City Marathon, we were seeing them start to do this work and create non binary divisions. And so I, you know, in the email was like, there are things happening, like, we're, we're seeing some movement on this topic. And the race director came back and was like, yes, like, we want to do this, but we just don't know how we have all these questions about how to address this, or how to implement that. And I'm, I'm not a race director, I was just, you know, the random person sending an email. So I went off and like, got those questions answered from a bunch of people in the industry, and kind of came back after about a month of like, I had like three plus conversations in the span of, you know, a few weeks, it was very, very intense. But I came back to the race director, and I said, like, hey, here are all these answers. And in doing so, realize, oh, I have a resource. Like all of a sudden, I have now kind of constructed this, what I've now called the

guide to non binary inclusion and running, how can I make this more, you know, available to people, you know, to race directors, but also to people like me who want to have these conversations, but didn't feel empowered to do so didn't feel like they have the knowledge to step into those conversations. So that's kind of what started it. It was just like, an email to a race director. And now it has grown into this huge project where this guide has kind of been sent across the industry, both within the US but also around the world. And, you know, I've got a website, non binary running.com. And there, you know, I built out this database because as I started to do this, I realized, okay, if we're going to be creating non binary divisions, we need to know where those divisions are, right? So let's create a database that has all the races that have a non binary division. Okay, well, what about the non binary runners out there? Like, how can I connect with them? Okay, well, we're gonna start to pull them together, like on a Facebook group, or discord channel, how can I make this a more accessible resource? So I started making videos like a tic toc series of like, here's me just doing like an audio visual component of this. So it really has just blossomed into this really exciting project that we're seeing a lot of progress and I'm about to actually leave to go back to Chicago, because I'm working with the Chicago Marathon as a consultant as they build out the nonbinary division. So lots of exciting progress. It is a literally a full time job that I am doing with part time hours, right like it

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 44:51

is yeah, there's so much but it's yeah, my gosh,

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 44:54

it's so so worth it. And I always tell people like I was running My second marathon this past summer. And I always make a point now to like, if I'm going to cross the finish line in a non binary division, I'm going to have my non binary flag around my neck. And I was running this marathon and I came in, I had my sister hand off the flag to me at like, mile 24. Because I was like, I can't carry this the whole time. So I tied around my neck, and I'm like, headed into the finish line. This was the first time this race had implemented this division. And there was someone like kind of on the sideline area, the corral. And as I came down that path or that area, they started like shouting or like, yes, come on non binary representation. And it was just this moment of like, oh, my, I didn't even like what Who are you like, you know, what, I thought I was the only one. And after the race, this person had connected with me on Instagram, and was like, hey, like, I just wanted to say, it was so cool to you know, see someone just out there running as their authentic self. You know, I'm also non binary, I ran the half marathon, which finished just before the fall, and it was just so cool. And it was such a wonderful moment to see someone crossed the finish line with that with the flag and everything. And that's why I do it, even if it's just one person, it's because I want the next kid like me to be able to feel or to feel like they can, you know, bring their full, authentic self, whether it be to the start line of a race, to school to their family, right? Like, I want that next person to be able to show up as their authentic self. And so what are the things I can do both with, you know, the way that the conversations I have the clothing that I wear the makeup that I put it, like what are those things that I can do that will help to show and to create space for that next kid that comes along? Right now I'm



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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 46:49

feeling no, though, is I'm feeling so many things. I'm feeling so many things is like a human. And also as a runner, like, I feel so appreciative to the work you're doing. You're changing the industry. I mean, that's how I was connected to you, I have friends in the running industry who are using your guide to make their races more inclusive, and are so appreciative of that resource. I was like, Oh, I have to talk to this person. And I'm just so I'm just so touched by the work you're doing in this world. And yes, like that sounds like so much work. And so I hope you're also like resting and paying, doing all the things to balance that out. Totally, totally. Because there is like a laboring Of course, that happens when we are okay, I'm going to be the person to try to make this change happen. And you're doing that and it is so fucking cool. So glad we got connected. Oh my gosh, wow. Okay, very cool. Okay, I want to talk you're off, but I gotta let you go. Before we do that, was there anything else? We missed? Anything that wanted to be said in this conversation?

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 47:46

Oh, my goodness, I think, you know, the one thing that I've been trying to, like, share with people and, you know, talk to people about is, I encourage folks to who are like interested in, you know, how can I create a more inclusive space or like, what, what are the things I can do to help the next non binary person or, you know, queer person that comes along. And my biggest piece of advice is, don't make assumptions. When you first are introduced to someone, don't make assumptions based on their name, or what they're wearing, or whatever the case may be, just don't make assumptions. And instead, ask them about their story. Right? Engage with them, listen to the things they're saying, and try to kind of build this bridge of understanding, you don't necessarily have to agree with their ideas or their, you know, opinions. But I think society has to get to a place where we can just be empathetic, and we can really start to connect and engage with one another. And not start off at this place of like, assuming Oh, they identify as this, or, Oh, they've experienced this. If we can start to peel back some of those things. I think that it kind of sets a nice foundation for us to then continue to build toward a more, you know, inclusive space, or, you know, accepting space, even my goodness.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 49:11

Right, totally, totally. That's it. Well, Jake, I feel so appreciative of you for coming on to share your story to have this conversation, but again, for the work you're doing in this world. And this is yeah, this is just such a treat. I feel so affected by this conversation. And I so appreciate you This was awesome. And, and if it's okay with you, I want to link to all the ways people can connect with you and learn more about your work. So if folks want to reach out and also learn more, look at the show notes of this episode. You have links there. And gosh, thank you so much. So good.

J

Jake Fedorowski (they/them) 49:45

Well, thank you. Thank you for the work that you're doing because I think these conversations are super helpful for not only the next generation of queer folks, but I think just everyone in general to really like I said, listen to people's stories and Get to put yourself into their shoes or

you know, get to hear a little bit of someone else's experience I think is such an important part of of living and interacting with others. So thank you

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 50:18

hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to secondadolescencepod.com for show notes and more. And you can connect further by following the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). If you're interested in being a future guests on the show, and you want to come on and share about your own Second Adolescence, visit secondadolescencepod.com/beaguest and you can submit your interest there. Alright, that's it for me for now. Whether it's morning, afternoon, night, wherever we're finding you and your day, go on out there and keep doing things that would make younger you absolutely thrilled. That is what it's all about. Alright, take good care.