

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & David Yi

**JVN** [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute-ish, or more, conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by David Yi, where I ask them: Do beauty standards need a glow up? Thank you for creating this book. For writing this book. For taking me on that journey. I was moved. I was enlightened. And I'm so excited that you're here. So without further ado, welcome, David Yi, who is the editor and founder of the beauty website Very Good Light, which we love, must follow. You guys need to be into it. And also the CEO of the personal care brand good light. Their new book, *Pretty Boys: Legendary Icons Who Redefined Beauty and How to Glow Up, Too* is out this month. Welcome, David.

**DAVID YI** [00:00:50] Thank you so much, JVN. I'm super excited to be joining you today.

**JVN** [00:00:54] I'm so happy that you're here, too. And I just have to say, you look so gorgeous. I mean, who are you obsessed with? What is this skin care, honey? I guess we all really need to just be like, really following and reading all up on Very Good Light. And we will find out for ourselves.

**DAVID YI** [00:01:11] Well, I have to shout out, like, honestly, I was using all good light products today and it is from our line that launched two months ago. It is cruelty-free, vegan. It is EU clean and it is just dewey and it makes your skin barrier function that much more robust. And I'm using it all. And it gives me that nice donut-glazed glow.

**JVN** [00:01:32] Ah! Your skin gorgeous moisture barrier is doing that good work today, I just wow, just beautiful. Get out! Don't actually leave anywhere, but just obsessed, you're beautiful. We're just obsessed. So I want to just dive right in. This book is incredible. Your research, your approach to the world. We love. We, we just love. I almost said we stan, but then I felt, like, it's 2019, I'm not saying that anymore.

**DAVID YI** [00:02:02] We say simp.

**JVN** [00:02:02] We simp! What's simp stand for? That's even, like, the younger, cooler thing to say, because now that I'm thirty four, I feel like I don't know.

**DAVID YI** [00:02:10] I mean, we're the same age and so I'm trying to, you know, keep up with the Gen Z, too. Simpung is, like, just really being someone's, like, overall obsessive fan, kind of like stan 2.0 now but we use simp now and that's just the new stan.

**JVN** [00:02:25] No one should have ever been quoting Eminem in the first place. So that's why stan was never the jam and it's always been about simp. It's always been.

**DAVID YI** [00:02:34] Exactly, exactly.

**JVN** [00:02:35] So now I'm going to go into a literal, this is, like, one of those, like, NPR moments where, like, as a journalist, like, I have to have, you know, ask a question that I already know, but I love that story because everyone needs to know. What can you, can you tell us: what is a pretty boy?

**DAVID YI** [00:02:50] Yes. So I would say a pretty boy traditionally is someone who's confident enough to own their pretty, you know, their truths, their authenticity, their inner and outer beauty stepping into their light. But according to my book, because there needed to be a thesis and it needed to be very focused, pretty boys, the definition, is: people or folks throughout history and time who use makeup and or cosmetics to amplify their power, whether politically or socially.

**JVN** [00:03:17] So can you tell us, like, if this was, like, serving you 1999. It's, like, Casey Kasem's Top Ten. Who are some of history's pretty boys and, and pretty gender fluid and third gender, and gender nonconforming people? Who must we know?

**DAVID YI** [00:03:32] Oh my goodness, this is so difficult. This is just like asking who your favorite child is. But we really know everyone has a favorite child. So I will be breaking this down. The top ten, the greats! Ramsays, Cyrus, Alexander, Neanderthals, who ground up rocks like pyrate for highlighters and foundations. I would say Vikings, who were actually these gruff and strong men, super fierce, but they were obsessed with their grooming kits and obsessed with their beards and their hair. The Hwarang of the 7th century Korea, these were Korean warriors, assassins who beautified, used cosmetics as a spiritual practice. The Macaroni in the 1700s, these British influencers. These came before the TikTok influencers. But these guys, they totally used makeup and big wigs and stickers and patches and they redefined what a man could be.

I would say King Louis the 14th, I mean, hello, created the wig trend just like Regina George created that cut-out boob trend in Mean Girls. And there are so many more, like third gender folks around the world. I would like to talk about the Hijra of, of India. I'd like to talk about Two-Spirit individuals in Indigenous cultures around America. I would like to talk about people in history like Hatshepsut, who was a third gender, gender

nonconforming, non-binary ruler Shi Pei Pu, who was a spy who seduced a French official to give over their country's secrets. There's just so many.

**JVN** [00:05:10] Can we talk about those gorgeous Korean assassins?!

**DAVID YI** [00:05:16] The Hwarang, yes!

**JVN** [00:05:18] Who, what's their story?

**DAVID YI** [00:05:19] We must, we must go back in the six hundreds. They were indoctrinated with Taoist shamans and Buddhist teachings, and they were selected for being beautiful. So back in the time, there's this king named King Jinheung, and he wanted to overtake the entire Korean peninsula. And he believed in the spirit called Maitreya, who was this Buddha. And the Buddha was said to be the most beautiful creature, the most beautiful, handsome and pretty god of all. And so they believed that when Maitreya died, his spirit went into all of the pretty boys in the land. And so it's kind of like a K-pop competition in the 600s where he chose these beautiful men because he believed they had an otherworldly spirit of Maitreya.

So he's like, "Who's going to join my assassin ship, my army? It's these pretty boys, because I know if they're pretty, they have that spirit within them." And so he went around for three months. He went around and he gathered his troops and was like, "We need to have an audition. We need to find the prettiest people in the land." And they did. And eventually the Hwarang came in. They were indoctrinated with all of these teachings. They learned swordsmanship and they learned how to ride a horse. And they also learned how to beautify. And it was a spiritual practice. They were channeling Maitreya, who was that Buddha. It was that big Buddha energy. And they really wanted to empower themselves with his spirit. And they were really fierce, really fierce in their expression and fierce in, in and off of the-, on and off the battlefield.

**JVN** [00:06:57] Do you know about, like, what was their tea like? Was it all about, like, a snatched high pony? Was it all about, like, was it just, like, a light contour? Was it, like, a strong nude lip? Did they empower each other ever by *empowering* each other, if you know what I'm saying.

**DAVID YI** [00:07:17] OK, I do know what you're saying. We don't have information about that, unfortunately.

**JVN** [00:07:22] There's never enough information about, I know, gorgeous, empowering, sexual empowerment in, like, in, in, in history and early history, there is, I-

**DAVID YI** [00:07:37] I agree. We will get to very much sexual things later on because there are examples of that.

**JVN** [00:07:42] What was the name of this gorgeous group of assassin people again?

**DAVID YI** [00:07:46] They're called the Hwarang, which translates literally to the flower boys, which translates to pretty boys.

**JVN** [00:07:52] So no, like, empowering sexy times necessarily, in the record. But what do we know about their, like, beauty routines, like, specifically?

**DAVID YI** [00:08:03] Well, at that time period, they were actually supposed to be very much these stoic warriors who pretty much didn't have relationships outside of what they did because they are so dedicated to the kingdom of Silla. But they did have these make-up routines that was very specific. It was this eye makeup. And I'm talking about sapphire colors, and I'm talking about red corals that they used. There's no direct source for the makeup, but the Tang influence was so big from China that I'm assuming that they used what the Chinese did, which was a mixture of lead, rice, clamshell powder mixed together to create a thick, pearly foundation and then red dye made from safflower and red lily for the cheek, eyes, and lips. And so it was this cheek-eye-lip moment. It was a stark white foundation moment.

And on the battlefield, they were said to be very, extremely kind of demonic-looking because of their red makeup and their stark white faces. But it's interesting because in history, the Tang Dynasty, an envoy, went over to the Silla Dynasty where they lived and they said they selected the most handsome boys of the nobility and adorned them, powdering their faces, and they called them Hwarang. And the people of the corps all respected and supported them.

**JVN** [00:09:21] So were the people from China, like, surprised because they were, like, "Oh, we don't really, like, do that whole thing here?" Or do they think it was, like, kind of cool.

**DAVID YI** [00:09:28] Well, the emperors did. The emperors totally beautified. I mean, acrylic nails are from China and royals wore long, golden acrylic nails throughout the history of China. And so Chinese people, Chinese men were adorning themselves, too. But it was very fascinating when the envoys went over to Korea because these men were just so striking and so beautiful. They weren't expecting that people in the army or assassins were this attractive.

**JVN** [00:09:58] Oh, I'm obsessed, and I also can't believe, basically what you're telling me is that they invented the first, like, three-in-one stick, like eye cream, lip cream, like--

**DAVID YI** [00:10:10] Exactly. It was Korean innovation! Are we surprised the beauty comes from Korea?! So they did make the first three-in-one kind of combination. You're correct.

**JVN** [00:10:22] OK, now I need to hear about these, like, Viking stunning, like, needing to have their, like, grooming kits. Like, what?! I need to hear about this situation.

**DAVID YI** [00:10:33] So during the time most European hygiene was appalling at best. Anglo-Saxons bathed only a few times a year, if even. I mean, some queens only bathed twice in their lives. And King Louis the 14th was said to have only bathed three times. And so it was this belief that dirt was good for protecting the skin from disease and preventing them from entering the body. And there are also religious aspects of this as well. Christians believe that bathing was immoral and sinful because you were de-robing. Other people were watching you. And so it was very stigmatized to bathe during this time.

But the Nordic folks, they were squeaky clean and they did not adhere to these Christian ideals. They were pagan, right. And they were also not Anglo-Saxon. They were Nordic. And so the Old Norse word for Saturday was Laugardagr, which literally translates to "bathing day." Every Saturday, these very buff, over six feet tall Viking warriors which scrubbed their faces, their bodies, wash their hair and their beards in an extensive process in a natural hot springs that go in the bath, Anglo-Saxons would come to appear, like, women would be like, "Oh, my gosh, these people are so hot."

And they would gawk and stare, but they would have an entire day of brushing their hair and making it a nice sheen, combing with expensive brushes made of bone antler, wood, ivory and hair was a signifier of virility and masculinity for the Vikings. And it was so sacred that during battle, these Viking warriors would tie their hair back so that blood would not stain their precious hair. This is just how much they were obsessed. They also had grooming kits right next to their swords on their belts. And the grooming kits were, had, had bushy, soft beard brushes separate from hairbrushes. And it also had tweezers, ear wax pickers. It also had some razors. And it was kind of like the modern day grooming kit that you or I would have in our bathrooms.

**JVN** [00:12:39] Ah! Okay, you also said, like, other really fierce people in that list. What were some of the other people? Because that was, like, a gorgeous list.

**DAVID YI** [00:12:56] Yes. We have to talk about the Babylonians of 3200 BCE. This was before, like, 3200 years before Christ, the Babylonians were beautifying. And they went to a salon. So it wasn't just they were beautifying themselves. The Babylonians got their nails and toenails manied and pedied hours, *hours* before they'd ever stepped foot on the battlefield. So think about it. It's maybe your last day on Earth because you might get your head sliced off. You might die in battle. But the Babylonians were going to the salon, and they could easily spend several hours having their hair lacquered and curled. That's what it says in the history books. And they'd, they'd flattened their hair, they'd curl their hair, they would color-coordinate their hair to their nails, and quote, I found this in the historical text: "No man of importance would permit himself to be seen in public unless he was beautified." So the Babylonians were going and they were kiki-ing and they were gossiping. They're getting their hair, nails, everything done before battle. And they were also just fierce warriors as well.

**JVN** [00:13:53] Who are the other top 10?

**DAVID YI** [00:13:55] Well, I would say the Neanderthals. Right. This was fifty thousand years ago. And our Neanderthal cousins, they weren't just these simple-minded beings with high-, low, low brows and grunting or throwing rocks together. They were intelligent emotionally, and spiritually, too. They ground up pyrite; a lavender rock called lepidocrocite; hematite, which is strawberry-colored stone. And they did that to beautify. It was used as a highlighter. And so a professor from the University of Bristol, his name is Professor Zilhao. He's the one who discovered in 2000 in two different caves in Spain, these makeup kits and seashells filled with foundations.

And at first he was like, "Is this painting for the walls?" And then he was like, "Actually, this was for your skin." And these Neanderthals would use this as a beautifying practice. He also said that, you know, when it comes to the highlighter, he didn't have a word, as a lot of men don't when it comes to makeup. He, he, he described it as: "its preparation makes no sense unless it was used as a body cosmetic. When light should shine on you, you'd reflect." That's a highlighter. So they would highlight their clavicles, their bodies, their faces, their high cheekbones, and they would want to beautify. So this really does show us that in our nascent forms, humans throughout time, throughout history have all wanted to beautify. And Professor Zilhao actually makes the conclusion that the more you beautify, the more intelligent you are.

**JVN** [00:15:34] Interest. Okay! OK, there is, the, the bathing was abhorrent in, like, Europe, that's a bummer. Do we have any evidence of, like, perfume, or, like, something to, like, make people smell better?

**DAVID YI** [00:15:53] Yes, so there's a quote that someone said: "We all stink. No one smells because we all smell." And Alexander the Great was actually the, the, at the forefront of bottling perfumes on his journey. He was obsessed with perfumes and colognes and would collect a lot of different fragrances on his conquests throughout the world. And he even brought a man named Theophrastus, the father of botany, as an essential member of the team wherever he traveled. And he would help identify exotic aromatics and then use them to establish Greece's first botanical gardens.

And at the time, his favorite spices were those dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love: frankincense, myrrh, costus root, cassia, cinnamon, bay, laurel. But he was so obsessed that his skin was said to be fragrant, like all the perfumes. His breath was set to be aromatic. And so perfumes really. The entire industry was arguably started by Alexander the Great, who people don't really equate to fragrances. And when it comes to bathing, I mean, we need to go back to the kings and queens. And Queen Elizabeth the First, she was said to be an excessive bather, which meant once every month. Queen Isabella of Castile bathed twice in her life: when she was born, and then once before her wedding day. And, you know, King Louis the 14th had such bad breath that all of his lovers were said to douse themselves from head to toe with a fragrance because he had such a bad malodor.

But when it came to, you know, bathing culture in the, in the eastern world, of course, we know that people bathed. I mean, the oldest example of the bath was the great baths of Mohenjo-daro in 3000 BCE. This is in Pakistan. And the Greeks were obviously obsessed with bathing as well. They create an entire city of Bath, England, to be a bathing city and multiple cultures in East Asia from China, Japan, Korea. They had bathing houses rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism, which told you you had to be clean and present yourself in a beautiful way.

But I will say the pharaoh, Pharaoh Ramses had the best bathing kind of experience. So Pharaoh Ramses was arguably the most powerful ruler in Egyptian times, but he'd wake up and dozens of assistants were ready for him to awake from his slumber. Manicurists would have basins full of fragrant water and exotic oils for him. Makeup artists were creating beautiful eyeshadows and pigments and scintillating emeralds, golds, blacks and rich creams and moisturizers they're creating all for him. Because in the Book of the Dead, which was a sacred book, there were strict hygiene rules. And you needed to paint your eyes first because the eyes had so much power. And Egyptians believed their pharaohs were the physical manifestation of gods. And so these pharaohs had to look their best every single day. There's actually literally a person named "Chief of the scented oils and pastes for rubbing His Majesty's body." And what he would do is he would literally just douse him in oil from head to toe at the start of the day.

And there was another person who was a manicurist. And it was such a prestigious job to touch the king, the pharaoh, that they would put that job title, being the manicurist, on their tombs, and the pharaohs would sugar themselves. It was this act of kind of getting rid of all body hair. They had no body hair, no hair on top as well, only wore wigs. They had entire wings full of wigs. And it would be this, this hour-long process, an hours-long process. Before they even started the day they would dump themselves in a bath, they would put milk in the baths, they would exfoliate their skin with honey.

And anti-aging creams back in the Egyptian era were incredible. It was a mix between honey lotus flowers, plant oils, creams, and it faded scars, acted as a sunscreen and a natural insect repellent. And, I mean, they were just ahead of their time in the Egyptian era. But if you can imagine this, this was the every day, every single day pharaohs would awake, and then people would be like, "OK, we need to go to business." And there'd be, like, twenty or so people just bathing him before he even got to his daily duties.

**JVN** [00:20:26] I mean, that sounds fun, but, like, shit, who's got that much time!

**DAVID YI** [00:20:30] The pharaoh does!

**JVN** [00:20:32] I want to do that, but fuck, like, I just, an hour every day? But it sounds gorgeous. What do some of these examples that we've talked about reveal about the understandings of, like, you know, cleanliness and wellness, and also, like, politically and with power? Like, what can you deduce from your research like, what have you learned and what do you, what do you think that, that says about people?

**DAVID YI** [00:21:02] I think what it says about people is that masculine and feminine, they weren't so distinct. And I think that gender roles were created from the Western world because of Christian influence. But throughout the world, all people have always beautified. And we can trace this back to any culture throughout the world, whether it's the Wodaabe in Niger. These are men who every year they would have a beauty pageant, they would beautify themselves so that women would choose them. And sometimes women would trade their husbands for another person in this beauty pageant.

To third gender folks who have thrived throughout history, we're talking about the Hijra, the Fa'afafine in Polynesia. We're talking about the Māhū in Hawaii. These were third gender folks and individuals who were just so powerful in their cultures and revered. But they used makeup and beauty as a spiritual practice, as a way of expressing themselves. And also beauty was very innate in a lot of Indigenous tribes throughout the world. And it was kind of a boys to men ritual where to become a man you have to beautify in these



ceremonies, in these beauty ceremonies. So I would conclude that from my research masculinity and what we know today in gender roles is very new. It only came in the late eighteenth hundreds and nineteenth hundred, but before that everyone was beautifying, and it was only because of colonization, westernization, and also the sort of racism where white superiority, that created this idea that everyone had to look a certain way and be a certain way.

**JVN** [00:22:36] So when, when does that start to happen in, in your research of history, like because I think I've definitely heard of, like, the Hijra of India. I never heard, did you say, what was the second example?

**DAVID YI** [00:22:46] In the Samoan cultures, the Fa'afafine. They were these beautiful--and they still exist today--they were these third gender individuals who were caretakers of the family. And they're very important.

**JVN** [00:23:03] Love! So when, so I think so, and I love that you also mentioned, because it's something that we talk about on Getting Curious a lot is that, like, a lot of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous people, and Native American cultures, it's like a lot of times are talked about as this, like, historical thing that, like, doesn't exist now. But there are so many contemporary Native Americans and contemporary Indigenous cultures all over the world that are very much alive and thriving and, you know, beautiful, vibrant cultures that still very much exist today. But in your, in your research of history, when does this shift start to happen and how is it related to colonization? And also, you know, a more Euro-Christian centric version of what gender roles should be?

**DAVID YI** [00:23:46] OK, so brace yourself. This is a kind of complex answer. I will try to break it down. So we know throughout history, men and women beautified up until, like, the 1700s, like, we're talking about the Macaroni. I was talking about them earlier. They're the influencers of their day. These were kind of teens and early twenties who traveled the world kind of like their study abroad program. And when they came back, they adopted, like, French wigs or more tailored clothing from the Italians. And when they came home and started wearing makeup, their fathers and people who are older, I call them the boomers of the day, they're like, "What happened to my son? Like, why are you dressed like this?"

But these were the influencers who were influencing British culture. There were magazines dedicated to the Macaroni. There were beauty trends dedicated to the Macaroni. They were just obsessed beauty boys. And so during this time, it was kind of the height of beauty in the Western culture, at least I'm focusing on the Western culture. And, you know,

the French were wearing big wigs, and I said Italians were dressing lavishly, British were red-lipped, but by the end of the 1700s, culture had drastically changed.

This is what I call and what is called, dun, dun, dun: The Enlightenment Period. The Enlightenment period came and fucked everything up. It was the age of reason, scientific, political and philosophical discourse around European society. And everything became so serious and stark. Reason became the primary source of authority and legitimacy. And so a historian named Thomas Laqueur, actually, during this time, he said that we need to make a distinction between women and men. So there, during this period, the female skeleton was published for the first time. And this is really important because this showed how females and male anatomically were different, and they needed that separation. And he even conjectured during that time and before the skeleton was published that women were underdeveloped versions of men.

And so there wasn't a distinction of gender roles. But then women were kind of written out of the Enlightenment. It was this misogynistic thing where men were and masculinity became seen as powerful and learned, whereas women were seen as inferior and incapable. And so women in history during this time, there was a lot of oppression because there was a lot of erasure that occurred at this time. But this is a time period that a historian named John Flügel from 1929, he calls it "The Great Male Renunciation." "This is a moment in European history in which men were expected to deny their identities and anything colorful and to adhere to a strict gender binary and abandon their claim to be considered beautiful, henceforth aimed at only being useful." That's what he said. And women were being more marginalized and men who refused to conform to the Enlightenment were being silenced or gaslighted.

So at the end of the 1700s, the Macaroni were seen as disgusting creatures who were frivolous, weren't taken seriously. And it's, like, "They wore makeup. They aren't learned. They're not trying to progress our society." And so beauty was now seen as frivolous. At the end of the seventeen hundreds, it wasn't considered essential or cool or something that elevated European society. And it was only politically savvy for these men in power to create a gender binary and gender roles to separate these intellectuals in the high class, in the hierarchy and thrust them to the top and everyone else. Women may be gender nonconforming people, queer people. They were at the bottom. And so this was very deliberate so that one person can hold that power.

And then this ushered in the most boring era, the second most boring era, I would call the Victorian era. And it sucked all the fun out of expression, dreary clothing, stark behavior. You had to be very stoic. And then in the 1800s, this obsession with colonization in war, Europe raced to plant their flags on foreign soil throughout the world. This propelled

violence, spread westernization, and this colonization, it really defined hypermasculinity from a Western, white lens. And of course, in this violent era, beauty boys were deemed as even more immoral, out of touch, and they began kind of being erased from society.

We see this in a law in England in nineteen eighty five. It's called the Criminal Law Amendment Act. And this was a law that criminalized, criminalized any gross indecency of gender nonconforming behavior. And so any man who was thought to be a little, they would say, feminine or outwardly expressive in a traditional woman's manner, they were seen as abhorrent and they would have to go to prison. It was hard labor and whippings, that would be their punishment. There's actually, actually three examples of men who were caught with cosmetics on them or photographs of them in drag. And they were punished with these, these hard labor camps or whippings for months. And it was very brutal.

But America had its own great male renunciation. And this was during the American Revolution. And obviously America, Americans and America rejected anything that was seen as European. They're like, "We want to do our own thing. If you're beautifying over there, we hate that." And it was even seen in people like Benjamin Franklin who was like, "I'm not wearing a wig anymore. This is too stubborn and this is what the British do." And it trickled into the 1800s. In 1840, members of Congress questioned President Martin Van Buren's masculinity by criticizing that he had too many cosmetics on his desk. And America's ninth president, William Henry Harrison, who ran for office against him. He ran under this entire campaign of hypermasculinity. He was saying that he's a manly man. It was a direct jab at Van Buren. He drank hard cider. He loved nature. He was, he lived in a log cabin. He didn't need coats in the winter time. He later died of pneumonia a month later because he didn't wear that coat.

**JVN** [00:30:00] Is that the guy who died three weeks into his presidency?

**DAVID YI** [00:30:02] Yes, yes, yes.

**JVN** [00:30:04] OK. Because I was, I was actually going to ask, this is really interesting. So, like, so what's going on in the United States in this time? So at the beginning of the 1700s, the Macaroni Boys are still cool, people are still thinking that's, like, interest, but it's through that entire like hundred years of like all those generations, you know, several generations in that time where it becomes, like, out of touch, out of vogue, like, not cute.

**DAVID YI** [00:30:25] Remember the song Yankee Doodle? "Yankee Doodle went to town," and then there's that line of macaroni? "Stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni." So that's Americans poking fun at these Macaroni, British who are really into their beauty. And they're like, "We stuck a feather in our cap and they call it fashion. So we're going to

make fun of them. And this is how we look at the Macaroni." It was this very much a facetious thing that they were poking fun at the Brits in that song, the, specifically, the Macaroni. And the Macaroni were called the Macaroni because when they came back from their studies abroad, they ate the elbow noodle. And people would be like, "Why are they eating such a weird noodle? Let's just call them Macaroni."

**JVN** [00:31:02] So I'm just very fascinated by, like, how Americans in early America, like, just started to come up with these more rigid gender ideas. And so and those are just such fascinating examples. Do you have any more? Because I'm, I'm obsessed.

**DAVID YI** [00:31:18] Yes! OK, so brace yourself, JVN, we have so much more to get into in American, Westernized hypermasculinity. So it trickles down from your president, who was like, "You have to be hypermasculine because that's how you are a man." But everything in America was started off in misogyny. The women's suffrage movement was happening around the time in the 1850s and men were triggered and they were so threatened that women were now asking for rights and leaving their homes and getting real jobs and protesting. And this caused pushback. This caused, caused mass pushback en masse. There's a quote that someone said "the man is taller, more muscular, has a larger brain, basically saying that men are the ones in power and should stay in power because women have smaller brains. They had smaller strides in their walk. They're meek."

And men's activists came out and they were very fierce, fiercely against any type of women because they were threatened that women were going to replace them. And so, you know, it's really interesting as well that during this period we have to look at facial hair. Facial hair in America has a misogynistic history. And it came about: men started sprouting facial hair. I think about William Howard Taft, who had that crazy, like, mustachio; President Lincoln. A lot of men during the 50s and before that, men didn't really grow out beards there were clean shaven. But during this time it's very deliberate because there was this sentiment that men needed to differentiate themselves from women and what women can't do. "Maybe they can try to vote, maybe they can go outside the home, but they can't, they certainly cannot grow a beard." And so these men were so proud of their beards and growing it out and go into barber shops. And it was kind of the signifier of: "We are the, we are a species that are seen as more powerful than you. You as a woman are incapable. We as men, we are just the gifts of gods." That's what they really did believe.

And then America went into the First World War. Fathers, brothers, husbands were drafted, leaving their jobs in need of replacement. And who replaced them? It was the women. And so women filled their roles, the manual labor jobs like the US Postal Service, drivers, factory workers, and more. And because women enter traditionally male fields, women suddenly needed to be hyper feminine, wear stockings at all time, paint their faces, style their hair,

wear makeup. Before this time, if a woman wore makeup, it was considered taboo and she was a sex worker. And so makeup, women really didn't wear makeup. But it was until the World War, the First World War, that a new propaganda occurred. It was saying, "OK, the men feel a little uneasy, their little fragile that you replace them in their jobs. So can you as women just be hyper feminine and make sure that these men aren't aren't triggered by your presence because they're out at war?" And the marketing campaigns and propaganda really did shape how we see makeup today.

It was so effective from this period that even today we see this gender binary in gender roles of women wearing makeup and men not. There was a campaign called Beauty on Duty has a Duty to Beauty. And it was this advertisement that circulated in every newspaper in Vogue magazine, in American Vogue, an article wrote: "To look unattractive these days is downright morale breaking and should be considered treason." So women were told that they had to be cheerleaders for the men at war and they were supposed to be objectified. They were always supposed to wear a red lip. I mean, makeup brands capitalize on this moment. Like Tangee and Elizabeth Arden.

They had colors like fighting red to commando red to regimental red. And it reinforced this idea that if you weren't hyper feminine, you weren't patriotic. And this time period, we see that war propelled men to become even more hypermasculine while women became hyper feminine. And it really did screw everything up at this time period. And it was so successful, like I said, the campaign and propaganda we still believe in today. But it is just so fascinating how because of that, because of war, colonization, Westernization worldwide, because we, we see ourselves through a Western lens that is so oppressive worldwide. These now gender binaries and gender expectations are kind of the norm.

**JVN** [00:35:53] Ah, David, obsessed, OK, now I feel like and y'all, this is like we kind of this is like a gorgeous miniature recap of David's book, but you really still need to read it. It's got so much more, there's just so much fascinating material that we could never cover an entirely one episode from David's research and work on this book. So you really must read. I want to talk a little bit about your work and beauty generally. And because you, just, it's incredible everything that you do. So what generally draws you to beauty and beauty preparations?

**DAVID YI** [00:36:30] This is such a good question. I think that growing up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and being the lone Asian face, I've always felt otherwise and unbeautiful, and I've also felt invisible. And I think that Asian-Americans kind of have this idea, especially of immigration, where we are perpetual foreigners and we don't belong. And there's that xenophobia and Sinophobia. So I grew up not seeing myself in media. I grew up feeling ugly. And I think that that's what led me to beauty. I saw my parents at a

young age, and I'll always remember this. My father and my mother both beautified five minutes in the morning, five minutes at night. And when I was younger, I was like, "Why are they beautifying so much? What are they doing in the bathroom?" But I realized through the racism that they felt and they experienced the pushback from American people, that was their time of self-healing, and self-actualization, and self-care.

So it was that five minutes of, like, hugging your face and looking yourself in the mirror and that five minutes before bed, pumping yourself up and really loving who you are, remembering where you come from. And that's what beauty is. That's what beauty is in our family, our Korean family. It's about self-actualization and self-love. And I think that that's what my work has always been. And it's always been about uplifting these voices who felt disenfranchised or invisible because no one saw them. But through beauty, you yourself can write your own narrative because you yourself can empower yourself and be your own man and be your own cheerleader. And that to me, is so powerful about beauty. It's not just vanity, it's about transformation from the inside out.

**JVN** [00:38:06] Which you almost just kind of, like, answered my next question a little bit. But I want to, I'm going to ask it anyway. And so in your career, how has your sense of what's possible through beauty evolved?

**DAVID YI** [00:38:18] Wow, that's a great question. I think that today we're seeing that people like me can be founders of brands like good light, and, and people like me can be a voice in the beauty industry. And I never thought that growing up. I never thought that a Korean-American like me could be a part of, of the beauty industry. And I think that the beauty industry is the leaders, are-, we're the leaders when it comes to diversity and inclusion and making space for all types of people. And it's really heartening to see how the younger generation Gen Z who loves to send people. I think that they're the ones who are really putting a magnifying glass over everything and saying, "Well, this doesn't feel inclusive. Why aren't we including that people or that person?" And, and I think that it's such a beautiful realm. And to be in and to participate in and I hope that we can only propel it and push it forward.

**JVN** [00:39:16] So what would you, what advice do you give to someone who wants to be more self expressive through beauty and is just too overwhelmed to know where to start?

**DAVID YI** [00:39:28] I would say start with what you love about yourself first, and start by hugging your face, everyone hug your face and look in the mirror and think, "Wow, like, I didn't see that new mole. I have a new wrinkle. Or maybe I have something that I never noticed about myself." And I think it's about that self-love, first and foremost. I know that sounds cheesy, but it's really true. Beauty is from the inside out, that light exudes when you

have it on the inside. But I would say skin care is probably your easiest kind of gateway drug, so to speak. Wash your face twice a day, use the toner to balance out the Ph, and then an SPF and SPF at least 30, I would say 50. And that should be your way of getting into the beauty industry, is just that self-care, practicing, you know, hygiene, cleanliness, and using that SPF.

**JVN** [00:40:19] OK, I just, I'm taking a hard right turn really quickly: top three favorite, like, up-and-coming, maybe gimmicky, or, just, they don't have to be gimmicky, just, like, different sorts of things. Like, right now I'm really well, this has, like, been, like, a two year obsession for me. But, like, jelly cleansers, like, dry hand, dry face. Can't get enough, obsessed. Biossance has one. Then also the Tatcha rice powder cleanser. I just think, like, there's something about adding a dry to a wet and then, like, ah! It just feels so much less basic than it already being all mixed up in a tube. Like, also those things "gaahh" things we, like, wash our face with, you know, I love those--

**DAVID YI** [00:41:07] Like a Foreo? Yep.

**JVN** [00:41:09] Yes! But what are, like, your favorite, like, beauty things right now?

**DAVID YI** [00:41:12] You know, the red lights are just so good for collagen, and also for anti-bacterial-

**JVN** [00:41:15] Really?! Does it really? [CROSSTALK] Because in beauty school, I thought it was lies. Because in beauty school, we had to do that red light to each other and I was like, "Is this thing really, are you serious?" But it really does?

**DAVID YI** [00:41:28] For a long period of time it does. So overnight, maybe not. But I would say for a couple of weeks you will see results, like, the collagen production. But I'm not one I don't have time, like, in a world where we're addicted to our phones. I don't want to sit and put a red light mask for seven minutes and be, like, just one with my thoughts. So I like this new brand called SolaWave. It is literally this stick and you turn it sideways and you can just put this red light, LED light throughout your face on your, at your own leisure, at your desk or when you're watching television or what have you. So I like that. I, I really do. I recommend that I like oil balms. I like Then I Met You's cleanser. It's a, it's a bomb, it's an oil cleanser. But it's just so beautiful, the texture. And I think that viscerally, like, it just feels so seductive on your skin. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, it's cleansing--"

**JVN** [00:42:17] Fuck me! Visceral and seductive in reference to a cleanser? I'm so obsessed with your descriptive words. I am freaking out. OK? Yes. What else are you obsessed with?

**DAVID YI** [00:42:28] Well, if that gives you some sort of feeling, then I love the milky toner that we have from good light. It's a moon glow, milky toning lotion and look at how milky and beautiful it is. And I feel like this goes on kind of like water, but it's better. It will hydrate your skin. It has snow mushroom in it. We just got a Self magazine award for Best Toner of the Year. You need this, JVN, it's going to change your life.

**JVN** [00:42:53] I really do. OK, so I'm going back into my flow, but I had to take that detour. So what are your hopes for the beauty and fashion industry when it comes to being more inclusive and democratized?

**DAVID YI** [00:43:06] I hope that when it comes to beauty and fashion, we're not just fetishizing diversity. We're not taking other people's pain and capitalizing on it for our gain. Right. When we're saying, "Oh, we have Black models or Asian models or disabled models." OK, but who is that benefiting? We know that that's the right thing to do. And people are buying that brand because they resonate with it. But who are the decision makers behind the scenes? Who are the ones with the agency? Who are the ones who are making those, those moves and kind of getting that equity behind the scenes?

And so I think that what we need to do is, we need to understand who is behind these brands. Are they queer owners? Do they have queer people inside? Do they have Black women? Do they have trans people? Do they have Asian people, Latinx people, Indigenous people. I want to know outside of your campaign, who are the decision makers, and if it's a predominantly white space, that makes me feel uncomfortable because you're capitalizing on my history and my pain as an Asian-American person. So I want to see more diversity inside these conglomerates. And that's when I think that the real change is going to happen from the inside out.

**JVN** [00:44:15] Yes! And now, David, what's next for you?

**DAVID YI** [00:44:18] Oh, my gosh, what's next for me? Well, this book, I'm really excited for that. I'm excited to expand Good Light, which is a gender-inclusive beauty brand. And I think it's very affordable. It's products that I, that are all under twenty-four dollars. But we're expanding that. We're going to China, we're going to Europe. And so that's something that I am currently super excited for. And just all the things, I want to talk about masculinity all the time, because it is such a construct as we know through the history of time, everyone has beautified. And I want to just dissect it more. Why have we been conditioned as masc-identifying folks or men to feel a certain way or to feel shame in certain ways. And I want to just put it, put masculinity on its head and understand that we all have our divine feminine, the divine masculinity. It's that yin and yang. And to be whole human beings, we need both.



**JVN** [00:45:09] I can't think of a better way to wrap up that episode, honey. David Yi, thank you so much for your time today. So much for coming on, Getting Curious. Your book Pretty Boys is out now. Y'all, you've gotta get into it and follow David. Thank you so much.

**DAVID YI** [00:45:20] Thank you so much, Jonathan. And thank you just for being a light and a joy and an advocate for our community, too. Happy Pride!

**JVN** [00:45:27] You too!

**DAVID YI** [00:45:28] And you do thank you for all the things. You're, you're just so fantastic and wonderful.

**JVN** [00:45:31] No, thank, literally, you for all the things. And you're amazing, and I love you so much. And thank you for coming on the show.

**DAVID YI** [00:45:37] Thank you.

**JVN** [00:45:49] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was David Yi.

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

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And our editor is Andrew Carson, who literally deserves a gold medal of all editing. And Alida Wuenscher, who also deserves a gold medal for all transcriptionisting, or whatever the verb version of transcribing is. Oh, I think that's what it is! Ha! Thanks, Alida!

Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Emily Bossak.