

Ep 43_ Aimy Tien (she_they)

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Aimy Tien (she/they)



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hi there, welcome to the Second Adolescence podcast here we talk about all things queer healing and Second Adolescence. So what is second adolescence you might ask? Second Adolescence is a sort of developmental life stage queer people navigate in our post coming out adult years after growing up within an anti queer world. For many Second Adolescence is about healing the wounds of our younger queer selves, gaining the experiences they missed out on and unlocking what it means for us to exist as our most free and true selves. I am your host, Adam James Cohen, psychotherapist and human who went through his own second adolescence. For today's episode, I wanted to find a way to bring in some conversation around something I think that's so powerful and important in our experience as queer people in our own healing, and that is the experience of joy. And when putting together this episode, I wasn't exactly sure how I wanted that kind of conversation to take place until I found today's guests and their work. And I was just so excited and pumped to have them on to learn about this project that you'll be hearing about in just a sec. And really just join in conversation about what is queer joy, and how does it look for different folks, and why is it so important. Before going into today's episode, just want to say up top as with every episode of Second Adolescence, I want to invite you as a listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of her stories are different and unique, you might hear some guest 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, feel free to 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. Welcome to the conversation. Thank you so much for being here. I am so excited for this conversation. I'm just so pumped to have our guests here. And I'm really excited for y'all to be listening to it. And our guest today is Aimy Tien, who uses she/they pronouns. Aimy is an award winning multidisciplinary artist based in Chicago as an actor, writer, director and producer. Aimy, a queer Vietnamese, Chinese American is driven by narrative plenitude, bringing the stories of people of color and marginalized groups to the page, stage and screen. She is the founder of tin heart productions, where they are developing multiple narrative projects centered on the intersections of race, healing and sexuality outside of their film and stage work. It facilitates conversations and

workshops around the country on storytelling, queer advocacy, and equity, diversity and inclusion. They are currently I work on a multimedia collection, the Queer Joy Project. For more information about previous work and upcoming projects, you can visit their website, AimyTien.com or follow them on Instagram. And I'll be linking to both of those in the show notes. So gosh, I mean, I am so pumped to have you here. Thank you so much for coming on.

A Aimy Tien (she/they) 03:33

Absolutely. Really excited to be here, Adam. I love the work of thinking about queerness in more ways, and I'm excited to see what you do with it too.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:42

Awesome. And yeah, so I wonder if we could start with your current project that you're working on The Queer Joy Project. I mean, there's so many things to say about queer joy. But I guess before going down that road, what is the queer joint project for folks who are listening who may not be exposed to that work yet? Sure.

A Aimy Tien (she/they) 03:59

So the Queer Joy Project is a piece of work. I started in response to the Trump administration, and really the deep, dark times. But we felt shortly after the election and the inauguration. And it came as a response to I've always pursued multidisciplinary work in multiple areas of my life. And I wanted to be able to do that in the same way in my artistic practice. And I was thinking of how I could do that in a project related around queer joy. And to me, we just needed to be talking about queer joy as much as possible in every single way. And I like to think about every piece of art as a story that lives best in a certain medium. And that means I may perform a role best. It might be something where I am the writer or I'm the performer, but it might also be me being the producer, uplifting someone else's story or curating a show. The lovely thing about the word project is it can comprise so many things. So I envisioned it as like an ongoing live show. One of the live shows I do around queer joys with an organization called Second Story based off The Chicago that show is made and told all by queer folks, obviously centered on queer joy since it is the Queer Joy Show. And I also envisioned a collection of essays and poetry based on interviews with queer people around the world, as well as archival materials. I think one of the issues we've seen historically with queerness, and queer joy in particular is that it often gets obscured by history. The story of history often is misogynist, it's patriarchal, it's white, we're not hearing our stories and there, but that doesn't mean we weren't happy. That doesn't mean we weren't living and making friends and making community with one another during those times. So I also wanted to look at those stories as well. And then because of the work I do, I also do a lot of multimedia work, I work in film, I work in theater, I have a lot of collaborators who work in multiple mediums as well, as the queer Joy project grows and continues to get more financing, we'll see some of those multimedia projects come into the world and be released.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 06:01

Wow this is just the coolest. And I'm just I want to be a fly on the wall for all I want to be

wow, this is just the coolest. And I'm just I want to be a fly on the wall for all I want to be witness to all these different expressions of this project and these different pieces of work and art that you've been a part of. And gotcha sounds like you've also been able to connect with such a beautiful collective of artists through all of this, how have you found people to respond to this idea of the queer toy project, both in terms of collaborators, but any other people who are engaging with the work?

A

Aimy Tien (she/they) 06:27

It's so interesting, because when I started in 2017, we weren't using queer joy in the way we use it. Now, I think it's a very common phrase. Now, we hear queer joy, we hear black boy joy, we hear like so black joy, period. And I think that's beautiful. But when I started, and I would talk about like joy as a form of radical resistance, people would just be very compute for like joy as an act of resistance. What does that mean? And I was like, Well, you know, we're talking about the work that's been done by a lot of black sadness, organizers. And now I feel like Adrienne Maree Brown has also really come into the mainstream and her ideas around pleasure, I think bell hooks' ideas around love. And of course, Audre Lorde. But I don't think those people were as read by people who weren't Gender Studies majors until like, the last couple years. So there has been that arc of change and how people like more, I would say, people who weren't artists or didn't know artists are reaching out now to be interviewed. In comparison paths, where I felt like the initial connections were artists, friends, or artists, friends, referring to community organizations, like community leaders being like, Hey, there's this project that exists. If you want to talk to this person, they'd love to talk to you. I think that's the where I get more queer elders from because they're less terminally online like the rest of us. Yeah. But yeah, it's one, it's really cool to see that we're using it more. I love that I love hearing from people who maybe don't want to be interviewed, because they're not ready to talk about their lives in that way where they don't want to, but would love to participate would love to design something or hop on a film crew, once a project, it's going things like that. And then just the way it spread, I've been lucky to be interviewed by a few international publications. So then it gets me from like places in regions where I do not naturally have a reach. Yeah. And that's been exciting, because my hope is to acknowledge that queerness looks different around the world, even though everywhere, it's been affected by colonialism. And like, the ways we also understand joy are different. There's a very western understanding of joy. And it is very different from the way I grew up around joy, even though I grew up in this country, and I'm from this country. But being a child of multiple cultures, you see the different things that bring people joy. And I also want to acknowledge that within the work to that my joy is not the same as your joy. It's not the same as that person's joy. But we can all see something in it and recognize something.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:57

Oh, I so appreciate you naming that makes me curious. Like, if you could share, what have you found queer joy to mean for people and like you're saying it's gonna mean something, perhaps different for each individual for each cultural context for each like, we're all different there. So what has queer joy meant? What meaning Have you found people to place onto even that phrase?

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Aimy Tien (she/they) 09:18

Aimy Tien (she/they) 09:10

I think some people really want to tie queer joy to like a queer thing: marrying their partner, coming out, being at a queer party. Yes. Those are absolutely examples of queer joy. And I think they're the very obvious ones that come to mind when I asked you, "what's your queer joy?" And then I usually like to take a step back and remind folks that hey, everything you do is queer. Like everything. And those moments don't always have to be big. Sometimes joy is the little thing is it's the routine that you have every day it's having a community garden with someone. It's the way your mother would make you sandwiches in a specific way before you went to school like views are the moments that fill our lives. And those moments matter just as much too. I'd also like to acknowledge that I think queer people understand Joy more because we understand suffering more. A lot of us have gone through struggle of varying types and are still struggling. So sometimes when I interview people at first or when they're asked to be interviewed by someone else, they're like, Well, I don't, I don't really think I have anything but fit. And I was like, I promise you, you do. But I see that, particularly in people who are older, they're like, Well, I don't, I don't know necessarily that I have something that fits this idea of using queer very broadly to refer to our whole community. And I also recognize that everyone within the alphabetical family refers to themselves as queer, like queer, and they're like, is it okay if I don't identify as queer, but you know, they identify as lesbian or gay or trans, but it queer doesn't fit for them that they belong? And like, yes. It's just not as pretty to say, the LGBTQIA plus Joy project, right. And I'm a Libra. So aesthetics matter.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 11:08

Totally, totally. And yet, I'm curious, like you mentioned the different interviews as part of this project, wondering if you could share a little bit about like, what occurs in that interview? What kind of things are you inviting people to reflect on and share about?

A

Aimy Tien (she/they) 11:19

Yeah, so I have a background in ethnography and anthropology and the kind of interview techniques that come out of that. And in addition, with my work coming out of second story, where it is all personal narrative and true stories in the there is a mode in the way we gather stories. And it's really important to build rapport with people. There scaffolding there as well. You start out easy, you get basic details of someone's life a little bit about who they are what they do now. And then you start with small things like everyone can think of a childhood crush, right? Or like an aha moment. And you just slowly start asking more questions that maybe get a little deeper, and then you start teasing out the threads. So each interview, there's some standard questions I'll ask like, what do you think of queer? Where have you found community? Where have you have queer community? I'll ask them straight out what is the moment of queer joy for them? But often, that's not the moment I would focus on later if I'm writing about it. Or if we think about depicting it visually, in some way, it's usually something else. And we will, depending on the comfort level, talk about really difficult moments as well like moments in their journey where it was hard. I love first loves. I think those are great. I think first are really lovely. And middles are really lovely, too. We don't always talk about the middles.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 12:37

No, oh, yeah, even just share more about that. When you say middle. So for folks who are like,

Oh, wait middles? What does that mean?

A

Aimy Tien (she/they) 12:42

Yeah, finding joy is work. It's practice, you know, you have to practice to do that every day, like joy is not a continuous state, it shouldn't be a continuous state. I think that's very unsustainable for anyone, whether you're angry all the time, or like, constantly joyful, like, that's just a lot of energy that you have to put to maintain that I think a lot of us Well, ideally, this was my philosophy, you don't have to agree. But I think aiming for contentment is great. But if we take like a rom com, we have like that brush that thing, the relationship, they end with the movie, and they got together, and it's great. And we love it. And like Yeah, but those people have to have a whole life. They have to continue to choose to be in relationship, to choose to love one another to choose to take care of one another as we talk about like building cultures of care and communities of care, both professionally and socially. That work is practice. There's middle so that there's things where we're figuring what works, what doesn't work. What works for me today, what may work for me two years from now, thinking about, like how we used to talk about queer narratives a lot often ended up with coming out, right? And I'm like, That person is going to come out 1000 times in like, the next two years. We don't ever stop coming out. Which is like, like, I was like, kid, I'm so glad you came out. Be prepared to do this. All right, buckle up. So like living in that middle? Yeah, happy and things aren't great. But who the happy middle to? Like, don't you want to know what it's like to feel that? I mean, like with the Trevor Project with this idea of it gets better. And I think there's a lot more projects around the world now with queer adults aimed at queer youth, or questioning youth to be like, Hey, we exist. We lead our lives and like, we're happy some of the time. We might not be happy all of the time, but we are happy some of the time. And we want you to know that. And that feels like the middle stuff to me. Yeah, I used to do a queer outreach show with about face Theatre, which is also based in Chicago, and we'd go around to schools as well as corporate settings. And like a big part of that show was all of us trying to be the person we needed when we were 15 to these 15 year olds, and just to like, be there And it consists and like we they could ask us anything we were allowed to pass, but we pretty much would answer any question these young people asked us. But just to show that we're there, we're here. And life may not always feel easy, but it is there. And it is possible to live all these things and do all these things and be happy, even a very, in a very dark world.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 15:21

Totally. And I just love you highlighting this idea of the middles and how like the power the meaning like there's so much purpose in the middle of so here to like, because yeah, life can be hard. This world is hard. But there's also something that's so purposeful and important in these moments where there's almost like, the grit, like, I feel like with joy, we often think it has to be the mountain peak experiences. But like, there's a joy in the grit, there's a joy in the muck a little bit in the getting to be someone who gets to have the middles. You know, we had our first beginning to have the middles and, and what comes after the medal, I just really appreciate you, you're inviting me in this moment, just to really even challenge my own perspective on what joy means for me thinking it had to be the pure bliss moment, but it's like, ooh, now there's so many more other parts of that. But we I want to jump back in, you were talking about going in with these 15 year olds, and being this person that your own 15 year old self, could have really benefited from getting exposure to you personally, what was that like for you?

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Aimy Tien (she/they) 16:20

Oh, I love working with youth. I think they're incredible. One, they are so much more brilliant and brave. And I think like the access to information that exists now for young people is incredible. Yes, it's also really touching, I have like a number of stories that have been podcasts and and things like that, that people use. And some of them are about coming out, I'm less interested in coming out stories in general, but I'm aware of their utility is what I'll say about that. And at that age, a lot of kids aren't fully out, or they might be partially out or they might be deeply deeply in the closet. And they're doing the thing where I'm asking for my friend, I'm like, Are you really asking for your friend? Are you asking for you, and I'm not going to push you either way. Because you're in a classroom of your peers, who maybe the very people who are making life difficult for you. But at the end of like the open q&a, we usually hang around and students will come up to us and having those moments where people talk to you after and tell you something very personal is deeply rewarding, because my goal with my art is to change hearts and minds. And it is enough for me if I change one person, if I make something better, or create some insight for one person, and I feel very grateful and privileged that I know I've done that, that there are students who have not completed suicide because of some of our shows, or some people come out to me for the first time. They're like, I don't know that I want to tell you one by one to tell you this before you left. And that always like makes me cry, and I'm probably gonna cry right now. Wow, I was so practical with how I was going to come out. I knew very young. And I was just like, I will be financially supporting myself before I tell my family because my family was not going or my parents were not going to be happy with it. And I knew that from a very young age. So I was like, I need to be financially independent, I need to be physically safe, I need to do all these things. I need to be emotionally safe. And I still tell young people that I'm like, here's the thing, you're a kid, and you have adult feelings right now, and you want to do adult things, but this world tells you you can't because you are a minor. And that is a reality we have to live with. So the things you need to worry about are your financial and physical safety. And your emotional safety plays a factor into that, and I don't know your life. So you have to make the calculus of when makes sense for you based on those things. But do not forget that all three things matter. my coming out story was so meticulously planned by me because I knew the reaction I was getting. So I was like I just need to choose the timing that works for me and I will be out I will be dating, I will be out in my own life. But people found out in waves primarily intentionally, occasionally, accidentally. But as it goes, right, and there's also a party that idea to young people that matters to me, there's also in parting something where I think it's hard to see this as a teenager who was resentful of your parents or as even a younger kid who's resentful of your parents. Your parents are also whole people. They had whole ideas of what you would be like when you came to be when they plan to be parents, when they started raising you and you have figured out this truth about yourself. And if they have no idea, they get to be surprised. They do not get to take anything out on you. That's inappropriate, but they get to have their own feelings about it too. And you can choose to give them time or not choose to give them time and you should set boundaries around how they can express that with you. But they get to be surprised and sometimes surprised people behave in shitty ways. Yeah. Right. And some of those parents turned around and they joined PFLAG, you know aren't they, they're the person crying at their kids wedding like 10 years down the line, like those things happen. And sometimes they don't. And relationships remain fractured. So you get to choose what you receive, or I hope I get to choose. Of course, boundary setting does not always work if your people don't respect your boundaries. But I think it's also the the gift of telling our stories and hearing stories is you just get to see more options. And think a lot about it 10 wins of narrative plenitude, which drives quite a bit of how I approach my work. And we just do need more stories, we don't need narrative monoliths, we need more stories all the

time. And those stories exist. And we just need to listen and to tell them and to see a breadth of ways of coming out a breadth of ways of living as a queer person from many different backgrounds. But you can see that on those kids faces, what it means to see someone who looks like them on the stage talking about this. People on the show tend to be in their early 20s or mid 20s. While doing it, it also helps them we look like an older sibling at that point. It's a little more imaginable to them like we're old, they're still they still might call some am. It's a little more reasonable for them to picture getting there versus hearing an elder at this point in their life. Talk about something?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 21:21

Oh, yeah, again, just like the work you're doing is just so powerful, and cool. And thank you for doing it. Whoa, whoa. And kind of throughout all of this conversation and all that you're sharing, I'm thinking about this idea of like the relationship between like queer joy and shame, and like queer joy and healing and like, you know, I'd often talk with people who I work with around using like queer joy, or what to talk about also as like liberated joy as like a tool for our own healing of like finding exploring those parts of us that whether anti queerness, or other internalized beliefs of oppression growing up made us feel like we couldn't embody, we couldn't want we couldn't desire, really exploring kind of those things that our younger selves wanted, where maybe there was some shame attached to it, and finding ways in adulthood to like, gift, our younger selves, the freedom and the joy of those experiences. And I'm curious if you've seen a similar thing show up at all in your work with people looking at queer joy and joy as a tool for healing and the different ways that can take?

A

Aimy Tien (she/they) 22:21

Oh absolutely, I think, again, because our community has dealt with so much suffering and all these things, there's this moment of watching someone reclaim a moment and find the joy in it or now, now that they're older, they can look back and be like, Wow, that toxic straight girl mess, taught me a lot about my life. Or there were moments that like I will cherish from that experience is something someone will tell me, I am so glad that I've never had a toxic stray girl issue. But yeah, like that those things happen. Or I think like being in community with one another, because a lot about the queer Joy project is also about collaboration, right? Like, this is not my project, this is our project, I just happen to have graded it. It is those moments of being able to connect with one another to see someone else be happy, usually makes other people happy. And it is also in a culture that desperately wants us to be unhappy in many cases not exist at all, particularly in this country at what it means when we cross certain state lines, knowing that there are so much animosity, of structural issues that we deal with regularly, just being able to see that and know that we still get to be happy that our happiness is our own and is a birthright. I think that realization for people in and of itself is healing. And the big thing of queer joy is practice. You get to practice that all the time. And sometimes we fuck up totally, we make a mistake, right? Like, we're like that thing I tried did not work. But other times like we surprise ourselves practice and collaborator of mine and a mentor Coya Paz would always say that art and theater is the work of radical imagination. We get to imagine how much better the world could be. And then we get to figure out the ways to get there. And I think that's also I've taken that approach and how I think about rehearsal process for pieces to that whatever community things I want to replicate, I want the cast to feel that I want the crew to feel that we're building community in the making of VR as well as on the product we give. And that is

true of queer joy. Like if I made a queer Joy show and everyone felt shitty during the whole show. I have not succeeded. People have to be having those moments of connection and communion because I think our community, we are so good at celebrating people when we can at remembering people and I also just want to remind everyone to celebrate themselves as well. And little celebrations are great too. Yeah, like as we were talking about not everything has to be the pure bliss Like mountaintop moment, but you can't live at the mountaintop all the time. It's got rain. So like, get some copper.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:07

Yes, it's gonna rain. Uh huh. Yeah, right. It can be these like small moments, these little moments and these like private moments like you spoke to earlier. Like, when people think of prayer joy, yeah, first image might be like dancing with a group of queer people, you know, which is also joyful, and queer, joy, and powerful and important, and all of it. And it can also be like, sitting alone at a cafe, just like feeling comfortable in your skin, and like showing up as your full self as you're walking down the street, it can be just really quiet moments. And,

A

Aimy Tien (she/they) 25:41

yeah, it can be the buttoned down that fits you.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:43

Yes, totally. Gosh, I feel like throughout all of this, I'm hearing such an invitation to like really interrogate? Like, what limits have I placed on what joy means for me? And where can I be expanded? And where's my own curiosity to explore more places of joy, big and small? Again, I'm just so pumped, you're here. And we're talking about this. Thank you. And I guess Yeah, for you, and in your own story, what has been like the evolution of your relationship with this idea of joy, whether throughout your life, or even at the beginning of this project? And now like, how have you held relationship to that concept?

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Aimy Tien (she/they) 26:15

You know, it's it's funny that you asked that, because literally, the opening essay of the queer Joy project says that I am not a happy person. Which I have had people disagree with me. And I'm like, It's not that I'm unhappy, right, I just think of a more calm content person on a given that than I am like someone who is at that pure bliss, or that super high energy, mostly because I look at it, I'm like, That's so much energy, I would like to. I really respect people who could live at that level all the time. Just know, I am not one of those humans. So I often describe myself as a curator of joy, I'm really good at parsing it and getting to it. I think in terms of my own relationship to joy, this is where like that cultural context plays a factor, like as I was raised Buddhists, and I am Buddhists, and we just have a really different understanding of emotional frameworks and how long we hold to emotions than the average Judeo Christian person. So I would often describe it as like, my highs are not as high as other people and my lows are not as low. And that's not bad. I'm not mad about that. And I think finding contentment for me personally brings me more peace, and is more of a life goal, like I love like the high of moments

of joy when I get them. But I'm more interested in sustainability as a whole. I'm very nerdy. And I like to think about the social and political effects of various things we do. And I do think there is an active thing and like having made my career around joy, as a person who does not describe themselves as a joyful person is a thing. But for me, that is about like building communities where joy can exist, knowing that joy will not be there all the time. Joy is always possible. But joy is not always present. I also think there's something toxic in some of the positivity movements right now where I'm like, No, we do not need to be happy all the time. That's not realistic. Don't tell me to be happy all the time. Like that thing that happened to you probably really did suck. Yeah. And I want you to be able to be unhappy, or angry or sad or grieving this thing. Yes, we don't know joy without knowing the other side of it, because you don't appreciate it in the same way. So spaces where we can show up as our full selves and have that range of emotion where I check in to see how someone is, before we start something actually matters to the person facilitating it. I always want to be contributing to a space for joy as possible.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 28:47

There's so many nuggets in this conversation. I can't wait to re listen to it. Wow, the Queer Joy Project, what's happening now? And next, like where are you at currently today with it?

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Aimy Tien (she/they) 28:57

Yeah, I am starting my next batch of interviews right now. Which means, if there are listeners out there who have submitted to me and haven't heard a response from me, you'll be hearing from me soon. I'm sure you know this, that it just takes time to schedule people. And especially if we don't speak the same language, that it's also like finding a good translator and making sure we have that set in space. So there's that I also have some financing inquiries out to do some of the multimedia projects and bringing out the balance of that is of course right now we are in a moment of strike support your unions. So we're paying attention to that as well, because I always think it's important to pay collaborators, their rate, if possible. That means money, you know, and the gift of this project is because there are different components. I can press forward at different components at different times when it feels right or when it fits within my artistic practice knowing that I have other ongoing projects or life things happening as well. So that's To the next step, I always hope to have like several 100 interviews before a book version comes out. But I also wanted like someone to pay for me to do some of those interviews, or to have like a stronger sense of financing. So that's the work taking the moment of the strike and not actively being on set as much taking this time to think about what is the best financing strategy and 2023. For this, also, I'm a producer. So budgets and Excel spreadsheets are a thing that I find home and whether I like it or not. So there's that, I think there's an opportunity, like I'm thinking about what it would be to work with some dancers, I know and make some dance videos around some of the poetry that's in the queer Joy project and have that filmed, I need to do a little more work on conceiving what that would look like. But that is something I am thinking about, too.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 30:53

Wow. It's making me think about I don't know if this is true for you. But like, because I'm hearing like, how much of not only like time, energy, probably money, soul - you've invested

into this project over the years. And just like the efforting, the purpose, but the efforting in that, and how often when we're doing work, mine's a way smaller scale during the work I'm doing here with second adolescence. But yeah, there's an efforting. And it feels like both trying to offer something as a gift for a collective. But also there is such a personal gain and healing and benefit from the work to that I experienced. I'm curious if you relate to that, and your own experience throughout kind of all the efforting and all the work you've done with the queer Joy project over the years, so much of it, I experience as such an offering for our greater community. And even for those individuals, you interview like them getting to have their story heard and told is so powerful. So you're offering so much, but I imagine I'm wondering, has this been a part of your own healing journey? How is this kind of interacted with your own process as a person navigating this world? .

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Aimy Tien (she/they) 31:58

Oh, that's a great question. And I think absolutely, it has, I think you learn so much about how to be happy from how other people are happy. I think it's also a gift. Particularly, I think I get a lot out of interviews with elders, yes. Because I'm just like, you lived it tough times, you know, you're a badass in this year, second story, queer Joy show, we had a trans elder with gray hair on the stage. And, you know, she wasn't thinking about it. Like, we were talking about what outfits people were gonna wear for the show. I was like, I don't think you know how meaningful it is gonna be for some people to see you with your, like, beautiful gray waves, like, we don't see a lot of trans elders or awful reasons, right. And it is so powerful to just see that and to see that person, the air, let alone whatever they talk about. For me and doing research for this. I was also investigating what queerness existed in my cultures, and like the cultures of so I'm half Chinese and half it means my dad's side is Chinese. My mom's side is Viet and to see like, the ways that queerness is still present, but also a race and also restructured by really colonial powers being in the regions because there's so much evidence of it before and it's funny having these arguments with my parents, because, you know, this was their history to like, but hey, here's this thing from a while ago, like, from deeply ancient times, millennia ago, showing these examples of queerness. My dad at first was like, oh, yeah, yeah, I mean, I guess that's sort of true, but also this other big pedestal, white people, the British, and they came in with their ridiculous values. And so I think there, it's also been very cool to excavate that type of existence, or in the ways it's so funny to me when I read like comments, or trolling threads, or whatever, where people were like, Why does everything have to be gay now? And I'm like, everything was always gay. So y'all just weren't listening and paying attention. Yeah, Oscar Wilde was just friends. It was so evil, or like the various gal pals that have existed through history and like, yeah, they were just roommates. Uh huh. So there's a lot of fun and finding out those tidbits. And I think there's so many cool queer historians doing work in that I also think like, just the changing climate around queer joy has been really lovely for me to see to see like other projects around joy to see other people thinking about it to see even in the representation in media now, right? Like when I was growing up, I didn't see a single queer happy ending. Yeah, you either died or you ended up with the opposite sex. And I'm saying opposites like very much of the way they used it at the time. Totally. And I was just like, a lot of the queer Joy project was also how much did it fuck us? That that was what we saw growing up. Yes. Versus young people now who get to see queer people in messy relationships but in happy relationships to where they just get to be together. Like I you So I do this thing where I wouldn't watch a show with like queer femme characters until it been going for a couple seasons because I was really afraid when I would die. And I had too many of those deaths that I was like I have, I can't anymore. And now there's so many where I'm like, I'm not even gonna be able to

watch all the shows, or queer people. I don't have 10 eyeballs and all that time. And I also want to acknowledge that I think straight folks are also some of them, not all of them, but some of them being better allies now and accomplices in this work. This is such a side tangent, but even seeing trashy Reality TV That involves queer people love that I want us to have mediocre lives, I want us to have shitty trash entertainment, like like we're all tomato totl Ryan, loved watching that because like when that premise came out, I was like, this is built for you Holic lesbians, like the builds for that community. But there's been that moment of like, watching, like, love is blind during the pandemic, when we were all stuck in our houses. And like, a lot of queer folks in that scene, like, are the streets okay? Like, are they okay? Know that they are. But in seeing these different moments of being like how what it means, as a society, when we get to have that mediocre entertainment, it means that we've reached a different level of acceptance. I mean, and there's also like the capitalism of it all though, people are now realizing that queer people tend to follow media they love and will contribute more to it, and therefore are a group to be exploited on a capitalist run. I'm fully aware of like that aspect of it. I guess for me, that means more open doors for more people. And my hope is that the queer folks who get to walk through these doors, myself included, remember to hold the door open after them,

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 36:50

"for people to come and acknowledge who held it for us." Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, I want to talk with you all day, I want to hang out, I want to be witness to all your art, I want to do all the things. But I do want to also be sensitive to your time. But I guess within this conversation, has there been anything that hasn't yet come into it that you would like to add that you'd like to share?

A

Aimy Tien (she/they) 37:10

I think when it comes to finding your own relationship to joy, that thought you had about shame earlier was like some of the moments that you may find joyful, maybe someone else being ashamed of you. And there's like a real cognitive dissonance that I think we can sometimes exist and code switching that we do perhaps inhabit spaces where it's not 100% queer, or it's not all in the family, it is now a very cis hetero, patriarchal space, it's okay to acknowledge that for people it's okay to live in that space where something can feel shitty, and something can feel good at the same time. And that's not bad. And you shouldn't feel bad that again, like we're thinking about what it means to make joy, sustainable, and joy, a part of the everyday and contentment part of the every day. And that comes with complicated feelings, like we all have so much baggage that we live with. And right now where we are as a country. Sure, it's a Democratic administration, but it turns out that don't matter at the Supreme Court, so, so in thinking about like those feelings of shame, I also think about how we respond to that - what does resistance look like right now, and you being happy is a form of resistance. And I strongly advocate that, I also really encourage people to stay involved politically as they are able to, very much be aware of your own capacity very much be aware of your own well, you cannot feel someone else's Well, if yours is not full, but I think it's a time to stay engaged unless you are seeking a different place of refuge. And I fully understand anyone who's fleeing the United States. But being engaged right now for both ourselves and for the youth is really important. Like don't be afraid to reach out, don't be afraid to talk to people, especially if you are in a moment of struggle. There is something that is always humanizing about stories. That doesn't happen with data. I know some people recognize data more. They're quant people, and that's

how they process the world. But it's really hard to look at someone in the eye and tell them they don't deserve to be happy. So when you are out there sharing your story, and it doesn't have to be something big. Like I said, it can be the button down shirt that fit you right, when you are speaking your truth into spaces, those ripple effects matter. And even if it isn't a policy change, it might matter for the kiddo whose conservative parent is yelling at you right now. And they're like standing there feeling ashamed of their parents, and they're listening to you talk. And it might really matter for that young person. I sometimes have young people reach out to me to be interviewed as well. And I'm like, and they told me about their parents and their emails and I'm just like, Oh God, I need your parents permission because you are a minor and I can't just interview you. Good luck. Hi, I'm so happy that you are here. And in this world, it's really easy because of the way how difficult the pandemic has been and is currently to disassociate. So I really do want people to take care of themselves. But I also don't want them to stop engaging with themselves and others in their community. Like I keep saying this, but it's a practice and you can't stop practicing. Now, that's my Russian piano teacher. But, you know, like, we only move towards a more liberated world towards a more radical world together. And every little step counts, I would argue, some people would describe me as an accommodationist, right, like, but that's because I think people need to survive the revolution. And that may mean compromises and little steps to get through, like burning the system down does not help like the parents of the world, raise their children, it's very difficult to do that. While you know, like storming the gates. So as much as I struggle with the system, I also want people to be alive for the other side, and to be here and to be able to still do things. So I think a lot of it's also finding balance, and everyone's balance with that work is going to look different. And I think, yeah, I just want people to know that every time they smile, every time they laugh, it doesn't matter matters to them, it matters to the people around them, and they should find and cherish those moments. Yeah.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:21

Gosh, I mean, I'm so touched by this conversation by you and your work and it's it's truly feels like such a gift. And so I'm just so appreciative of what you're doing, and what you're offering. And I'm encouraging everyone listening to follow the links in the show notes to go learn more about the queer Joy project and get involved and perhaps share your own story. And, gosh, I can thank you so much for doing this and being here and letting us all into you in the work you're doing.

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Aimy Tien (she/they) 41:52

I appreciate you creating this platform, Adam, I think it's really important to the work you're doing to share more stories and just to think about all the aspects of queerness that live within us, right like queering the world is also about just acknowledging that sis hetero patriarchy that we live in and queering everything we do and making the choices that fit us and I think what this podcast does a such a big contribution to that. So I'm really honored to be here.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 42:18

Thank you. Thank you. Hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to secondadolescencpod.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. All right. Take good care.