

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & ALOK

JVN [00:00:00] 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. This week, we're re-airing an episode from June 2019 with the incredible writer and performance artist, and someone who I'm honored to call a friend, ALOK, where I ask them: How grateful are we to live beyond the gender binary? Welcome to "Getting Curious." I'm so excited to introduce our beautiful guest ALOK, who is a writer, performance artist, fashionista extraordinaire. So nice to have you here. Welcome.

ALOK [00:00:42] So happy to be here. Thank you.

JVN [00:00:44] Well. So it's, I don't know if you heard this. Did you know it's Pride month?

ALOK [00:00:48] I had no idea.

JVN [00:00:49] I don't know if you heard anything about it.

ALOK [00:00:51] This is blasphemous.

JVN [00:00:52] It's you know, we're already like almost halfway through, unfortunately. But I just found out. I'm just kidding. We love Pride month.

ALOK [00:00:58] I thought it was Straight Pride month.

JVN [00:01:00] No. What is that with? We're going to have to hit that point later. We'll get there. But you are a very you are having I mean, you've been working towards creating your moment for a second, but I feel like you've been on my radar for a second. But you're really coming into your own in public in a visible way that has just been so beautiful and exciting to watch. I'm curious about you. I want to know everything. I'm so inspired by you and I look up to you and. Yeah, so. Yeah.

ALOK [00:01:34] Yeah.

JVN [00:01:35] Tell me about everything.

ALOK [00:01:37] OK. Sure. And like, welcome to morning therapy. My name ALOK, like you said, as in "Tell me a joke, ALOK." I'm a gender nonconforming writer and

performance artist. And basically what that means is I'm in Cancer, Leo rising with a lot of feelings. And the stage is really the only place where this culture allows us to, like, cry and laugh. So that's where I am most of the time. I've been performing now for about seven years, touring the world. So I've performed in over 43 countries at over 500 venues. And a lot of my work is about challenging the gender binary. So I guess like my sort of soapbox as I think it's so wrong that we tell people that there is man or woman, male or female. And I think there is many genders as there are people in the world. So I'm trying to fight for a world where we celebrate creativity and not require people to conform.

JVN [00:02:23] Wow. I love that. And I love that you've been able to articulate the name of your soapbox and like how you want to approach that. It is. I was just, I've been writing a book lately and I've been thinking so much about how, like all my experiences with gender were so much formed when I was a little kid.

ALOK [00:02:43] Yeah.

JVN [00:02:43] And how they really like our ability to express ourselves is so linked to how we like perceive our ability to like make it in the world.

ALOK [00:02:57] Right.

JVN [00:02:57] I feel like. And as a child it was like really bore into me that if I, like being a gay man was something that was like terrifying for my family, but it was something that was like somehow more OK than like finding me at home in like a big, puffy, golden, you know, shoulder Dynasty evening gown and my beautiful, like, clip on earrings and my beautiful scarves and and heels. Like when my dad found that. It was like.

ALOK [00:03:26] That's the problem.

JVN [00:03:27] Yeah. And it really scared me.

ALOK [00:03:29] Yeah. Same I mean, I'm actually flying out right after this back to my hometown in Texas. So I like to say, "I grew up in a small town in Texas. It is very much homo on the range." OK, so as you can imagine, extremely white evangelical Christians straight. And there I was like a brown, gender nonconforming non-Christian kid. And for me, it was always about gender, not about sexuality. I used to wear my sister's clothes. I used to dance to all the Bollywood songs at our local Indian dinner parties. I didn't call it drag, it was just me. You know? I wear my mom's clothes. I would make gowns out of all the towels. And it was totally OK until I hit puberty. And then when you hit puberty, it's like time to be a boy. And I was like, "Wait, what?" Like why are we OK? And then everyone in

my family, everyone in my community started to shame me for being feminine. And I didn't even understand what I was as feminine or masculine. It was about freedom. And I'm coming back up for my 10 year high school reunion, actually. And it's like a big fuck you to my school and to my classmates because I never felt safe there to express myself. But now she's cur-, she's cur-, curated all of her outfits. Don't worry, there's multiple outfit changes. She's a nice, practical six inch denim wedge heel that she's gonna wear homage to Texas.

And I'm really just trying to teach people like when it comes to young transgender nonconforming kids, oftentimes they will try their best to destroy us and call it "love." That it was the people in my life who said they liv-, loved me, who also told me to be quiet. So they loved the masculine form of me and not me. And I think a lot of my poetry over the past decade has been about healing from that. And I think I have. I mean, healing is like a lifelong journey. But now I think I'm ready to be more of an advocate for the community, because I think so many of us have to destroy. The first line in my book of poetry is what feminine part of yourself did you have to destroy in order to survive in this world? And I think so many people across genders have to police our femininity in order to be real, in order to be safe, in order to be desirable. And I want to challenge challenge that.

JVN [00:05:22] Wow, that's so beautiful. I mean, it is I feel, especially in like gay male culture. It's crazy.

ALOK [00:05:35] Yeah. Oh, my God. It's so traumatic.

JVN [00:05:37] It's literally so traumatic. But I do think that there are fringes where it's starting to open and become like more supple and gorgeous and feminine like and like even just in our ability to be like to voice your attraction to like nonbinary people and to see, like just to see like the lack of fun.

ALOK [00:06:01] Right.

JVN [00:06:02] That's in, that's like-.

ALOK [00:06:02] That's what it's about, it's about fun actually.

JVN [00:06:04] It is, well just like the lack-. It's like such a rigid. I don't know. I just think that, like, the way that we celebrate masculinity and femininity is so rigid.

ALOK [00:06:13] So rigid. You know, it's ridiculous because they say that we have a disorder for being gender nonconforming. But I think the real problem is society's understandings of man and woman like cis people are having to live up to a completely

unrealistic standard where you're not allowed to have emotions if you're a man and you're not allowed to be competent if you're a woman. And that needs to be challenged. And I think what I'm really trying to do in my work is to get feminism to catch up to the reality of gender, which is the problem is not just male supremacy over women. The problem is that we divide people into man and woman to begin with. And for me, what feminism is actually about is people should have the autonomy to determine their own gender expression, what to call their body and who they are. And I think that that scares people because I mean, I'm sure you get this, when we're growing up as kids were taught if you at all express yourself a little bit past a point, then you are just disposed of. You're too much. And I think to be a gender non-covering person is to always be never enough and to be too much. At the same time.

JVN [00:07:08] Oh.

ALOK [00:07:09] They're always policing us and they're always saying, "This is where you belong. This is where you don't belong." And I'm saying done with those binaries, done with those boxes. Just allow me to live my life. My name is ALOK.

JVN [00:07:19] Which I love. OK. Let's go back to bb ALOK.

ALOK [00:07:23] Yeah.

JVN [00:07:23] Because like Texas is in the-. OK, so if you're coming up on your 10 Year Reunion, that means that you're like, ok, I'm just doing my math, which if it's not hair-.

ALOK [00:07:32] I'm about to turn 28.

JVN [00:07:33] So, like, I'm not great at hair color. So, or I, ew. Whoever says that. I'm great a hair color, but I'm wholly good at adding and subtracting hair color, not like years.

ALOK [00:07:41] Right.

JVN [00:07:41] But. Okay, so. So. But you're like coming up in the mid 90s.

ALOK [00:07:45] Yes.

JVN [00:07:46] In, in Texas.

ALOK [00:07:47] Yeah.

JVN [00:07:49] As a gender non-con, and because I think by the time I was-. Like with my voice and how I carry my body and how I like, move and talk, I think I was very gender nonconforming. But with my clothes, like, I feel like I was not allowed to like, I mean, it was like literally not allowed.

ALOK [00:08:10] Right, right, right.

JVN [00:08:10] Like I could play as much as I could with like tights because I had like extreme aversion, aversion to like buttons, snaps or zippers until like my dad was like, "You have to fucking wear Hambro shorts and jeans to school," Like, and also I just think I was like scared. Like I was scared to, like, dress how I really would have naturally, I mean, I already realized by the time I was in kindergarten and first grade that like wearing like scarves to make yourself look like Kristi Yamaguchi from your mom's scarf collection was like frowned upon.

ALOK [00:08:37] Right.

JVN [00:08:39] But so you were rocking that at school.

ALOK [00:08:41] I was rocking that until maybe like 8 or 9.

JVN [00:08:45] Which is so strong and brave. Like, I would not, like I like I did at home. I definitely, was I choreographing to like Vanessa Williams, like her entire album? Like, yes. Like I had beautiful, like lyrical dances to all that.

ALOK [00:08:57] For me it was a "Dream:, the girl group, remember that? "He loves me, he loves me not."

JVN [00:09:01] Oh, he loves me. He loves me not.

ALOK [00:09:03] Yeah, I love it. I love album so much. I still listen to it.

JVN [00:09:06] Wait, do you remember that? Not to get off track. And then we'll go back to gender expression when we were young 'cause it was really-, when you were young, which is really important. But do you remember that one song that was like, "C'est la vie, say you will, say you won't."

ALOK [00:09:15] Yes.

JVN [00:09:16] I loved that song.

ALOK [00:09:17] It was so good. I mean, honestly, music is just taken a downturn from there. That was the highlight.

JVN [00:09:21] Well, I mean, if you like Dani King was still bringing a pretty hard.

ALOK [00:09:23] Ok, yeah.

JVN [00:09:24] You know.

ALOK [00:09:25] Yeah. So the thing is, like I grew up in an Indian family and I think that's important because we have always had gender expression outside of the Western binary for like thousands of years.

JVN [00:09:34] Which is gorgeous.

ALOK [00:09:35] Hello.

JVN [00:09:35] Can you give people a detour into that?

ALOK [00:09:37] Totally 100 percent. So a lot of people think that this whole non-binary thing is a new fad. And that irritates me so much because actually the new fad is "man and woman." That actually there have been people outside of the Western gender binary for literally thousands of years and there still are. So where I'm from in India, actually, we have a long documented history of Hijras, of Aravanis, Kothis, of all these words to describe people outside of male and female.

JVN [00:10:03] Is the first, the first one you said is that H-i-j-j?

ALOK [00:10:06] H-i-j-r-a.

JVN [00:10:08] H-i-j-r-a.

ALOK [00:10:09] Yeah.

JVN [00:10:10] And weren't those baby gorgeinas minding their own business, and when Britain came in.

ALOK [00:10:15] Hello.

JVN [00:10:16] Isn't that-, because I think I just read about this is in BBC.

ALOK [00:10:18] Yes. Yes. BBC just did a great, a great story on this. So a lot of people don't know the history. So I'll break it down for people who don't you. So when the British, a.k.a. the origin of all my issues in my life, came into my country and it wasn't even a country at the point because the nation state came with them too. The first, one of the first things they did is they criminalized queer people. So they did two acts. One was the sodomy law, which was recently repealed, Section 377. And the second actually was a eunuch ordinance law which single handedly criminalized gender nonconforming people. So what they would do is they would forcibly strip trans, feminine, gender nonconforming people, sell their clothes and make them wear men's clothes. And this is a tactic of colonization we've seem to forgotten. It happened here in the United States as well, where indigenous people were forcibly assimilated into man and woman. So indigenous men had to cut their braids. Indigenous women had to wear dresses. That we took a very European white gender binary and we imposed that onto people of color, indigenous people. And so for me, when we say that nonbinary is a new fad, I'm like actually that's racism because this has been around for a very, very long time, it might be new to white or European consciousness, but black and brown people have had this for a very long time.

JVN [00:11:29] We're going to take a two second break. We'll be right back with more ALOK after this teeny little break. Welcome back to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. We are here with ALOK. OK, so that's a really important. And there was a couple of things that you say that really blew my mind. One is that I wonder, did Britain come into India like, it's in the 1800s, right? I think it was 1850-something. But it actually really doesn't even matter because when you think, well it does, but not for the purposes of what I was saying. 2019 that law got repealed or '18?' Cause like?

ALOK [00:12:08] '18.

JVN [00:12:08] '18. That took, even if it was 1899. That was 120 years. Almost.

ALOK [00:12:13] Right. It's just really, It's sad because you see all these maps of like the safest places in the world to be gay. And it's always concentrated in the U.S. and Europe. But I'm like you need to understand that actually these sodomy laws were put into place through colonization.

JVN [00:12:25] By those places.

ALOK [00:12:26] Hello. So why are you patting yourself on the back about how progressive you were whenever you brought that conservatism and that homophobia across the world?

JVN [00:12:34] So it's 1864. 1864, India, Britain came in. We just did our little "beep boop," we edited that out. We made that part cute. But then basically we just did a little quick Googling and we realized that Britain came into Indian in 1754 then or 1750-ish. Then in 1864, they enacted these two laws that criminalized LG-.

ALOK [00:12:56] Gender non-conformity and queerness. Yeah.

JVN [00:12:59] Yeah. And so really, you were saying that this is racism when, wait, say everything that you just said again. Because now we're back from break.

ALOK [00:13:07] So, you know, like media right now is saying like we're in a nonbinary fad or like we're in a gender neutral fad, I'm just like rolling my eyes because I'm like, this is not a fad. This has like thousands of years of history. And also we've been around for a very long time. I think that part of the ways that we're getting dismissed, especially in state legislation right now, because it's important to name that there's literally dozens of pieces of anti-trans legislation that are being debated right now. As they're saying, this is a millennial fad where we're just coming up and making up what genders. And I'm like, okay, first of all, all language is made up. Newsflash. They only get mad when we make up new language around gender and sexuality, but they're not like protesting the word "tweet" in being in the dictionary, you know?

JVN [00:13:46] Right.

ALOK [00:13:47] Language evolves and changes over time. But what they're saying essentially is that this is just a conspiracy of millennial Internet kids who are making up genders. And I want to say, actually, that's not true. We've been around for a very long time. We've had different words to describe ourselves. But this is a tactic of transphobia. It's not about real history.

JVN [00:14:04] And also, it's not even limited, well, I mean, it's not limited only to India and to Indian culture. I know that there's like Central American cultures where there is like, also in Native American, there is like definitely-.

ALOK [00:14:13] Yes. Even in pre-colonial Europe. That's what I always tell white people, too. I'm like, if you actually learn about your cultures before the formation of Europe, y'all were literally doing such amazing stuff too.

JVN [00:14:22] Really? What? What we were doing?

ALOK [00:14:23] Like amazing relationships with the environment and nature, like ritual and ceremony, multiple genders, like sex positivity. You know?

JVN [00:14:31] We were?

ALOK [00:14:33] Yeah.

JVN [00:14:33] Like kind of like, do you watch "Outlander"?

ALOK [00:14:35] No. Should I?

JVN [00:14:36] Well, yes, it's kind of fierce. It's like time-travelly. It's hot. Sam Heughan, I think, is how I say his last name. Super cute. And then Carolina, starts with a "B," fierce. But it's a story of this like 1945 like Ameri-, or British couple. And then they accidentally touch this like wooden Stonehenge and transport back to 1750-something. But there's like baby witches and they're doing, like, chic, like, nature witchy stuff. And I could to-, there was definitely like some slightly LGBT stuff.

ALOK [00:15:02] Ok.

JVN [00:15:02] I feel like I remember there in the second and third season. It's like interesting. I love that. I love it when like white people did something good once upon a time.

ALOK [00:15:10] Once upon a time.

JVN [00:15:11] Yeah, like, wow. Like deep down, like there's you know, everybody has good things in them. But that is but the binary. So gross. So we come back from our detour of the history of India and gender suffrage and also Filipino culture. There's also a lot of it gorgeous third genders. Yes, oh my god, I am about sneeze. Mmhmm.

ALOK [00:15:30] It's the ancestors speaking through you right now.

JVN [00:15:33] Mmhmm. Now it just diverged. But so. But back to you.

ALOK [00:15:39] Yeah.

JVN [00:15:39] And it's like the 90s and we're in, we are in Texas.

ALOK [00:15:41] Yeah.

JVN [00:15:42] And your family is Indian.

ALOK [00:15:45] Yeah.

JVN [00:15:46] And can I ask you like, like you were born here. But was it your parents that came or your grandparents?

ALOK [00:15:53] Yes. So my dad was born in Malaysia where he was born and raised, and then went to India for school, then went to Canada, then went to the US.

JVN [00:15:59] What a gorgeous multicultural person.

ALOK [00:16:02] And my mom was born in India and then moved to the US. So we grew up like kind of with extremities of like a very white Christian town and then a very tight-knit Indian Hindu community. But the reason I was bringing that up is because among other Indian people, when I was a kid, my gender non-conformity was not a problem. And I say that because I think that there's this revisionist history happening right now where we pretend that immigrants are more conservative or more homophobic or transphobic or literally just the other day I was like at the P, at my P.O. box and this white woman came out to me. And she's like, "It's a good thing that you live in the U.S. because they would kill you where you're from." I was like, "Excuse me, like first for the audacity to come up and say that to me in the middle of the day." And I tried to get her together and I was like, "Actually, like, you need to understand that this country is one of the most dangerous in the world right now for me, that actually that I have more legal protections and other places, in places like India, they actually acknowledge third gender on all identity documents, whereas here I still have to be called a man everywhere I go, I can't even walk down the street in New York City without being afraid for my safety."

But it's just so ingrained in people that when you see immigrants, when you see brown people, they're somehow more homophobic or transphobic. But that was not my case, not my case at all. I started to experience gender policing when I would go to school and then other white kids would be like, what are you doing? And so for me, like becoming a man was always about becoming a white man. This kind of very masculine, like don't care about fashion, like Indian men are literally some of the most fashionable people in the world, like we're literally wearing like mirrors, like glammed, like drag queens every day. But then in white male culture, it's like never care about your hair, never care about your nails, never care about-. That was never my experience. And so I think a lot of what I'm really trying to do and bring to the movement around LGBT issues is to say like this is a racial justice issue, that it's not just like you have LGBT rights over here and racial justice over there. And they

only come together when there's queer people of color. LGBT rights are already always about racial justice.

JVN [00:17:53] Just. Yeah, for sure. And well, I got to interview the director of the National Center for Transgender.

ALOK [00:18:00] Mara.

JVN [00:18:01] Yeah, Mara. And Mara was saying like, you know, you will see people from the National Center for Transgender Equality at every protest for whether it's, you know, Muslim equality, if it's whatever the marginalized community is, who ever it is, you are going to see someone from National Center for Transgender Equality, because we are not free until we are all free.

ALOK [00:18:20] Hello.

JVN [00:18:21] But I do think that it's like it is-. And I think another thing that I realize now that continues to be an issue is like the marginalization of classes, like people that don't have money.

ALOK [00:18:32] Right, totally.

JVN [00:18:32] Like that creates a whole other level of like inability to access safety information, like literal safety, because even how you present, how you look like, the more, the chic-er you look or like the more like polished you look, I feel like that can make you more safe from like harassment.

ALOK [00:18:50] Yes, totally.

JVN [00:18:52] Which is like a thing. So for you, growing up, you had the courage and the wherewithal and the strength to like present how you wanted to present in, up into school.

ALOK [00:19:00] Yeah.

JVN [00:19:00] Then you started experiencing like gender policing. Were you very much bullied?

ALOK [00:19:05] Oh my god, I got bullied so much. And I think that's why I'm a little scared about going back for this 10 Year Reunion because I have so much trauma from this town. Like we call my town "Colloquially Closet Station." It's called College Station. It was

just like there was no queer visibility at all. We had one gay bar on the periphery of town next to the strip club. So it's like that was where all the quote unquote, sinners went. Right? So I just did not know it was even possible to be LGBTQ. And then when there is media representation, there's never any Indian people who are LGBTQ, so I was, like, that's, that's a white people thing. And so I was bullied by the Indians for being too gender nonconforming and by the white people, for being gender nonconforming and for being brown. And especially growing up in a post-9/11 moment, I was made into this scary figure kind of overnight. And so I have so much trauma from that period where I attempted suicide when I was 13. And I speak about that publicly because actually trans Asian-Americans have some of the highest suicide rates in the country. And I always say that, "When you tell us that we're not real at some level, we begin to believe you." You know? And that's why I have difficulty even saying I attempted suicide. And rather saying, you know, I almost died by suicide because was it my agency or was it just me reflecting everyone telling me to disappear?

JVN [00:20:17] Wow. That is fucking heartbreaking. So you, I, that is one thing that has really blown my mind as a white person. The, and just like I came from like a rural cornfield in the middle of America during 9/11, I was very out living as a gay, like little like ninth grader then. I mean, I was very out, very queer. I mean, like just, because I went by Jack then, like just Jack like from "Will and Grace" was like. It was either that or "fagot." Like it was like one of those two things.

ALOK [00:20:44] They used to call me "fagatron," which I've since reclaimed. I'm like, that's kind of cute look, right?

JVN [00:20:47] It's like, you know it does. But do you notice like, if I recount my experience of like being called "fagot" to people, like people like cringe.

ALOK [00:20:54] They do.

JVN [00:20:55] Like they get so, and where like for me, it's like if I hear someone say fagot to me to this day, like, I turn my head assuming that someone is like coming for me.

ALOK [00:21:02] Literally same. Like that was just the name that I was called all the time.

JVN [00:21:05] Yeah. It literally doesn't even like move a hair on my head.

ALOK [00:21:09] Right, right.

JVN [00:21:10] So, but how did you get through high school? Like, how did you do that? I mean, you. You did not know, but I also was going to say. Back to the whiteness and of-.

ALOK [00:21:16] Yeah.

JVN [00:21:17] Like, I didn't realize, like, how deeply 9/11 affected the rights and the perceived right. No, not perceived-, the rights of a Muslim American people.

ALOK [00:21:28] Right. And like anyone perceived as Muslim.

JVN [00:21:29] Yeah. Anyone-. Yeah.

ALOK [00:21:30] Yeah.

JVN [00:21:30] Because like, cause like were you like a bb? You're like a baby Hindu.

ALOK [00:21:33] Yeah. My family was Hindu. But I think that what a lot of people don't understand is like Islamophobia was part of a racist project where anyone who was ethnically ambiguous or brown was just already racialized as Muslim. Right.

JVN [00:21:45] So many Sikh people were also.

ALOK [00:21:47] So many. And still to this day, Sikh people are being targeted for hate crimes all the time. It doesn't make the news, you know? How I got through high school. Two things. One, my art practice. So because I couldn't speak about the bullying I was going through and I'm sure you can identify with this. When you're a young queer person. If you speak about the violence you're experiencing, it brings more violence to you because then you're showing people that it has an impact on you. You have to constantly pretend, "No, I'm, I'm fabulous, I'm strong. I'm funny. I'm charming." You can't actually show I'm hurting, I'm sad because then you become more vulnerable and they target you. And then also, I wasn't disclosing to people that I was gender nonconforming. I didn't have that language. All I knew was gay. So I was like, okay, I'm gay. I didn't want to tell people that I was gay because then I would get more harassment. Right? So I was just being very strategic. And that's why I don't like the word closeted, I was being strategic.

I was like, okay, girl, I need to get out of Texas so I can live my truth, because right now my physical safety is in jeopardy. So I'm not going to I'm not gonna do this. So I started to write because I had nowhere else to put the pain. So I just, I was a big MySpace kid. I don't know if you were on MySpace, I've always been an Internet kind of girl-boy. So I was really big on MySpace, really big on Xanga, had my digital communities because they were

taking care of me when I didn't have a physical community. You know? I met LGBT people online and they were like, this is what it means to be gay. I was like, oh, my God. Because in Texas, we had a zero tolerance sexual, sexual education policy. So we literally taught like 101 ways to say no to sex. There was a poster in my a room. I'd be like, "What would my dad think?" Or "I have to sneeze." Just things we could say, so I never learned about sexual, sexuality at all. So the Internet was where I went. So I started to post like my journal entries, which I didn't call poems. They're just like my diary, online under a pseudonym called Larry. There's a lot going on at the time. I started an inner name society, "Put a Trans Moment" when I was in sixth grade. Like, what name do you wanna be called? And I chose Larry. Kind of anticlimactic, but.

JVN [00:23:37] That's my cat's middle name.

ALOK [00:23:39] Oh, my God. Well, maybe we're connected. You know?

JVN [00:23:41] I bet we are. Wait, we're going to take a two second break. We're just like two seconds break. It'll be painless, I swear. Welcome back to "Getting Curious" with ALOK. And so basically sixth grade, you started like a literal.

ALOK [00:24:06] Yes.

JVN [00:24:06] Like pronoun slash name, preferential thing before it was even fucking-.

ALOK [00:24:10] Yes, People called me Larry for years. Some of my friends from high school still like will call me Larry. What? But anyway, so I started to post my poems online. I didn't call them poems, they're just my diary entries and people like, "Oh, my God, you're better than Shakespeare." I was like "What?" And they're like "You're an artist." I was like, "What?" And they'd be like, "Can I read your poem in my high school English class?" I'd be like, "Oh, my God." And so those people gave me the validation to keep on writing. And I just wrote and wrote and wrote. And that's how I processed a lot of the pain. I call it "emotional alchemy." When you take harassment and violence and you turn it into something else and turn it into something beautiful. And I think that's what I love about being queer, is that we've always been able to do that. That's our historic tradition. In New York City it used to be illegal to wear more than two articles of clothing different than your assigned sex. Right? They would throw the girls in present and those girls-.

JVN [00:24:53] When?

ALOK [00:24:53] Honey during the Stonewall riots like all before that.

JVN [00:24:57] What?

ALOK [00:24:57] Yes. Cross-dressing laws in New York City. Sylvia Rivera has some amazing interviews on this about being arrested for, quote, female impersonation. Right? And she said for her, even if she is wearing makeup just on her face, walking down the street, they would arrest her on charges a female impersonation from the shoulders up. It was literally a criminal offense to be gender nonconforming in public in New York City. And what I take solace in is that those girls, those drag queens would be incarcerated, would dust off their heels and go right back out onto the street living their truth. And that sense of being able to bounce back and to actually amplify your fabulousity based off of the terror you're experiencing. So for me, when I'm getting harassed, I receive so much harassment, but that's how I'm so free because I recognize my power. And I think as a young kid, I didn't understand, like you have so much power that you can make your entire high school sweat, like you've so much power that when you walk down the hallway, everyone is staring at you.

Now, I understand that's my queer power. Like, people are envious and jealous because we are the free people and we've been taught to destroy our own freedoms so when we see other people being free we're jealous. So I made art and that's where I started to put it out. And then I also studied really hard. And I think this is what, I'm hearing from a lot of queer kids. I do a lot of college gigs and a lot of them tell me like, "Yeah. I really just wanted a scholarship so I could get out of my, out of my place." So I was thinking myself, "If I'm really smart, then there'll be something redeemable about me." ALOK will be the fagot who's smart. ALOK will be the fagot who's really good at English or really good at writing. And so I just studied, studied, studied, studied. And I think that now I understand what I was trying to do, at least I'm working through it in therapy is that I wanted to be able to defy everyone's stereotypes to actually, because I'm sure you get this, too. When people see people who they perceive to be men who are feminine. They think that we're stupid, that we're incompetent, that all we can do is like talk about like our hair and her nails. And I'm like I can talk about those things, but I can also talk about so many other more enormous things. And I'm actually really intelligent and smart. And so I thought, like, if I studied really hard, I could defy people's stereotypes and I could get access to safety worth beauty and recognition.

JVN [00:27:03] Wow. Babe, you are amaze.

ALOK [00:27:07] Thanks.

JVN [00:27:07] Have you ever heard of that book, "The Velvet Rage"?

ALOK [00:27:09] No.

JVN [00:27:10] Okay. So there's this book called "The Velvet Rage" by, yeah, Alan Downs. So he basically says that the reason that, he says that there's like three phases of like gay men and the reason that so many of us become like experts. You know, the best at English or the best athletes or the best hairdressers or the best you know, translators, whatever, like oftentimes like we become like the best at our things.

ALOK [00:27:32] Right.

JVN [00:27:32] It's because we have to work so hard for the love and the acceptance of the people that we have to do that.

ALOK [00:27:36] So true.

JVN [00:27:37] And then he goes on to say like a bunch of other stuff. It's a very interesting read.

ALOK [00:27:39] I'll check it out.

JVN [00:27:41] But it's it is like a very good read. Very interesting. Also has like some Louise Hay Vibe's fine, I'll say it like in the sense that I'm like a little bit sick. And I'm like, like you're kind of on a soapbox because there's like a, he lacks a certain intersectionality about gender.

ALOK [00:27:59] Mmm. A lot of them do.

JVN [00:28:00] That bothers me.

ALOK [00:28:01] Right.

JVN [00:28:02] That didn't feel like totally like organic to my particular experience.

ALOK [00:28:08] Right.

JVN [00:28:08] But also, you know, I think that's one of those things that makes me feel really seen and good, but we need so much more of this. And he talks about this sometimes but it's like the knowledge that, like, I'm not terminally, like, unique. And that like I wasn't the only one when I was 15 trying to figure out how I could like I was like I

once drove to this town in Missouri, like across the river from where I'm from, because I was like, maybe I could go down there front street in like a cute girl outfit.

ALOK [00:28:33] Right.

JVN [00:28:33] And like, it would be like, OK, I literally got out of the car and got back at it like ten steps later because, like, it was very immediate that it was like not going to be OK. But it was really cute. I had this like little like maroon mini-jumper dress.

ALOK [00:28:45] You need to recreate this look.

JVN [00:28:47] It was like and then like I had like a little scarf because my hair wasn't long yet.

ALOK [00:28:50] Right.

JVN [00:28:50] It was it also for like, and also like any Halloween, I was always like dress.

ALOK [00:28:54] Right.

JVN [00:28:54] Skirt. Like let me just get my life in this particular-, like I love that.

ALOK [00:28:57] I love that. Halloween was my favorite. To this day in New York City on Halloween and New York Fashion Week is when I'm the safest because people can be like, "Oh, you're just dressed up for something." I have people come up to me in restaurants and just be like, "What are you dressed up for? What are you in a costume fo"r? I'm like, "Honey, this is not a costume. It's my daily look."

JVN [00:29:13] This is just what I'm wearing right now.

ALOK [00:29:16] Yeah.

JVN [00:29:16] So high school, I'm obsessed with-. What did you call it again? When we take like violence-.

ALOK [00:29:19] Emotional alchemy.

JVN [00:29:21] Emotional alchemy. I love that. So basically, you're in high school. You've developed this emotional alchemy digitally, which I love using your resources like not your fault you're smart. Then you're like, when did you, like, bust out?

ALOK [00:29:33] Ok. So I, I'm a Cancer, Leo rising, like I said which means I'm deep emotions and I'm able to express them. So everything for me is heightened. So I was like, OK, if I'm going to do this coming out thing, it's gonna be epic. So I literally planned it. I had like fifteen people. Each person I had to have like a one on one kind of declarative conversation with. And then after I told us fifteen people I got a Facebook account and I put like "interested in men" on Facebook cause I knew at that moment in the MySpace, sorry was that? Yeah, Facebook. I think at that moment everyone would always go check like what you put interested in. I was like, I'm gonna be honest, right? And so my senior year in high school, I chose those fifteen people. I was dating a woman throughout high school, which I think is important because a lot of times people think that being gay is synonymous with being trans or gender nonconforming, but actually they're separate. Like I've always been attracted to people of all genders.

JVN [00:30:25] Ooh!

ALOK [00:30:25] Hello. And I was dating this cis woman throughout high school. And for a long time I didn't think that you could be bisexual or pan. So I was like, "Oh, like, I must be gay. I can't be inter," but now I'm like, "Oh, my God, no, we were just in a lesbian relationship. And we didn't understand it."

JVN [00:30:37] Oh, my God, every once in a while, like once a year, I'll think like, oh, my God, I think I want to watch like a la-, like la-, like a porn with like a lady in it. And every year after about 20 seconds, I'm like, "I am complete. I feel good. I actually was not cured. But I think you're gorgeous."

ALOK [00:30:57] Right.

JVN [00:30:57] Like I'm, you know, you're gorgeous.

ALOK [00:30:58] But it's good to check in, things change.

JVN [00:31:00] I have to check. Yeah, I realize it's always like this little whisper like, like annually. And then I'm always like, "Nope, I'm OK." But before I used to think that I had to be vagina-phobic because I thought that that was something that I had to prove to like own my gayness.

ALOK [00:31:13] Right.

JVN [00:31:13] Like, so I was definitely that gay like in my teenage years, where I'd be like "Ew" like, "Ew, oh," like if someone was like "Vagina." I'd be like "Ew." But then I, but then Margaret Cho was like, "Have you ever even eaten pussy?" When I was doing her hair this one day and I was like, "No." Although I did one time, I did have one sexual experience with a woman. Oh, this a one time when I was in high school and I was like I said that. And she's like, "Well, then you really can't knock it until you try it." Then I was like, "Ladies are fierce." And so are vaginas.

ALOK [00:31:39] Totally.

ALOK [00:31:39] I was only saying that it's a reaction to like, it was like a protectionist thing. And ever since then, I've been like very pro vagina.

ALOK [00:31:44] Right. I'm really glad that you bring that up, because I feel like what ends up happening in gay male culture is that there's so much more pressure to be a particular kind of gay man like that is like vagina hating. And that's also transphobic, right? Because they're trans men that have vaginas and non-binary people that have vaginas. Right? So there are gay cis men who are dating trans men and are in gay relationships and there are vaginas there. So that language was even coded transphobia. But there's this kind of pressure to be this really like misogynistic person. And I think that was my experiences after high school. Is like I could finally join a gay community when I was in college and I was meeting gay people for the first time. And I was like, is this what I spent my entire life trying to do? It was so traumatic because I felt like no one had actually processed their childhood trauma and was just taking it out on each other. The amount of bullying, the amount of pettiness, the amount of.

JVN [00:32:35] That you went through in college?

ALOK [00:32:36] Yeah.

JVN [00:32:36] And where did you go to college?

ALOK [00:32:37] I went to Stanford in California.

JVN [00:32:40] So you went from Texas to California.

ALOK [00:32:42] Yes, I did.

JVN [00:32:42] And then once you got there, you were like, like the, like the bullying that you were seeing like from within the LGBT community.

ALOK [00:32:47] Yeah. Because there just be this pressure and we are speaking to a little bit before about like a kind of masculinity in the gay male culture, like, OK, I've lost male privilege from being gay. So I'm going to overcompensate for that, for being as masculine as possible. And if you are at all feminine or gender nonconforming, you were just seen as like the leader of the club or like you were always just made into a caricature and never a real person. And I think that trauma is what I'm still working through because I'm like when it's other people outside of your community who are pressing you, you're kind of used to that, you know? So it's like when I'm experiencing racism from white people, I'm like ok, I had that my entire life. When I'm experiencing homophobia and transphobia from straight people, I'm like, OK. But when it's within the community you're like, "Really, you should know what it's like."

But this is what I've learned, being a gender nonconforming person. From all fronts people are projecting on us and they discriminate against us. And the trans movement, they'll say, "You're not really trans enough. If you are really trans, you should be taking hormones. You're making us look bad. You're too visible." In the gay movement, they'll be like, "You're just a gay man that's confused. You should be more masculine." I'm like, what? But then I started to really learn and I think college was an exercise in this of like, I'm not responsible for other people's projections. I'm really not. And that's a really hard thing when you're a queer person because you learn how to be a people pleaser for your safety. Like when I was younger, I learned how to crack the best jokes, how to compliment everyone, how to make other people feel comfortable so they wouldn't attack me. And I still see that coming into my life now where I can disarm and charm people. But I'm like, actually, no, I'm going to take up space and you're gonna call me a bitch. I'm going to take up space and you're going to say that I'm stupid or irrational, but that's just your misogyny. Not, not anything to do with me.

JVN [00:34:22] Yes, I have really dealt with that so much too. Like it but, you are so, yeah, your way of words like being able to speak is where it's at. So you go to Stanford.

ALOK [00:34:34] Yeah.

JVN [00:34:35] And so basically your whole 20s, once you come out, you're living your same gender nonconforming, but like not ev-, you're like you're just like a pangender, like a pansexual gender nonconforming queen.

ALOK [00:34:47] Yes. So it took a while to come into those terms. I still like I only really started presenting in the ways that I do now after I left school. And that's honestly the case, I think, for a lot of us, because at school there was still that kind of masculinity where I

felt like I would be targeted. I would experience sexual violence. I didn't feel safe. I felt safe like it like a queer party, but not on like a day to day kind of thing. And this is, I think, something that I'm really thinking about these days with this kind of gender fluid moment. People are comfortable with gender fluidity when it's on a billboard, when it's on a runway, when it's on a photoshoot. But when it's sitting next you on the train, then it's threatening. Right? So it's like they'll be okay with us as a spectacle, like, "Oh, you're just dressing up for something." But if you're just living your life, then it's a problem. So after I graduated from school, I moved to New York because I needed to be around other transpeople, like I really was seeking like people in my life who would understand what I was going through. And for the first time, I met other trans and gender nonconforming people of color. And I gained the courage through them seeing me and being like, "We see you for who you are" to start wearing dresses and makeup and growing out my hair. And that was, I think, the chapter of my life that has been the most traumatic because that's when the physical violence started.

JVN [00:35:59] So you come to New York and that was when you experience like your like physical violence for the first time?

ALOK [00:36:04] Yeah. And I still do. And I think people get so shocked by this. But I'm like, this is the reality for us as gender nonconforming people, especially gender nonconforming people of color. Every single day in York City, people spit at me. They laugh at me. They take photos through that without my consent. They yell things at me. They film me. Sometimes they push me. They shove me. I've been physically attacked. I've been sexually harassed. And the thing is, it doesn't stop. Like you're on the train, people are messing with you. You're walking to the restaurant, people are messing you at the restaurant. You go in the bathroom, people are messing you in the bathroom. And it really has changed my entire life and I think affected my entire art because there's never a moment of peace or, or like clarity except for when I'm with other gender nonconforming people. And that's why I wanted to use this as an opportunity to say, I know this is a big, a big week for you, but like your visibility of seeing you with a beard and wearing a skirt has meant so much to me, too, because I'm like, people are always like, "What the hell are you doing?" And I'm like, "What? It's not a big deal." But I really feel like at every level people are trying to invalidate me.

JVN [00:37:05] Which is so unfair.

ALOK [00:37:06] It's so unfair. It hurts so much.

JVN [00:37:09] And I mean, it, I feel like I when it comes to gender expression, I feel like it was literally physically like my natural inclination to express it and to feel comfortable in a

non-binary gender expression was like physically beaten out of me from a very early age. And I was taught to be like very terrified of it. And I was only allowed to, like, test my boundaries as much as I could. Which as I came into like my 20s and as a hairdresser, like really the ways that I could challenge it the most was like on Halloween or by wearing tights to going to yoga or joining like cheerleading or even doing gymnastics. But like those sorts of ways were like the only ways that like I felt because with like with I guess I could have done like, well because those are the things I like the most passion about. I didn't really like want to go into theater necessarily. I played violin, which I loved.

ALOK [00:38:02] I played cello.

JVN [00:38:03] I loved the violin so much.

ALOK [00:38:04] Yes. We need a duet moment.

JVN [00:38:05] We do, we really should. Or we like Thorgy Thor. We can do like a little trio.

ALOK [00:38:09] Yes, yes.

JVN [00:38:10] But you guys are probably way better than me. But but yeah. I mean I, I think I, it got to this point like pre "Queer Eye" and post doing hair were just like I was raising cats and going through a lot of like really like awful, horrifically challenging personal things like losing parents, people with cancer just and just expressing my gender was like something that was like it came out going out at night or like it just, I was going to the salon and just like putting one foot in front of the other. And like, it just wasn't really on my radar because I was just getting through my life. But anytime I had a chance to play with it, I was like always there to play with it. I didn't realize, like, how important it was, like putting a name to what my gender is or even like putting a name on it. I just I literally it's like, what I, or even in that interview, like, I didn't really eve-, like I just was talking to this amazing person about this partnership and about gender. And people had been asking me about like, what is your gender expression like for basically like since "Queer Eye" came out. But I guess I just never. I always just thought that. I guess I just didn't know that we had a name. That really was like kind of what it came down to. I always knew that I really looked up to people that were nonbinary. I just I think I just remember like being torn out of dresses as a child and thinking that like, you know, like an exact quote that was like said to me at like under the age of 10 was like, "I don't care if you suck dick, I don't want you to get AIDS."

ALOK [00:39:51] Yeah.

JVN [00:39:52] Like there was, like there was so many things that were said and that was like by an adult person in their 40s.

ALOK [00:40:00] Right, right.

JVN [00:40:00] So like even getting to like I was dealing with so many signals around and just terrified around so many things. I just I think that in some ways we all have come really far but then I think again, like I get really reticence. I think that we are way too quick to pat ourselves on the back, especially for things like "Queer Eye" 'cause like as much as I do love the show and it is heartfelt, but like especially in terms of like safety and representation, like this is like one successful TV show in an entertainment landscape that is gigantic. And it like-.

ALOK [00:40:30] That is still so homophobic and transphobic.

JVN [00:40:32] So homophobic, so transphobic and so under represents our community.

ALOK [00:40:37] Right.

JVN [00:40:37] Like we have-.

ALOK [00:40:37] We're the makeup artists, we're the stylists, we're doing all the behind the scenes but were never in front of camera.

JVN [00:40:42] And even when we are, even the people that are in front of the camera only represent like a tiny fraction of our community. I'm not complaining because like it's been good for me and it's been good for some of our LGBTQ family. But there, it's still woefully underrepresented. And some of the most talented actors and comedians and people that I know like have never even gotten auditions that they should have because of just like the culture of the way that things are.

ALOK [00:41:04] 100%. The way that it's affected me professionally makes me so mad. Like I'm an extremely talented writer and performer. I've been doing this all across the world for almost a decade. But my support has come from the Internet and not from any mainstream entertainment agencies. When they come to my shows, their jaws are on the floor. They're like, "You're hilarious. You're gregarious, you're dynamic. You're thinking. You're preaching. You're doing a whole other level of art." They're so surprise. I'm like, let's get rid of this diamond in the rough kind of conversation because my community has always seen you for the diamond that I was. It's just when white straight cis men validate us, then we blow up, you know? And I want to interrupt that cycle. The cycle of Madonna stealing from Vogue

and then making it be a thing like, why do we have to have these institutional gatekeepers? And that's why for me, it's really important for queer people to support queer people professionally and to actually say we should not need straight validation or like a stamp to say this is an appropriate gay, but to actually support one another. So for me, everywhere I'm performing, I try to find another trans artist of color to try to uplift them and their work. I try to find ways to like pay all of queer people that I'm working with, to hire queer visionary teams, makeup artists, hairstylists, because I'm like, this needs to be a movement on just a moment.

JVN [00:42:17] I'm really big on that too, especially with comedy. It's always if they, always LGBTQ, always female, if not LGBTQ like just always people of color, diversity, like I don't want like to have like I don't want this platform of comedy that I've been given, which is so lucky and random. And like I've, I've gotten to do tours and stuff that like I have earned, but not in a way that like other people who've worked so hard that I respect so much. Like, girl, you gotta come with me.

ALOK [00:42:43] Yes.

JVN [00:42:44] Yeah. I saw that you were on Laverne's Instagram the other day, speaking. That was amazing. Major. And tell me about your billboard.

ALOK [00:42:49] Totally. So I think you did this campaign last year with Harry's. So Harry's just reach out to me and said, "Hey, we're doing this kind of pride collection. We're going to put on billboards." I didn't really think about it, I was just like, "Ok, cool, fun." And then the billboards started to come out and I got so emotional because I was like, "Wow," like I am a brown, bearded, lipstick wearing person in a dress like, where do you see that? And just having people from Cleveland, Ohio, just random places messaging me like, "I'm seeing your billboard. This is the representation that I want." I can't tell you how many photo shoots I've been in, where I'm edited out of the photo or the photographer will be like, "Do you want the best photo or the politically correct photo?" I'm always made to be political correctness. I'm like, "Honey, I'm gorge." Like, I'm fashionable. I'm everything. I'm beautiful. Why are you eliminating me? I'm always cut. And, and I think to actually have that moment for myself opened up a new set of possibilities for myself, because I think for so long I thought I only can be on a stage because that's where people are comfortable with people like us.

If we're, if they can think of it as like a drag show where they're like you're putting on a costume for the performance and then you go off and you're a man and you live a normal life. And now I'm feeling that stage more and more feels like a cage for me because I'm like, "Ok, why is it that I'm only safe when I'm on the stage? Why can't I wear this look

everywhere else?" And when I moved to New York, as I was saying with my, my timeline is when I started to perform more, I started to experiment with my gender more onstage. And then I was having so much fun. I was like, "I'm going to wear this just on the street." And that's where the violence started to happen. And I think that's what really breaks my heart, is the kind of queerness that I'm fighting for, is I should be able to walk in a seven inch heel in an amazing gown that I designed myself just to go get some coconut water from the corner store. And everyone should be like, "Hi. Have a good day." Like, and people conservatives in this country, when I say this is a, quote, radical gender ideology. And what it really is, is just my ability to exist and function as a human being. There's nothing radical about that.

JVN [00:44:42] It's literally older than Jesus.

ALOK [00:44:44] Yes. Hello?

JVN [00:44:45] Yeah. Like literally. Well, I think that you are incredibly strong and very visionary. What do people. Well, okay, actually I have two things and then we have to wrap up, but I could literally talk to you forever. Here's one thing I've been kind of struggling with and I want to ask you a question. So when it comes to like pronouns, I've always referred to myself as a he or a she. I refer to my penis as a she. I refer to like lots of different things as like a he or a she. It's kind of like a feeling. It's like an expression that like because I've never felt like beholden to that binary. I always felt that I fit outside of it. I always felt that it wasn't really for me. I've always felt that like the things that made me feminine organically are the things that make me the strongest and actually are the most like masculine rewarded things because like, I think, you know, traditionally masculine, you would have to be very brave. You'd have to be able to endure a lot of pain. You'd have to be very strong and have like a very strong conviction. I have had to have all those things to express myself the way that I do. As have you. So it's like sometimes I feel like the things that make me feminine actually make me the most masculine if you're looking at like the qualities that they come along with.

ALOK [00:45:49] Totally.

JVN [00:45:49] So it's like I don't mind if people call me he or him because it's requires me less conversation. It doesn't really like move a hair on my head, like what you need to categorize me as. Because I've always known in my heart that like, I'm not the binaries definition of a man. I've never needed to be.

ALOK [00:46:07] Right.

JVN [00:46:09] And then but so I feel fine with he/him. I feel fine with she/hers. I feel fine with they/them. But, like, as owning this and stepping into that, like, how does the whole pronoun thing work like how, I mean, because it's, like, like, how do I do it? I just like, because like so many people were like saying it was like in the article like, it could be he/him, it can be whatever, like.

ALOK [00:46:28] Yeah.

JVN [00:46:29] But there's this, like, expectation that, like, I have to come into a room and like immediately, like, put everyone at ease and tell them, like what my pronouns are. And I am newer on this scene. So it's like, what how what is the rule of this?

ALOK [00:46:41] There's so much I want to say. I'll try to be brief. First of all, you're not newer on the scene because you've always been this way. What's new is the language. And I think that's what people get so fixated on the language that they neglect that like there's so many ways of existing in the world that are beyond language. And that's what I believe as an artist, as art, as the place beyond language. And so I think that you can have the sense of imposter syndrome to be like, "OK, how do I represent the community best?" Your obligation is to respect and represent yourself. There's as many ways to be nonbinary as there are nonbinary people. And I think what's really dangerous right now in the trans community is we're always thinking about how we put the most respectable, responsible face versus how do I put my face? We can have as many different ways of being trans, as many different ways of being nonbinary.

You can use he, they can use they, she can use she. And that should not at all undermine our collective efforts. So it's totally legit and wonderful to be nonbinary and to still use he. And then I think the sense of, like, having to put a label on it. I think about that as a compromise actually, because for me gender and sexuality are stories and they can never actually fit into like these static labels or categories who I am, change, I can't even decide what shoes I'm going to wear in one day, like the idea that I have to have a gender for the rest of my life.

It's like unambitious. Not really what's happening. What I love about fashion and style is I can change it up all the time. And that's the same thing with gender and sexuality. We're fluid, we shift, we change. That's dynamic. And so oftentimes the reason that we've been pressured to give language is because of a heteronormative straight society that will look at anyone else and be like, you're different. What is your name? Let me categorize that. I understand that right now we need language because we have to give visibility. We have to say that there are these rights that are being restricted. But the world that I'm fighting for is when you're just JVN and I'm just ALOK. You know? And we don't actually need to

say, "This is nonbinary, this is whatever." I think categories are important, they're necessary. But I don't think that that's the end goal.

JVN [00:48:40] It reminds me like Eckhart Tolle, it's like knowing like what ego is and knowing like what your center self is. Like we need to have like the ideas and things because it gives you like directive. But that doesn't mean that's like literally who we are.

ALOK [00:48:50] Right. I think so often, like when I'm, when we're talking about the entertainment media landscape, people look at us and just think that we are a genders and sexualities. Like I'm so bored of just getting booked for gigs to talk about gender. I'm like, "I can talk about loneliness, I can talk about heartbreak. I can talk about all these other universal things that you allow straight cis white men to talk about." Like we allow cis straight white men to be experts on everything. Why can't I be a weather reporter? I'm just putting this out into the ether. I've always wanted to be a weather reporter who gives fashion advice with the weather. It's that necessary?

JVN [00:49:22] Bitch, do a YouTube.

ALOK [00:49:22] Hello. I might. I might. Because literally, I'm like-.

JVN [00:49:24] We need to write the roles for yourself. I'm sorry I'm screaming. Everyone in the other room is like, "You're screaming." Write the rules for the-.

ALOK [00:49:31] Right, I should do it.

JVN [00:49:32] 'Cause I would buy that.

ALOK [00:49:32] Thank you.

JVN [00:49:32] I'm obsessed. So where can people find you? And like, what's coming up next? And what are you most excited about?

ALOK [00:49:37] Totally. Instagram is the best place to find me. It's Slash A-l-o-k-V-m-e-n-o-n. And so many cool things coming up on the horizon for me. I'm coming out with a book in May called "Beyond the Gender Binary," so it's going to be a little primer for people to really understand nonbinary and the politics behind it.

JVN [00:49:55] Like this coming May?

ALOK [00:49:56] Yes.

JVN [00:49:56] So, like, an 11 month.

ALOK [00:49:57] Yes.

JVN [00:49:57] Oh my God. OK.

ALOK [00:49:58] Anti-climatic, but it's happening.

JVN [00:49:59] No. It's OK, it's OK.

ALOK [00:50:00] You know, the publishing cycle is a little slow.

JVN [00:50:01] It takes a second. You're busy or perfecting.

ALOK [00:50:04] And I'm continuing to tour around. So I have a show in Atlanta this month and then I'm going to be in Texas, my hometown, putting together our first Pride pa-, pride party in like a decade, I think.

JVN [00:50:15] Good for you. Bringing visibility back to the original place.

ALOK [00:50:19] Yes. Yeah, yeah.

JVN [00:50:19] Well, I want to hear about how the reunion was. I. Be safe. Have so much fun. There's so many more things we could talk about. I know we have 40 minutes, but we just have to have you back. I love you so much. Thanks for your time.

ALOK [00:50:29] Thanks for having me.

JVN [00:50:30] Yes. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was the writer and performance artist ALOK. This episode originally aired in June 2019.

You'll find links to ALOK's work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

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Our editor is Andrew Carson and our transcriptionist is Cassi Jerkins.

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