

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Tan France

JVN [00:00:02] Welcome to "Getting Curious", I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I am joined once again by the biggest expert of all experts in what it is to be one Tan France, where I am asking him one of the most fundamentally important lifelong age old questions which is, "Are you my Tanny Bananny"? Yep. Welcome to "Getting Curious", this is Jonathan Van Ness and we have an incredibly exciting guest who I am the president of the Fan Club for, the Vice President, the scribe, and I'm basically I'm the, I lead all of it, because I will not let anyone else in the club because I'm, I'm too obsessed. Don't you say anything before I'm ready. The first question I have and it's the most important one is this.

TAN FRANCE [00:01:01] Yeah.

JVN [00:01:02] Is, "How in the world-. In fact, I'll say this. Is it true, Tanny?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:10] It is true. You're the number one fan.

JVN [00:01:12] No, not that. Is it true what they say?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:16] It is. My hair is naturally gray.

JVN [00:01:20] No, is that you're a Tanny Bananny.

TAN FRANCE [00:01:22] Bananny.

JVN [00:01:22] No, you're a little Bananny. Tanny Bananny. Is it true that you're a little Bananny?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:25] It is.

JVN [00:01:26] How old were you when you knew you were a little Tanny Bananny?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:29] MY mom used to call me "Tanny Bananny".

JVN [00:01:32] Did she?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:32] Of course she did not.

JVN [00:01:33] Oh. Did anyone ever call you Tanny Bananny before me, Tan?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:36] You were the first.

JVN [00:01:36] Really?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:37] Yeah.

JVN [00:01:38] I'm surprised by that.

TAN FRANCE [00:01:39] Which is frustrating for one, only one reason. Now, other people in my DMs and on my comments think it's OK to call me "Tanny Bananny".

JVN [00:01:47] Well, that's how people think about calling me Jackie.

TAN FRANCE [00:01:49] Nobody calls you Jackie, they know that is my right alone.

JVN [00:01:53] So no one ever called you "Tanny"?

TAN FRANCE [00:01:55] No.

JVN [00:01:58] So when did, what ages-? OK. Of all of your ages?

TAN FRANCE [00:02:02] Yes.

JVN [00:02:03] What age were you when you went the most from dark-haired to gray haired? Like what year did it really?

TAN FRANCE [00:02:08] 17. I remember very distinctly at 17.

JVN [00:02:11] No, I disagree because I seen a picture of you with a flat iron soupy fringe and your hair was very black.

TAN FRANCE [00:02:15] It was the back. You can't see. You couldn't see from the front. I'd never noticed it at the back so much. All, it started so prominently at the back when I was 11, 12. But then when I hit 17, I remember my boyfriend who I started dating saying, "Wow, you are so rapidly going gray". And I was like "No, I'm not. I've got like a three or four". And I never had one of those three way mirrors. I'd never see what the back of my head looked like. And yeah, I had gone so gray.

JVN [00:02:39] So when did the front start to go?

TAN FRANCE [00:02:41] Not until my 20s. Not until like 20, 21. And it was it was really slow. And then earlier on today, I realized just how shocking rapidly it happened. Because when we met, the front of my hair was actually pretty black.

JVN [00:02:54] No, it wasn't.

TAN FRANCE [00:02:55] It was, we let you saw a photo this morning.

JVN [00:02:57] No, it's been all, it's been like this since I met you.

TAN FRANCE [00:02:59] No, it's not. I want to show you that photo again. We literally had this conversation very, we literally had this conversation this morning.

JVN [00:03:04] No, you and someone else did. And I didn't agree.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:06] You're out of your mind.

JVN [00:03:08] I didn't agree.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:08] Even though it was factual.

JVN [00:03:10] OK, so now I'm going to start asking real questions.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:12] Please.

JVN [00:03:13] So the last time we had you on "Getting Curious", it was June 18, 2018.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:18] Which feels like a lifetime ago.

JVN [00:03:19] It was a lifetime ago. That was about five months and like a week before, before the midterm elections.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:28] Yes.

JVN [00:03:28] I had-.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:30] Uh huh.

JVN [00:03:30] Which is interesting.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:32] Yes.

JVN [00:03:32] So I said that quietly so you guys wouldn't know because I was talking shit. So, yes. So much has changed. So "Naturally Tan" came out.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:44] At 2019 June.

JVN [00:03:46] June 2019. So by the time I was interviewing you in June of '18, had you started working on it?

TAN FRANCE [00:03:52] I had. I literally started like two weeks prior.

JVN [00:03:55] So it, you're a New York Times bestseller.

TAN FRANCE [00:03:58] Yeah.

JVN [00:03:59] You were also.

TAN FRANCE [00:04:00] Sunday Times Best Seller.

JVN [00:04:01] Yes.

TAN FRANCE [00:04:02] Yeah.

JVN [00:04:02] And so like how was the, how is the process for you? I mean, do you-. Well, first of all, you said you didn't love me, that you didn't know that you're going to love me so much in the very beginning, which I got asked about at way too many interviews so next time you write about me in your good damn book.

TAN FRANCE [00:04:16] Isn't that nice, though, hearing how much I love you now?

JVN [00:04:19] No.

TAN FRANCE [00:04:19] You're a liar.

JVN [00:04:20] Because you've always loved me and you just made that story up for clickbait, Tanny Bananny. Okay. So anyway.

TAN FRANCE [00:04:26] Yes please.

JVN [00:04:26] So "Naturally Tan".

TAN FRANCE [00:04:27] Yes, it was. You wanted to know what it was like to write it?

JVN [00:04:30] Well, I just wanted to, like I mean, other than that fake news that you put in there about not loving me so much right at the very beginning. You know, you really took what out a good old Trump's playbook for that one. So but the rest of it was a masterpiece.

TAN FRANCE [00:04:44] Thanks. You all know this or no, I'm positive you all know this. But you go into writing a book thinking, "Yeah, it seems simple enough. I'm telling my story like that should be simple enough", It, I found it so hard. And it wasn't necessarily that I couldn't think of the things I wanted to say. We had ample and it was deciding which ones we're gonna take out. It was confronting the things that you've worked so hard to forget. Channel out.

JVN [00:05:13] Suppress.

TAN FRANCE [00:05:13] Yeah. For your, for your comfort, for your protection, for your, for your sanity. And so working-. My first chapter of my book starts with my life as a child. And it's amazing how now thinking back when I was writing the book, thinking of how I felt about it. And now it's really dictating how I move forward. I mentioned to you, you know this, I started a new Instagram account and I, and that all stems from how I was feeling when I wrote the book, the things that I thought that I hadn't thought for 25 years, forgetting that they hurt me so, those things hurt me so badly. It does bring up so much more stuff than you ever expect. You go into it thinking, "Yeah, I'll write a book, I'll just tell my story". It's so not that simple. And you know me. You know, I'm not as emotional as our castmates. I don't cry as often. It's something I struggle with for years. I would love to be able to let that emotion go. I just struggle with that. But writing this book, I worked with a writer and we would Skype for four or five hours at a time. A few days a week. The amount of times I cried on that call, on those calls was shocking to me. I do not remember those things affecting me so greatly as a child.

JVN [00:06:29] Does that make you? Did that, did that change your perspective on, well, what is your perspective on like therapy?

TAN FRANCE [00:06:36] I've never been to the-, I think it's wonderful for people who know that that is going to benefit them and they want to go. For me I'm such a private person, discussing those things with anyone I don't really know very well doesn't work well for me. Instead, I talk to the people closest to me. I talk to my husband, I talk to my sister, I talk to my best friend as I would a therapist. And that's what I've always done. I don't really keep anything from those people.

JVN [00:07:02] So but it basically like kind of talking about a lot of that pain, a lot of that trauma coming up in the United Kingdom and coming up as a person of color and a member of the LGBTQ community was like you're like, This is, there's still some residual pain here".

TAN FRANCE [00:07:16] Yeah, like I wouldn't have ever imagined. I left England, you know, the funny thing is so many people when I go back to England to do press, they say, "Don't you miss England? Wouldn't you love to move back here? Like England's always home". To a certain degree it is. I love England. I think the country is a beautiful. I think it's full of wonderful, wonderful people. However, my experience was different to a lot of people's. I, I suffered. It's a very intense racism. From the time I knew how to use words, I suffered racism. And so my experiences and "Oh, I can't wait to live back in the UK". I understand how beautiful it is, I understand how wonderful it is. But for me, my experience was always quite negative. I felt attacked so regularly, even if it didn't happen everyday, I knew that I always had to be wary of it. That within a few days somebody is going to call me something disgusting on, on public transport.

JVN [00:08:07] Did you feel like that was different? Because you are from Doncaster? Of course.

TAN FRANCE [00:08:12] Yeah. Mmhmm. Perfect.

JVN [00:08:12] And. And then you moved to London later.

TAN FRANCE [00:08:15] Manchester first and then London.

JVN [00:08:17] So you moved? Oh.

TAN FRANCE [00:08:18] Yeah.

JVN [00:08:19] I just went to Manchester for the first time. Do you go to uni there?

TAN FRANCE [00:08:21] I did. Isn't it lovely?

JVN [00:08:22] You did?

TAN FRANCE [00:08:22] Yeah, it's beautiful, huh?

JVN [00:08:24] So, yeah. So you were in Doncaster till you were 17.

TAN FRANCE [00:08:27] Yeah.

JVN [00:08:28] And then you later-, and you.

TAN FRANCE [00:08:28] Straight to Manchester.

JVN [00:08:30] For 17 to like 21?

TAN FRANCE [00:08:31] 'Til 19.

JVN [00:08:32] And then.

TAN FRANCE [00:08:32] Final year of Manchester. Loved it.

JVN [00:08:35] Did you go to a fashion school?

TAN FRANCE [00:08:36] I did in Doncaster.

JVN [00:08:37] You did?

TAN FRANCE [00:08:38] Yeah. And then I went to Manchester and then I was in Manchester for about four years. My family ended up moving as well. Apparently they just couldn't live without me. So I moved for a year that almost all my family moved also. And then I moved to London. And London, I didn't have any of this issues. You've been to London often enough to know. It's very mixed, like there isn't much racism. It's not very often I experienced that at all. I actually don't remember a time I experienced that at all in London. But moving up nor-, further up north to a place where the community was so divided, it got even more problematic in Manchester.

JVN [00:09:12] So you went Doncaster, Manchester, London, and then you went back to Manchester?

TAN FRANCE [00:09:17] Then I came to America. Then I went to Manchester for a heartbeat, and then I went, came back to America.

JVN [00:09:20] So the last time you went to Manchester after having experienced London, you were like "Yikers"?

TAN FRANCE [00:09:24] Yeah. I think I'd forgotten just how bad it was. And it was when my first days, and the funny thing is, after we shot "Queer Eye", my family still lives in Manchester. After we shot, shot "Queer Eye" but the show wasn't out. The bus is often faster. They have a separate bus lane, so the buses are often faster than driving yourself. And so I got on the bus, and within 10 minutes. I don't know why I thought, "Oh, my life is different now. I'm doing a show, I'm in entertainment, people are going to leave me alone". Somebody called me the P-word, which I was going to say it, you should never say this, but "Paki" is the word that they use against us, which is a disgusting word to use against us. Somebody called me a "Paki" within the first few minutes and I just thought, "Wow, I guess it doesn't matter what's happening in my life, that doesn't stop".

JVN [00:10:08] And so like in a way that someone would like if I walked past them in like on a bus would be like "Fagot".

TAN FRANCE [00:10:13] Yes, exactly. Exactly. With such venom.

JVN [00:10:16] And do you think, and that was, so that wasn't a post-Brexit world. When you were done with, done with "Queer Eye"?

TAN FRANCE [00:10:23] Oh, I don't know exactly the time.

JVN [00:10:24] Well they voted on it-

TAN FRANCE [00:10:25] Two years ago.

JVN [00:10:26] And it was voted on before Trump. So and we had filmed "Queer Eye" after Trump.

TAN FRANCE [00:10:30] Oh, wow. Yeah then. Yeah.

JVN [00:10:32] Yeah so that was a post-Brexit world.

TAN FRANCE [00:10:32] Wow. Okay.

JVN [00:10:33] So do you think that, though-? So I would say, I mean, I only got, I haven't been to London in the United Kingdom as much as I wish that I had.

TAN FRANCE [00:10:41] Yeah.

JVN [00:10:41] I went once in eighth grade like three days.

TAN FRANCE [00:10:43] Yeah.

JVN [00:10:43] Then I went for like ten days when I was like in 2016. It was like during the election it was like the second presidential debate. I was there. I was in fact, I was there from like October 15th to October 25th. And I was really trippin' because when I was just back, I was basically back at the exact same dates but three years later and I was like, "Wow, my life is so unrecognizable from what it was".

TAN FRANCE [00:11:04] Yeah.

JVN [00:11:04] But having gone back at this last time, having been your friend and, you know, knowing you so much.

TAN FRANCE [00:11:09] Yeah.

JVN [00:11:09] It, I mean, it did make me-. I was like noticing on television there's like definitely I don't think that there's the same amount of representation.

TAN FRANCE [00:11:18] No.

JVN [00:11:18] Of people of color.

TAN FRANCE [00:11:19] Agreed.

JVN [00:11:19] On telly that there is here.

TAN FRANCE [00:11:21] Yeah.

JVN [00:11:21] And also I noticed a shocking amount of transphobia and nonbinary phobia.

TAN FRANCE [00:11:28] Yes.Yes.

JVN [00:11:28] I'm just very like gendered, a very gendered existence in the United Kingdom.

TAN FRANCE [00:11:34] Yeah. See, here's the thing. I think that, I think something similar is going on here. I just think that the Brits and you know this from me, we're just a lot more comfortable saying the things we want to say. So we just don't mask or hide it as well as a lot of Americans do, which I don't know what's the better thing. I actually for me personally is it's better in the US where even if you have something disgusting to say, often you won't say it. And I think that we're a lot more comfortable with just complete candid comments in the UK where if they don't like somebody who trans or you don't like someone who's gay, they don't like somebody who's brown, you'll most likely say it.

JVN [00:12:08] But they don't like that because they're racist and transphobic.

TAN FRANCE [00:12:12] Yes.

JVN [00:12:13] Yeah. It's not like they don't like the person because they're an annoying person.

TAN FRANCE [00:12:16] No, no, no, no. It's purely surface issues.

JVN [00:12:20] So do you think that the factors that led up to Brexit and like led up to Donald Trump? Do you think that those are similar phenomenons between the United Kingdom and United States? Have you lived in both places?

TAN FRANCE [00:12:33] Yeah, I think I think people who are surprised by Trump's win or by Brexit have probably lived in a very different world to me. They have a different existence to, to what I experienced. And I've found that with most people of color that I know we are, we kind of do giggle when we, when we find that people are so shocked by this because we've known how racist these places can be. We know how homophobic these places can be. And so Brexit doesn't surprise me. Trump doesn't surprise me. I think what surprises me most is that it's taken so long. It disgusts me. But I think the surprising thing is it took so long.

JVN [00:13:12] Okay. I want to just, we're just going to do two really fast commercials, everyone. And then we're gonna be right back with more Tan France after the break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious", so. OK. So for white people listening to this, they have not experienced racism because I think, you know, I think it's just, it's just being white, honey. It's uncomfortable when you realize that like other people don't have it as easy as you do. So you just had the example of you being in a bus after we were filming "Queer Eye". When you were growing up, is there any story from the book or any other example that just to explain, like what someone like you growing up in

like in a (*inaudible*) would potentially have to say, or like had to deal with like at a grocery store or like at school or like with like some other child's parent?

TAN FRANCE [00:14:02] Yeah, this was this was the most common experience as a kid was so my mom had to work a lot. My dad at work a lot. Most parents do, but they had to have a couple of jobs. They were first generation immigrants. They were immigrants. And so they couldn't take their kids to school. They had many children. They couldn't take their kids to school. And so we had to make our own way to school. And so but by the age of 5, we were in first grade, in England we start kindergarten earlier. And so I was in first grade. And my, every time my brother was sick, my brother and I were the only ones who were in first school together. Middle school, my eldest siblings were in. So my brother was the only one who was in the first school with me. If he could-, the school was seven or eight minutes away. Two streets, so easy. It wasn't unsafe to go as far as cars or whatever were concerned. So really easy to get to school. My other, my brother was sick. I would get this feeling that no 5 year old should experience, where I would start to feel physically sick myself. My mom thought that I was lying. "No, of course, you're not sick". Like, "You just want to be off school because your brother's off school. You wanna play at home". No, that's not the case. But I felt too silly or too insecure saying to my mom. "No, there's a much larger reason why I don't want to go to school today". And the reason was I knew I had to run to school that day to hopefully find a lady with children or a lady on her own that I could walk next to. So people would believe that I was with that person. So those grown ups wouldn't hit me. There was a situation when I was 7. We're walking to school-. This was quite common. This was just the experience I remember. These kids who were in, I'm gonna say college, they're probably 18, 19, kicked the shit out of me and I was 7 because I was brown and I didn't run fast enough getting to school. And that's the difference when we talk about people not understanding what it's like to be brown. It's not just that, "Well, I really don't, I don't look like a lot of people that are in my town". No. It's it's literally, "Will I get to school safely as a 7 year old? Will someone beat me on my way to school purely because I've got brown skin"? And I learn this tactic very earlier, early on of trying to reason with people the fact that a 7 year old has to try and reason with 18 year olds not to hit him in the face because, just because of his skin is disgusting. And that's, that was our version of childhood in England. And so I love that I'm, I'm from the UK. But having to constantly be aware that you have to stay close to a lady who could protect you is a real sorry state of affairs. And I've got niece and nephews who are that age. That's too young to be aware of your skin tone.

JVN [00:16:38] Do you think it's still like that there?

TAN FRANCE [00:16:40] Yeah, I do. I. So I go home to England regularly. You and I were just there a few days ago, a couple weeks ago. And I was having this conversation with my, my niece and nephews. It's like, "Do you still have to run to school"? And they're like, "Yes, stupid. We live in England". And I don't know why that shocked me. What was nice to hear was that they did say that nobody cares that there's, there's gay people in school. Thankfully that's moved along. Like you wouldn't pick on a gay person at school because there's no reason to. However, the racism hasn't gone away.

JVN [00:17:14] So for people that live in like London, Manchester, like more, you know, urban centers of London, especially like white people that live there. What would you say to people that like, "There's not racism here"? Like, you know, America is really racist. Like, they have a lot of that going on there. But like, we're actually really not racist here.

TAN FRANCE [00:17:31] Do you know the funny thing is, Jonathan? Is I hear that a lot from the Brits. "Oh, gosh. Can you believe you got Trump? There's so much racist, racism there". I'm like, "Yeah, we have the same here. You just don't see it". What I will say is that use that, use that luxury that you have to feel like there isn't racism and ask somebody who is white, "How can I help"? How can I help make this easy for you? What can I do if somebody asked me that as a kid, if somebody asked my mom that as when I was a kid, I'm sure she would have said, if you see somebody say something to my son, run to him, help him. If you hear your friends or family say something disgustingly offensive, instead of just being polite and thinking, "Well, they're not saying about me. They'll move on to another conversation soon enough". Call them out. Check their arrogance. Check their racism. And it can be done in a diplomatic way. I know that a lot of, a lot of people aren't confrontational. But just start a conversation saying, "Hey, why would you think it's okay to refer to that family as the Paki family down the street? Maybe just use the full name. That's not appropriate to refer to them that way". There's a little ways of encouraging people to think differently about how they interact.

JVN [00:18:39] So it's basically like using your white privilege to like combat the racism.

TAN FRANCE [00:18:43] Yeah. Here's, the thing is my community and every other community of color doesn't get to move forward by us saying, "Hey, can you please not call us Paki's anymore? Please not hit us on the street". That happens by strong white folk standing up to their own people saying, "I've seen the light. I've realized how disgusting this behavior is. And I, and you're, they're not going to win you over because you don't respect them enough to listen to them, but you respect me because of my beautiful white skin. Therefore, I need you to hear that that's not okay to do to them anymore".

JVN [00:19:17] So, yes. Also, I think one thing that I followed immediately and have been very much liking all of is your new Instagram account, Shaded.

TAN FRANCE [00:19:28] Yeah.

JVN [00:19:29] Which basically you mentioned it a little bit previously, but you were writing your book and then you get this idea.

TAN FRANCE [00:19:36] Yeah, I, so in part of my book, i, just one moment in my book because I didn't want to belabor the point because I was too scared to talk about it. Remember, I started writing my book in June. The show had been out for three months. There's already a lot to process without having to try and be an activist in any kind of space. You're more strong-willed than I am in that space. I was too nervous about it. I just thought people already are making comments about my religion, my skin color, my sexuality. I don't want any, I don't want to rock the boat anymore. But then writing this one comment in my book really sparked, started to spark something. I mentioned in my book that right about the age of 9 or 10, I stole my cousin's bleaching cream and started to try and bleach my skin. It lasted a few days, it was very uncomfortable. It actually irritated my skin so badly that I stopped immediately. But again, the sad thing is, the media seemed to really twist it and make me seem like the devil. I was 9. I was 9. I didn't know that that wasn't OK, that I should embrace the beauty of my skin. All I knew was people hated my people and in particular when I was going to school, me. And therefore, I need to solve that problem and that, the way I solve that is by being whiter. But it wasn't. The sad thing is it wasn't just the Caucasian community who was causing me issues. And let me preface this by saying there were wonderful, wonderful white

people in my community, people we loved so much, people I still love so much. It was a very, very small sector of the community. But what I will say is that it wasn't just people outside of our community, it was people in my own community that made it very clear, in my own extended family that made it very clear you're too dark to be considered attractive. And there was conversation in my household many times, if you are too dark, you're not gonna get a good job. You, nobody decent is going to marry you. We have got to find a way to lighten up. At one point, I hear my my sister's mother-in-law say this recently and my grandma said it to me also, "Well, I see the problem with Tan. We know what the problem is. He's got his dirty skin because he keeps eating chocolate". Like his dark food is making him dark. And it's a very older mentality, an archaic mentality that what you're eating is encouraging your skin tone. And so they encouraged my, my family to continue to feed us lighter foods, to lighten us up. And so that kind of pressure from a very young age, knowing that I've got to find a way to lighten up. I've gotta find a way to present as white as possible otherwise, I'm not going to be successful in life. That really screws you up, so I mentioned it in my book and it really got me thinking about how this happened so regularly. The majority of the TV that we see in Asian households is not a Caucasian TV, it's not Hollywood, it's Bollywood. And we always see the lightest, fairest people who are our stars and they are considered beautiful. It was, I don't even remember a time there was somebody darker than me who is represented, who was attractive. And then I started to think of Western TV and where's this coming from? I mean, this goes, this has gone on for centuries. But where, where, where is it happening now? And I thought we are responsible.

JVN [00:22:59] Really quick, everyone. Me and Tan are on a secret project right now and like in a secret bunker that I can't tell you where it is. But if you hear rolling, if you hear voices, if you hear speaker phone, don't worry. That's what it is jumping right back in.

TAN FRANCE [00:23:12] So I start to think who else has a responsibility? Entertainment. Entertainment is often, Hollywood is often at the forefront of pushing movements, pushing activism, pushing boundaries, encouraging people to think differently. Yet it is so rare you see a person of color, especially a South Asian person of color, a Middle Eastern person of color, an Asian person of color depicted in a way that is seen as desirable. They are either get to be terrorists or a taxi driver or a doctor. Non-sexual, just a doctor or a lawyer, somebody hyper-intelligent at the best of a person, the best of a community. They don't get to be a complete person. And I was watching TV and I would cou-, start watching TV a lot and movies a lot thinking there's gotta be one person that is in there. And I saw a show and there was somebody was described as Indian man, a very handsome Indian man called Nikesh Patel, who was described as handsome. And somebody was talking about how sexy he was. And I sat there emotional. I didn't cry, but I sat there. I felt it so deep in me thinking, I've never, ever seen this before. I've never seen a Western show describe a South Asian person as anything other than just a person. This person is seen as a complete person. He gets to be desirable. How is this the first time I've ever seen this? And it is 2019. And so I started digging further and then I had a very strange interaction. I'm not going to say names, obviously, but I had a very strange interaction with somebody. And I have this show called "Dressing Funny". And I get to dress comedians and comedians are sometimes more open and vulgar than we get to be on our show. Our show, "Queer Eye" is a PG show. And I was told-

JVN [00:25:00] But being a comedian and obviously in our history you've seen me be vulgar.

TAN FRANCE [00:25:03] Yes, pretty vulgar and I'm incredibly vulgar also. And so John Mulaney was being quite vulgar. So was Pete Davidson and I was joining in and I was making sexual comments and swearing a lot, and somebody mentioned an event, they were like, "We've seen 'Dressing Funny' and here's the thing. If you if you want to really be successful, you need to stop that". Like, yes, that that comedian be sexual. Let that comedian be vulgar. The world isn't ready for you to be sexual or vulgar. You get, you get to be those other things that. He said, "You get to be the idea, the ideal. Like you're the first one that has really shown that you run the gamut of emotions. You run the gamut of what it is to be a person. Don't push it. Like, why would you take it to that level? Nope. The world's not ready to see was that America's not ready to see you as sexy or sexual".

JVN [00:25:58] You know what I love? Is unsolicited advice from fucking strangers.

TAN FRANCE [00:26:02] Love. Love unsolicited advice.

JVN [00:26:03] It's like you know what you should you do is "Tell me, tell me what the people that are following me hand over foot. And like all the people that are, like, obsessed with me, I can't even go get a damn coffee because I'm so attractive and my hair is so fucking gorgeous and volume and don't even get me started on my body". But, no, keep going. I can't believe someone literally said this to you.

TAN FRANCE [00:26:19] It was a person of color because they said, "Look, I've experienced it. You, it's a really, really bad move and it's the quickest way to get out of this industry is by rocking the boat like this. Like they've allowed us in, maybe stop".

JVN [00:26:32] Which is like lull, tell that to you and your other 17 shows that you're booked, bitch. Booked and busy, bitch. You can't help it.

TAN FRANCE [00:26:39] I was so angry. Like you know how you'll say you just want to do a table flip. I wanted to do a table flip more than I ever wanted to do a table flip saying, "Nobody gets to fucking tell me the version of a person I get to be. Nobody gets tell me that I shouldn't be swearing. Nobody gets tell me that I shouldn't talk about sex if I want to talk about sex. I get to be the complete person that every white person is allowed to be on western television. They get to talk about their emotions. Why can't I"? And so that, literally the next week I started Shaded to start a conversation saying, "I want to encourage people to talk about what, if you want to talk about sex, talk about sex. If you want to talk about the fact that you feel desirable because your brown-skinned wonderful. If you are darker skinned and you love your darker skin, but people are making you feel shitty about it. Let's talk about it". And really the main reason I started Shade is because I am so desperately trying to find a way to make sure that people aren't allowed to sell these products over the counter anymore, to say, "Oh, here's a way, here's a way to correct". And I'm saying actual "correct", I'm using my words correctly to correct your skin tone, to brighten your skin tone. There's nothing fucking wrong with my skin tone. And if I could, if little 7 year old Tan could see himself today. He'd be shocked because I was very upset by my skin tone. And now it's the thing I love my, love the most about my appearance. I love my skin tone. And I want other people to feel as beautiful as I do with my skin.

JVN [00:28:02] We're gonna be right back with more "Getting Curious" with Tan France right after the break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious", this is Jonathan Van Ness. So the first time I ever

saw a bleaching product was in the Philippines. I was there with my cousin like a long time ago. And I remember seeing that and thinking like, "This is weird". I feel like I've never seen a bleaching cream in the United States like I-. So, I mean, so there is irritants in these cream.

TAN FRANCE [00:28:36] Yeah.

JVN [00:28:37] That actually can bleach your skin.

TAN FRANCE [00:28:39] Yeah. And this report suggests, data suggests that it can cause a major, major health issues. And so the fact that, I don't remember what you call it, is FCC? The-.

JVN [00:28:51] FDA.

TAN FRANCE [00:28:52] FDA sorry. FDA hasn't regulated this. And so.

JVN [00:28:55] What's interesting about that. Is the FDA can only legally, they can only regulate skin care if there's SPF because it's like an active ingredient from like a medicinal standpoint.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:07] Oh.

JVN [00:29:07] But if the bleach or whatever the lightening agent is doesn't have like a medical directive, then the FDA isn't subject to it.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:14] That's terrifying.

JVN [00:29:14] It's the same thing that in the United States we haven't passed any any laws related to personal care products since 1938.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:21] You had mentioned that.

JVN [00:29:21] That's why that is like that.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:22] Shocking.

JVN [00:29:23] I'm surprised in the United Kingdom, which has a much more stringent.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:26] I'm surprised, too. But people are benefiting from this massively. You, anywhere you go, I just go back for the Middle East. There are billboards everywhere about lightening, lightening skin. They found more cunning ways now to do it as opposed to making it so disgustingly crude and crass is "Let's whiten you up". Now, they say "Brightening cream". Again, it's the same, it's one and the same.

JVN [00:29:48] I have a question. Going back to what you're talking about.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:50] Yeah.

JVN [00:29:51] Was the person of color who said that? Were they British?

TAN FRANCE [00:29:53] No.

JVN [00:29:53] Not British.

TAN FRANCE [00:29:54] American.

JVN [00:29:55] So I guess what, the reason I was going to ask that is do you find a difference in-? Because I was wondering, like, why would this person say that? Like, are they like jelly that like they didn't have the courage to approach their platform in the way that you are? Or that they aren't getting the accolades that you are? Like was it, like was it coming from a fear-based place?

TAN FRANCE [00:30:14] I think so. I don't think there will be hyper-judgmental of me. I think that this person, like many other people of color, had been told by their parents, grandparents. It is so ingrained in us. I don't, I don't think I know any person of color who hasn't been fed this crap by somebody in their cul-, in their community. And so I think this person was just regurgitating what others in our community might think. "Calm down. Let's not scare, let's not scare either the people who are lighter than us or the white communities by showing them a version of us that may be scary to them".

JVN [00:30:46] So that's what I was going to kind of ask is like, I don't know really know how to say because I don't want to say it the wrong way, but it's like, do you, have you encountered in your activism people of color who seem to side with the side of the oppressor?

TAN FRANCE [00:30:56] Yes, saying, so, it's funny. I don't often check my DMs on my personal Instagram, but I.

JVN [00:31:04] You're so busy taking in all my dick pics, honey. You don't have a lot of time.

TAN FRANCE [00:31:12] You know how it is. Me personal photographer.

JVN [00:31:13] Just to be clear, I only sent Tan asshole pics and torso pics because he's a big top, and I don't want to scare him.

TAN FRANCE [00:31:17] I was also being clear. He makes me take his photos for him.

JVN [00:31:20] Yeah, I don't send pics to Tan, I'm just kidding.

TAN FRANCE [00:31:23] No, my issue, my issue with my Shaded account is when I look at the DMs, a lot of people already angry that I'm talking about it saying, "Why? Why shouldn't you let us whiten our skin? Like we don't see what the problem is". Or "Why shouldn't be people lighten their skin? It makes them more beautiful". I think that they've, we've been so conditioned over literal centuries that we've convinced ourselves that absolutely these people are right. There's this term that we use in Hindi, also Urdu, which are a couple of languages, which are a couple of languages that I speak. And it's when a child is born, you ask, you often ask the parent [Hindi/Urdu] which means is asking clean. Which is saying how white are they? Are they white enough to be acceptable to our community? Literally, that is the direct translation. How clean are they are? Or are they clean enough? And so I think that the reason why people are angry or frustrated that I'm talking about this so openly, especially on a Western platform, is that they're saying we don't want

them to think that we're causing trouble. We don't want them to think that we're not happy with our skin tone. But white is right. That couldn't be more archaic. That couldn't frustrate me more. It's not right. It's just we've been convinced that that's right. And so my goal. Let me tell you my goal with Shaded is to encourage people to see this differently. But my real goal is and if it takes me 10 years, it takes me 10 years. I want to, I want to stop people mak-, selling this product. They will. It will always be available in the black market. I wanted them to stop selling it legally. And I want for people to see that as something that is never, ever an option for them. Because I think as long as it's available, they'll think, well, it maybe I think I should, I should correct, because there's a product that corrects it. No, I don't want you to see this as even an option for you. It doesn't matter that you're the darkest one in your family like I am. It doesn't make you less of a person. Does it make you less successful? Does it make you less desirable? And I want to tell you one more story. I go to China a lot. I used to go to China a lot, as you remember. I owned a few businesses. And the lovely factory owner who was a really nice guy, he didn't mean this offensively. I used to go there regularly and I used to have to pretend that I was straight. Oh, sorry that I wasn't married because I wouldn't be able to get my visa to go and do my my job.

JVN [00:33:44] Really?

TAN FRANCE [00:33:45] Yeah. And so I put, I put a "single" even though I'd be married for quite a few years. And so this factory owner, lovely, lovely man he once had very calmly, "Well, of course you're single. You've got the undesirable skin color". And I smiled and I was like, "Mmhmm, yeah, that's that's the reason why nobody married me is because I'm undesirably colored. Uh huh". And so often in China and this happens in Middle Eastern countries and South Asian countries whenever I revisit. Somebody inevitably will offer me that umbrella because I'm one of the very few people who won't try and shield my face from the sun because I actually quite like getting a bit of a tan. They do not like it. They know how wrong that is for their culture.

JVN [00:34:28] So you got like, you know, a large swath of like white people who would have never known that this existed.

TAN FRANCE [00:34:35] Yeah.

JVN [00:34:35] Or that like this was even an issue.

TAN FRANCE [00:34:36] Yeah.

JVN [00:34:37] Then you've got like a lot of people who probably partake in skin bleaching, like it, want to do it more. Makes them feel more desirable or whatever. And your thing is kind of like calling into question this, this perceived beauty as being whiter in the first place.

TAN FRANCE [00:34:55] Yes.

JVN [00:34:55] Which I think a place where I've talked about it a lot and I see it a lot and I've been thinking a lot about it is for women of color in the United States that are told the only like white, straight, you know, white texture of hair. Straight hair, blow dries, and we're seeing like women all across this country losing their hair to traction alopecia. Spending all this money to maintain hairstyles that like are not native to their hair. Like if I wanted to have, you know, really, really tight, kinky curls and I was like smothering my hair in a wig every day and braiding my hair to sew, you

know, tight kinky curly hair onto my braids to have that illusion of that kinky hair. I'm going to experience alopecia. I'm an experienced all sorts of stuff. I'm also going to spend a whole bunch of money finding the hair, maintaining the hair, as opposed to celebrating and loving what you have. And I do think that there's like that universal adage of like, you know, happiness is like wanting what you have.

TAN FRANCE [00:35:47] Yeah.

JVN [00:35:47] Instead of like trying to change it to be something else. But there is a whole industry and there is so much money to convincing people that they are not as they should be. Like with this, you could feel more like that.

TAN FRANCE [00:35:59] Yeah.

JVN [00:35:59] You know, so.

TAN FRANCE [00:36:01] I, there, this isn't the solution. Absolutely this is not the solution.

JVN [00:36:05] But let me ask you my question.

TAN FRANCE [00:36:06] Yes, sorry.

JVN [00:36:06] So for people that are suffering, you know, from a trauma or from an experience of believing that, like their skin wasn't the right enough color or of experienced, I mean, obviously treating your skin topically and then like experiencing racism like day in and day out and physical and, you know, emotionally abusive ways. I feel like are maybe all under the same canopy, but like far away in the same cano-.

TAN FRANCE [00:36:30] Yeah.

JVN [00:36:30] It's like experiences. But it's like for people that are healing from this, how have you healed? How would you say to like mothers, to parents, to older siblings that are going through this? And also because we do it like seven to ten minutes left, more rapid fire.

TAN FRANCE [00:36:48] Yes. Yes.

JVN [00:36:49] What would you say? What would you say to families that are trying to heal from this? Or maybe to people that are waking up to the fact that this is like a whitewashed beauty existence and then it's like not what needs to be celebrated?

TAN FRANCE [00:37:01] For me, honestly, what helped was we talk about allies a lot. We've talked about it for the last couple of years. But this actually was important to me, my white allies, the people that I was dating. They, for the first time ever, I was described as beautiful by them. And so I started to view my skin differently. And then I start to surround myself with other people who were of that, of that mindset of you do not need to whiten yourself up. Your skin tone is beautiful as it is. And I'm not looking for a Caucasian hero. I'm not looking for a Caucasian knight in shining armor who's going to make me feel beautiful. But honestly, for me, that was very helpful to finally hear, "You do not need to look whiter for this". And now that I am in a privileged position to be able to

have this conversation, to then pass on that message to others. I simply want them to know, remind your children, remind your siblings that the color that they are is perfect just the way they are. Yes, there is a version of beauty that the beauty industry suggests is the most attractive, but there are also many others that are attractive just in a different way. And you need to find the pocket of community, of people that are going to love and respect you for exactly who you are. You having dark skin will not hinder your success in this world. It absolutely will not as long as you have strength of self and you know just how beautiful your skin tone is and stop looking to those influences that so massively encourage you. If you are finding that a lot of your Instagram, a lot of your Facebook, whatever, is, is stuff that's encouraging a certain kind of beauty. Stop clicking on that stuff. It's going to change your algorithm. And you don't need to be reminded constantly that your skin tone isn't right. And so there are ways of working with your tools around you to stop thinking the way you're thinking to start to encourage a different mentality by surrounding yourself with people who will love you for just who you are. And the social, social media can cause so many issues for so many kids. We know this. That is their main outlet. If that, if you know that you're seeing things that are encouraging you to be lighter, that your skin isn't right. Remove those, block them, start to do yourself a favor. Don't be the reason you're unhappy.

JVN [00:39:07] That's really good. So basically, I hear you saying, like, surround yourself with a close circle of people that, you know, you love and you trust. And that takes a certain amount of vulnerability and courage to even like find those people in the first place.

TAN FRANCE [00:39:18] Yeah.

JVN [00:39:18] But you have that. So that's good. So like, keep doing that. The other thing I want to say is for this like, I hate to, well ok. So you have 18 other shows that you're hosting. You have "Dressing Funny with Tan France".

TAN FRANCE [00:39:32] Yeah.

JVN [00:39:32] You have "Next in Fashion". How much do you miss me when you're on other shows?

TAN FRANCE [00:39:37] Like you wouldn't believe it. Actually, it really is hard going-.

JVN [00:39:40] But you miss me more than everyone else, right?

TAN FRANCE [00:39:41] I do. I do. No, I was about say. It's hard because you if, if nothing else. I know. At any point in "Queer Eye" I can turn to you and you're going to have something important to say, something fun to say. You are like my safety net and I'm usually very comfortable on "Queer Eye". I've always got something to say but if I struggle for a moment, I know I can turn to you and you've got. It's hard when you don't have that person. Alexa is incredible, I'm not talking about to that, I'm talking-.

JVN [00:40:09] But she's no me. Tanny, I miss you all the time. Tanny.

TAN FRANCE [00:40:12] I'm talking about "Dressing Funny". "Dressing Funny" is just me.

JVN [00:40:16] Yeah, it is.

TAN FRANCE [00:40:16] It's very hard. I don't have that person to be like, "I know that somebody says something really funny and it's Jonathan Van Ness". It got very difficult, I miss you a lot.

JVN [00:40:25] But it must be fun.

TAN FRANCE [00:40:27] It's so fun. And it is, it is, it's nice pushing yourself thinking I don't have the crutch of four other people. I love the other show so much. But there is such a comfort when I come back to "Queer Eye" thinking at least I know that I've got the support of everyone else.

JVN [00:40:40] So "Next in Fashion", I know how it is when you are, you know, hosting a Netflix show, Queen, like you can't give away too many like dates and important stuff. But like, what can people kind of look forward to? Is the competition fierce like-? But like when you met everyone?

TAN FRANCE [00:40:54] Yeah.

JVN [00:40:55] Did you have any clear favorites? Or were you like this is really anybody's game, it's a nail biter?

TAN FRANCE [00:41:00] Oh, gosh, I can't, maybe, I can't. You know, this is my personal opinion so I'm going to say this. I think I knew very early on I won't say it was when I first met these people. But when I, within the first few weeks, I think I sensed who was possibly going to get the final.

JVN [00:41:16] And were you were correct?

TAN FRANCE [00:41:17] I absolutely was. And you were-.

JVN [00:41:20] I was there.

TAN FRANCE [00:41:20] You were there. And we can share this. It was epic.

JVN [00:41:24] Really epic.

TAN FRANCE [00:41:25] Like the-.

JVN [00:41:27] Next level epicness.

TAN FRANCE [00:41:28] Next level epic.

JVN [00:41:29] Because how long do they have to do the finale?

TAN FRANCE [00:41:31] Four days.

JVN [00:41:32] Yeah. That is really unbelievable.

TAN FRANCE [00:41:34] Unbelievable. So here's the thing. We've seen fashion competition before and I didn't know how ours was going to be different. I wanted to make sure the ours felt new. It felt fresh. It felt exciting for the younger audience, too.

JVN [00:41:47] Well ,I think having a person of color as a Pakistani gay man.

TAN FRANCE [00:41:51] Yeah.

JVN [00:41:52] I, you know, when I think of other fash-, I think a lot of white stuff.

TAN FRANCE [00:41:56] Yeah.

JVN [00:41:56] Also I would say when I was in the United Kingdom, that really floored me, the first day I walked in. And I know no one really watches like "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" anymore in the United Kingdom. But I was floored because I saw three episodes because there's this one channel that they only play, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire"?

TAN FRANCE [00:42:09] Ok.

JVN [00:42:09] And it was literally white dude, white dude, white dude, white dude, white woman, white dude, white dude, white dude, white woman, white dude, white dude.

TAN FRANCE [00:42:15] Yeah.

JVN [00:42:15] I saw three episodes in a row where it was like white host, ten white contestants three times in a row. I just don't think you would see that in America like so blatantly.

TAN FRANCE [00:42:23] No, I agree.

JVN [00:42:24] And I do think that just thinking back what, just going back a little tiny bit into Shaded, which I think you should follow Shaded if you're not already, you should. I'm really excited to see what you continue doing with that platform. I think it's amazing.

TAN FRANCE [00:42:35] Thanks.

JVN [00:42:35] But I think so much of what you are doing when you're like, "I'm not as whatever as you in the activism space". I think you by being an out Pakistani, British, Muslim, gay man, married, you are setting such a beautiful example of being comfortable in your skin and accepting yourself where you are and celebrating that. So I hope you celebrate how much you are doing and how active you are and how many people you are a light to and how loved you are because it is very much next level. So then the other thing I want to just end up really quickly, is, is you can never like anyone else on any other TV show as much as me.

TAN FRANCE [00:43:11] Of course.

JVN [00:43:12] And-.

TAN FRANCE [00:43:12] But wait, I've got one correction. What's, really small correction, with "Next in Fashion", there are two nonwhite hosts. Alexa is actually half Asian. Her dad is following fully Asian.

JVN [00:43:22] Oh cute, cute, cute.

TAN FRANCE [00:43:22] Yeah, yeah. So I think that's shocking to have two people of color as the hosts of the show.

JVN [00:43:26] The other thing I was really surprised about in the United Kingdom was the-, and this is our last question, is the amount, the lack, the huge lack of understanding of transgender people and non-binary people. The week that I was there, there was this like LGB group that basically formed a group like without transgender people because-.

TAN FRANCE [00:43:44] I was so disappointed. I know.

JVN [00:43:45] They were like, you know, saying that transgender people in non-binary people are taking away the hard, the hard fought fights of gay men and lesbian women, which I just think is so funny because in the 60s and 70s, it was. It's always been transpeople.

TAN FRANCE [00:43:57] I know.

JVN [00:43:57] That have been doing the fighting. What do you, what say you as a-, I'm just kidding.

TAN FRANCE [00:44:04] You know, what I say is I'm disgusted. And I'm such a proud Brit, I'm such a proud Brit. However that makes me really disappointed.

JVN [00:44:11] But I guess my specific question is what is breeding that? Within the LGBT, within our community, where is that coming from?

TAN FRANCE [00:44:20] I so wish I knew so I could just point out and say you're com-, coming across so ridiculously and how insane that you would think that this is OK to talk about it or to even think. I don't know. I worry that it's fear based. I don't want to, I don't want to say, "Well, they can't help themselves. They're just scared", because that sounds like an excuse. But I worry that it's fear. I worry that they think, well, we've moved far enough where gay rights are a little stronger than they were 20 years ago. We can get married legally now. I wonder if they think, well, we've moved out from the pack, we've set ourselves from the pack. So we don't want to be brought down by a community who are still so actively trying to fight for their just equal rights, even civil rights.

JVN [00:44:59] I also think governmentally in the United Kingdom with that Margaret Thatcher law that like you weren't allowed to teach anything in school.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:03] Yes. Yes ,yes, yes.

JVN [00:45:03] About LGBTQ stuff.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:06] Yeah.

JVN [00:45:06] I think that that has had very long lasting really like a complicated implications on.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:11] Agreed, but we have-. I don't think you're allowed to talk about that in the U.S. and that was in the 80s.

JVN [00:45:14] Yes, you are. There's, there's no.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:15] Really?

JVN [00:45:15] There's no law from the federal government that says that you cannot cheat, I mean teach. I learned about all sorts of stuff when I was, I mean, not all sorts of stuff, but it wasn't something you could not talk about.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:25] Wow. Okay. Okay. Okay.

JVN [00:45:26] Like I did a report on Rudy Galindo in like third grade. You know?

TAN FRANCE [00:45:29] Okay. Okay. It just that was in the 80s. It just. Even if it was a law, we've moved on so much. I can't believe that people from our community are trying to drag the trans-community thinking that they're hindering us. It's a really sorry state of affairs. And I would love to actually hear the rationale.

JVN [00:45:46] Yeah, well, I think it's yeah. I think you'll probably be a lot dumber if you had to, like, sit yourself down and listen to it.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:52] I know.

JVN [00:45:52] But I love you so much, Tan.

TAN FRANCE [00:45:53] I love you, too. Thanks for doing this.

JVN [00:45:54] Do you, is there any, like, yogi recess that you need to say or anything?

TAN FRANCE [00:45:57] No, not at all. That was it.

JVN [00:45:59] Oh, yeah. I have one for you after this but I love you so much.

TAN FRANCE [00:46:04] Ok.

JVN [00:46:04] Bye. You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week with Tan France. You'll find links to his work on the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter at CuriousWithJVN and make sure you're following Shaded by Tan France. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quin. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend and show them how to subscribe. "Getting Curious" is produced by me, Julie Carrillo, Rae Ellis and Colin Anderson. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak.