

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Shan Boodram

JVN: Hey curious people, I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and welcome back to another episode of Getting Curious. Today we're getting into a topic that's on top of most people's mind, it's hotter than a fresh plate of heart-shaped pancakes. It's relationships, sex, intimacy, and everything in between. It's Valentine's Day after all, baby, and whether you're single, coupled, or in a situationship that needs divine intervention, we're here to talk about making every kind of romance, whether it's one night rendezvous or a long term love story, healthier, sexier, and more fulfilling. My relationship to love and sex is a very long one, honey. I'm 37. I've lived a lot of a lot of life, but I think that really in my twenties, I spent so much time pining, feeling really alone, feeling really terminally unlovable. Um, and I felt really like this insecure relationship with myself that caused me a lot of searching, a lot of validation, and a lot of like self-destructive behaviors that really didn't serve me very well. But so much of my work on love and relationship, I've actually done in this podcast, um, and in therapy and the like, and a lot of you have been along for that journey and I'm really lucky to be in love. I'm, I love my husband. I love that I get to also like it's not lost on me that I like get to be married as a queer person, so that is part of what makes, I think my relationship to love kind of a little bit different is that like, I grew up in a time in this country when I couldn't be married to the person that I wanted to be married to, and now we live in a time where that's kind of potentially up for conversation again. Um, so I think that the way that I relate to love, the way that people relate to love is so universal. I'm excited for us to all learn about how we can up our love game, uh, and also if we zoom out, social media has changed the way that we date, the way that we hook up, and the way that we communicate desire. If you're on this Valentine's Day, you need like a smorgasbord of dating content to listen to, I, in this episode, like, a lot's coming up for me. So Logan Ury comes to mind, Doctor Sabrina Strings comes to mind, Stan Tatkin comes to mind, all of those episodes. So if you need like more, in fact, I think we might put a little playlist together for you for like a Valentine's Day, like relational thing that you could listen to on @CuriousWithJVN . So that'll be fun. Um, so that's a lot. I know that that's a lot, but we love a good dynamic opening. So we have a perfect person to talk to us about all things, sex, relationships, love, intimacy. It's Shan Boodram. Shan is a certified sexologist, intimacy expert, and author, known for her engaging approach to sex education and relationships. She holds certifications from the American Association of Sexual Educators, Counselors and Therapists, AASECT and the American Board of Sexology and has earned a Master of Science in Psychology. Boodram has gained widespread recognition through her work on various media platforms. She appeared as a sex expert on Netflix's Too Hot To Handle and currently hosts the Lovers and Friends podcast. Her media presence extends to major networks including appearances on the Today Show, Good Morning America, The Talk, the real, and The View. Today we're asking: how can I make romance work for me?

JVN: Shan! Welcome to Getting Curious, how are you?

SHAN BOODRAM: Oh my gosh, thank you so much for having me. It's such a joy. I actually just got to hang out with Karamo last week, and in my mind, when I see one of you, I see all of you. So I feel like, hey, good to see you again.

JVN: Is he not just the most like world's cutest, nicest man?

SHAN BOODRAM: So stunning, so beautiful. Obviously has a skincare line because has perfect skin in person it's like gelato. It was very difficult not to lick, um, but yeah, super giving.

JVN: You're so stunning. Also, happy Valentine's Day week, queen.

SHAN BOODRAM: Oh my gosh, thank you so much. It, I love this week. I love everything about Valentine's Day. I love that you love it too, so I love when people share the sentiment. I know it can be a scented day for people and that everybody feels the happy Valentine's Day energy, but when someone gives it to me, I just want to like shoot from my womb, you know, the love right back to you. So please consider it's shooting right back to you.

JVN: You know, I think that's like a it's interesting that you say that cause this can be kind of an interesting time, and I'm gonna go like off script, uh, for our first question, which I love, uh. As someone who studies like love, sex, intimacy, I mean, this whole wheelhouse is your wheelhouse. For those people who do feel left out othered, like they haven't had that like intimacy or they don't have that confidence. Like, if Valentine's Day for that person is like a source of like insecurity, like not confidence, how can people like own their sexiness, own their confidence more in times that may be triggering for them.

SHAN BOODRAM: Yeah, I don't know how we got it twisted over the year into branding Valentine's Day as a day for couples. It's a day to celebrate love, romantic love and specificity, and we've all had touch points with that. Whether it's been unrequited, whether it's been love lost, uh, whether it's a love you're excited for or a love you currently have, we have all had experiences with romantic love. So it's our day. So I hate that it became an exclusivity thing where it's like, well, if you're not going to go for dinner with someone, then maybe you should just quietly sit to yourself, like sit out this day. No, no, this is your day. My favorite Valentine's Day, I shouldn't say this because I'm happily married and we have great Valentine's Days. But when I reminisced on some of my most formative Valentine's Day, they were the days, days that I spent alone, bawling my eyes out, writing poetry, you know, reflecting on the past, manifesting what I wanted in the future, talking to people about their relationships, just like immersing myself in the spirit of the feeling. And that belongs to everyone.

JVN: So you studied love, sex and attraction for years. How would you define a healthy romance? And is there even a such thing as a healthy romance? Or is that a false binary between like healthy and unhealthy and is it actually more of a spectrum? Tell me everything.

SHAN BOODRAM: I think the formula for a healthy romance is, uh, mutual progress and fair trade and unconditional positive regard. I think if you have those three things, you're probably in a healthy relationship. You can apply that to platonic or family relationships, um, but it's especially special within love to have romantic love, to have all those three components.

JVN: Mutual progress, fair trade. What was the last one?

SHAN BOODRAM: Unconditional positive regard. So let me break it down. Um, unconditional positive regard is different from unconditional love. Unconditional love says, I may not always like you, but I will love you. I might think that you are an idiot sometimes, but I'm a still love you. Unconditional positive regard is I see you as a good person. I see you as

a good intentioned person. And even if your impact doesn't align with that, that doesn't change how I feel about your character. I unconditionally give you the benefit of the doubt. I unconditionally see through, um, some of your misinterpretations or misunderstandings to like see the heart of you. And I think There's two people in this entire world who have offered me unconditional positive regard, my husband being one, my sister the other. And there's, there's just something so magical about that feeling when you know that you genuinely, that somebody won't turn against you. Um, the other one is fair trade, and that in essence means like, I'm happy to give because I like what I'm getting. And that can come up in a number of different configurations. So to your point, there's not like a specific formula within these three components I can give, because fair for me might be like, yeah. Like you go to work, you do all the stuff, and I'm happy to be at home and watch you shine and support you as long as my bills are paid and go get my nails done. That feels fair to me. Fair may also be like, well, I want an opportunity to pursue myself, to pursue my dreams, and I want to make sure that within your plan, that's accounted for. So figuring out again, just a simple thing. I am so enthusiastic to give to my partner and I love sacrificing because I know in return, they would do the same for me in ways that are specifically meaningful to me. And the last one is mutual progress, which basically means what makes humans unique is, you know, if a dog has all their needs met, they're gonna find a little patch of sun and just lay down and take a nap. When all of our needs are met, we're like, how can I make my bed into a rocket ship? Like we are born to expand. Our brains are born to challenge themselves. It's the reason why we live in this wonderful dynamic society. It's the reason why we're on iPhone 75 right now, which is like insane. The iPhone was already a perfect product and we're still going on top of that. So I think that keeping in mind that that is an integral part of what we desire, of course, we want that out of our romantic relationships and opportunity for achievement. And again, achievement varies from person to person. Maybe that for you is having kids, maybe for somebody else, it's giving back to the world. But when you feel like you are expanding because of the connection you have with your partner, I think that's what I mean by mutual progress.

JVN: Uh, ok. Also, can I just say unconditional positive regard? When you're explaining that, it almost made me cry like that was so impactful, the difference between unconditional love and unconditional positive regard. My, I remember when my stepdad, who I've like written so much about, he like changed my life. I loved him so much, he's been gone since like 2012, but I remember when he was dying, he was in hospice care in our house, and he like, he'd like quit to like nicotine patches for 10,000 years, but like, in his last week he was like, I want fucking nicotine patches, and but they kind of made him like, I don't know if it was that or the morphine, but they made him really edgy and really grouchy, and I remember like, and he never talked to my mom like this ever, but it was like he knew this was like 3 or 4 days before he maybe it was like a week before he died cause he was still like talking, but he was like, where are my, like, give me some Nicorette patches, like he was just pissed and I was like, ew, like I've never really heard him talk like that to my mom, and he's so sick and and so my mom and I went to the store to get it. And I was like, Mom, like, why are you in such a good mood? She was like, I will do anything for him like this, like he, this is not his normal self, like this is like, he's he does not feel good, and she was like, you know, and then she like started crying in the car, it's gonna make me cry telling the story, but she was like, when you love someone and if you want to be in a happy marriage with someone like you have to be for them. Like you have to be for them and like every way. And when you were describing unconditional positive regard, that is like what she meant. She just like didn't have that word,

but like they really had like unconditional positive regard. You were never gonna hear them talk shit about, like, if my mom did something and I wanted to like vent about it to my stepdad, wrong person, not going to go there with you, cause like that was his number one and you were never gonna hear him talk about her in a negative or derogatory way just like wasn't gonna happen cause they were like really, really for each other. And in my whole life, I feel like they had the most like secure functioning relationship I've ever seen, like up close, and I feel so lucky that I got to see them up close because I really wouldn't know anything about it if I didn't know that or if I didn't get exposed to that, ok, but anyway, back to my regular scheduling programming.

SHAN BOODRAM: Yeah, I'm gonna steal just the simple explanation of being for that person and I love that example of like, yeah, it's not gonna happen over here. Like you're not going to come and do the gossip and talk behind that person's back around me, not on my watch. I remember driving with my husband, and it just hit me. Like we were driving in Hollywood. I can remember the turn that we were going on, where I was like, wow, I don't have to audition to be a good person around you. Like I just realized my whole life with other relationships, I was always auditioning to be seen as good. And if you miss a line or you miss a beat or you don't do a kick flip at the right time, all of a sudden, like you're out of good graces. And this was the first time I was with somebody that I was like, wow, like, you just unconditionally see me as good. And it wasn't, I think some people are afraid. I mean, I think from a parental perspective, you're afraid that if you do that, you're gonna enable bad behavior. But funny enough, it actually does the exact opposite. It calls you to want to be the best person. It calls you to want to reach for your potential of, of goodness. So, yeah, it's a beautiful gift to give. I'm glad you got to see that up close.

JVN: I have this friend. I've certainly never done this myself, so that's good. Um, but, um, but I do also have a friend. How do we confuse intensity for intimacy?

SHAN BOODRAM: Oh my gosh, what a great question. I think that intimacy can be intense, and intensity isn't necessarily always intimate. So I think that's where the confusion comes in. Um, because you have to ask yourself, is this logical, gradual, and mutual? I think those are really important questions to ask. You know, whenever somebody comes on really strong, it can be extremely flattering. And again, that sense that you're being chosen, that you're being seen. But if that person hasn't really seen you, then this is not really a, a logical response, right? So they may be falling more in love with the idea of you or with the concept of being around you, or the idea of who they get to play in your life during this cosplay of, of being this like deep lover and this deeply romantic partner. So sometimes we have to really acknowledge if intensity is genuinely intimate. And I define intimacy as two components, which is vulnerable and personal. And that essentially means you're letting somebody in to your secret world, and it's personal because you're only doing it because they are who they are, right? So you can never, people always actually say to me, you know, because the work that I do, like, you're so vulnerable online. Like, I love your vulnerability. I've never been a vulnerable a day in my life online. How could I be? Right? It's not personal. I could tell, if I'm saying something online, I would be comfortable shouting it out at Starbucks. There is no, I'm choosing to say. To you because of who you are and what you mean to me. And a lot of times, the intensity or the vulnerability that we get from romantic partners is the exact same kind of vulnerability or brand of vulnerability that people give, um, you know, on social media. It's just not genuinely intimate. Um, so I think that that's really important to acknowledge that or ask yourself those questions. It's hard to do because the flattery of it all can just make you

feel like, of course, this is personal to me. Of course, this is about how great I am. When you start thinking about it, you're like, how much of me do they actually know? How many sides of me have they truly seen? Like, is this something that I've even given to them? Um, is this something that makes sense based on what happened before and what we're planning to do next? And if it's not really math and if the math is not math thing, then you have to say, OK, this has nothing to do with me. As much as I would like it to, um, it actually doesn't. Did,

JVN: wait, what was the third one? Logical, gradual, and what was the third part?

SHAN BOODRAM: Mutual.

JVN: Ooo, ok. So Doctor Sabrina Strings, I'm obsessed with this woman, she's major. Um, she wrote this book called *The End of Love*, and she basically says in this book, I'm really paraphrasing here, but I think you would really like her work. We had her on the podcast a couple times, but the last time was like in 2023, I think, but basically she's interviewing all these women and so many women are feeling like really unfulfilled by their either primary romantic relationship or that they don't even have one at all. Either they don't have one, chronically single, or the ones that they do have, these fucking guys suck, kind of, I mean I'm paraphrasing here, but it's like it's like they are not being held to the same standards that women are, and I mean really when you get into it, it is just It is just so and I'm sure there could be like a little outlier. I already know our listener be like, well, not all men, yeah, not all, but most, you know, I'm just talking about like most, not all you there, yes, there's some good men here, but it's like that whole idea of like. You know, man meets woman, woman meets man, they live happily ever after. And she kind of pins it on Playboy, which I think is really interesting. She was like, up until like the 1940s it was like, it was kind of working, not like totally working, but like, I guess you could make an argument for like romance, but then after that, like, men just started like really dehumanizing the shit out of women left, right and center in this really like culturally relevant way where like, Men could be like, oh well, she's not chaste enough or like chaste stuff like she's too much of a slut, she can't be like a good mom, she can't be this like, so you can use her, but you can't like marry her. Like she's not a good quality, like it's giving like a little eugenics, it's it's bad. There's like so much bad shit in here. But the point is, having heard just that rapid fire assessment of romance today and and not that that has to be the truth for everyone, but that's like Sabrina's work, or at least in that book. Thoughts, like, is it or like, is like a nuclear family or like a bipedal monogamous relationship, is it? Is it the future? Is it the way, is it not serving everybody the same? Like, what's the state of romance in your opinion?

SHAN BOODRAM: I think that a lot of people would agree with the dood doctor, and I think the concept of the end of love is beautiful. I can't wait to dive into that more. Thank you for all these amazing resources, um, and I think that there are a lot of people who are like that. I think that it's important to ask why. And to ask what can we do about that? And that's a little bit frustrating, I think for a lot of women who have worked so hard on themselves. I'm very big on formulas, but I talk about like the formula for good sex as, you know, freedom to, uh, freedom from, and freedom not to, and freedom to it means the basics, right? Freedom to try kink, try BDSM, to do anal sex for the first time. Um, freedom not to essentially means that like this isn't your son's sense of work's not tied to this, you know, good sex is also being able to say no to sex. Being a great lover means being able to accept when somebody is not interested. And then the freedom from component is so interesting because that, in essence, means a place where you get to go, where you can authentically be yourself. Make any

sound that you want, have any thought that you want, any feeling, you know, act up any fantasy, explore your body, explore pleasure, explore the thought of God. Like, so sex, you know, is the intersection of, of life and humanity. So it, it should be a place where you can do that. And even there. Most straight men cannot, right? Like they're constantly between a rock and a hard place, um, that they're always the, the audition for masculinity and heterosexuality is like so strict. And then once you finally get in that door, it's like you can't leave. And on the other side of that door is a wall, and you're just stuck there. There is no growth, but at least you get to be called a man. At least you get, you don't have your sexuality constantly questioned. So I think that, that what a lot of people are experiencing is that men don't grow, they don't evolve, they don't experiment, they don't have that hold my beer persona, they don't have that sense of playfulness, and all of those things are integral components to romance. So I think it's interesting to pin it back on, you know, Playboy. and the objectification of women. But I also think that it's like on the minimization of men and you know, straight men in particular.

JVN: I also think I missed like 80 million beats. I really paraphrase it because I'm sure she went into that. Like I, I've been like having like nervous palpitations since I recapped it that fast because she's like a fucking like major ass like researching ass doctor like she like this book is like major. I just like paraphrased it like too fast and that's like what stuck out was like, I was like, well, I like it it was like the 40s, but there was like a whole bunch of shit before that and after that, and I'm sure like the toxic masculinity and like the patriarchy culture, like I know she spoke to it. I know she did. I just, I didn't recap it very good.

SHAN BOODRAM: Yes, and all of that. I think the period though, I think things like the, the net net sum is that, there is still hope. I don't think people want to be this way, and I don't think that people are benefiting from being this way, um, but you have to only choose partners who can acknowledge that or acknowledge a seed of that. And if they can't, that's a really, really big project, so. Uh, like you said, there's outliers. I happen to know, but this is probably just because, and you probably happen to know, like I reflected on this last Valentine's Day, Majority of people that I know are in good relationships, like literally the vast majority of people I know are in healthy relationships with really bomb partners, and I happen to know a lot of like rock star ass women, um, who are out there getting it, who have successful careers, who have families like who really are just going for it in this lifetime. So not people who've had to serve and put themselves secondary in order to have a premier relationship. So I, I, I have a lot of, of hope for it, but I also see a through line. In a lot of those men, in what allows them to show up and actually be effective romantic partners. And that can be hard to spot, you know, especially if you're in a city where, you know, LA might be a little easier where people are more progressive, but, uh, I definitely empathize with those challenges. And I also encourage people to ask those questions and then to ask more of people. I actually work at Bumble as a sex relationship expert. And every year there's like a different trend. So during the pandemic, it was actually the year of what they called explorer dating, where people are like, let's just see what's out there. I mean, when the world is on fire, you're like, why not? Like, I figured out that I can live life without my daily coffee at my exact spot. What else can I live without? You know, what else can I try to experiment? So people were just like trying anything. But here we are, you know, 5 years later, I guess. Um, and people are now like, no, no, I'm done trying. I know what I want. I know what works. And I know it's out there. Even if I haven't gotten it thus far, even if it's like it's not really anywhere in sight, I know that the standards that I've set are not insane, and I know that there's somebody who can meet and exceed them. So I challenge people to, to keep that up. Do not

dim down your sense of romance. Do not turn down your hopefulness, like, keep those. And people need them, because people can't rise to potentials that don't exist. Right? So you can call out the best in somebody, but you've got to have a standard that they have to meet. So I think it's important for people to, to keep those ideals up, even when it feels very hopeless, which I want to affirm anybody who feels that hopelessness, because you are definitely not alone. I actually think I've heard it more than ever, probably in the past year.

JVN: My ADHD is violent in my brain right now because I want to go in two diverging directions and I'm trying to figure out which one I want to go in. Ok, so let's say this. And then we're gonna go into micromans, which is this. Let's say that you're just getting back into the the field, like you have not been dating for a long time, for whatever reason. Let's say you do an online dating profile, like, let's say you do your Bumble, um. Let's say you go on a date with someone, one day, one person, and that ends up being your kind of all of a sudden your primary relationship. Thoughts?

SHAN BOODRAM: It sounds good. What's the problem?

JVN: I didn't say there was one, I didn't say there was a problem. I just said that this person hasn't dated for a long time. They went on Bumble, they went on a date with this like one person and that became their person. Like, is that ok? Is it we don't we don't go on like 3 dates with 3 people? Yeah, you know what I mean, like, but but that's fine. Like it's ok, like it's not bad that you did like at least like try to like, as a couple these, like I was hoping for like a few more like for my friend, you know, but like just kind of went with like the first one, but is that, that's ok?

SHAN BOODRAM: Yeah, I think I'm happy for people who have those, you hear the stories all the time, like, uh, you know, I signed up for online dating and then this is like not statistically improbable because they front load the best candidates. Um, so you're probably gonna see people that you're most interested in during your early sign up days. So I think that, yeah, it's normal to be like, oh yeah, this person that you meet, you're like, yeah, yeah, that's full connection here. I'm with you. I know a lot of people are not like this, but I'm very big on dating multiple people at once. We are born to bond. So your brain doesn't care if it's the best partner. I always love using, um, The March of the Penguins, you know, that like. that they have. And it's like a love story. Like all these penguins and they get together and through the fiercest of winters, they march, and then they mate and they starve to death and then they come together as a family. It's a beautiful story. And you're like, wow, we should love like the penguins. And you're like, do you think that the penguin has a choice? Like if their partner that they chose has a gambling problem or super bad breath, or like, it's just an asshole. The biology has already decided that that's your person. And through sickness or health or, you know, better or worse, in order to complete your life cycle that you have been programmed to complete, your brain has decided that you have the best chances when you are in a romantic bond, um, and especially, of course, when we talk about fitness. So it's just, that's it. You're locked in. And that's why it's easy for us to stick with miserable partners, even if we're not happy, we still can't get away from that person. It's because of that pair bond. So I just think sometimes if you don't give your brain lots of options, just out of natural desperation, because we're just all naturally desperate. Out of natural desperation, your brain's gonna be like, yep, that's the one, that's the winner. And then, you know, 4 months in, you realize that that's not necessarily true, but it's too late. Like your brain is already decided. So I'm a very big fan of like, keeping it easy, spreading it thin, giving yourself the

benefit of logic and objectiveness until you decide to like give your brain no other option than to focus on this person. But that to be said, I do know tons of people, got on Plenty of Fish back in the day, swiped for 10 minutes, now they're married to their partner and, you know, they have those three things that unconditional positive regard. They're seeing themselves develop and grow in ways that they've always desired and they love giving to their partner because they love what they get in return.

JVN: In the work that you've done and the people that you've worked with, like, what are men in their like twenties to like, well, I guess just what are straight men up against that are like dating, like what like what is like what is that? Like what are they up against? What does that feel like? I know you're obviously a woman, but what do the guys say that they're going through?

SHAN BOODRAM: I asked this question of Karamo actually when I was chatting with him, and this speaks to the work that you guys do on Queer Eye, right? And he's like, whenever I look at a grown man, I just asked to see a picture of them as a kid, because that's who I'm really talking to. Like many of them stopped trying new things, stopped developing, stopped experimenting back then. And that little boy just wants permission to know, like, it's ok. Pick up that doll, right? It's ok. Like, shout that out loud, express that emotion, ask that question, like on the other side of it, you're not going to lose something very dear to yourself. You're gonna gain more of yourself and I'm gonna give you that permission. So I think that that, yeah, that permission doesn't exist for a lot of them. Um, I feel like again, like I've had a really fortunate experiences with men, but that also comes from the fact I have a really great relationship with my dad and I participated in a coed sport growing up. So I just like grew to know and understand them and also grew to know the ones that I would, you know, be compatible with as friends or otherwise, and ones that I haven't. So I feel like by and large, I went through, don't get me wrong. So when I was chasing the spark and I was chasing the chemistry and I was just chasing that like, undeniable soul tie, uh, feeling or twin flame feeling. Yeah, I definitely had that. But when I think back to like the experience I had as a kid in choosing friends and the experience I had in my thirties, um, in choosing romantic partners and then choosing men to be around, I feel like there's been like a through line of men who've just been, uh, allow themselves to be curious, allow themselves to ask questions. In the work that I do in general, I'm constantly confronting men's masculinity. Just by existing, I get into an Uber and someone's like, What do you do for a living? And I'm like, Yeah, I talk about sex in relation to the sex educator immediately. Well, what are your qualifications? What do you this? Because what they heard is like, oh, I can fuck my your wife better than you. Then what they heard in that is that like I'm challenging you or like I know more about an area that you already feel like you're supposed to know it all in. So I, I think I'm just like constantly confronted with like men's fear, um, around not being enough and fear of being found out that they don't have it all figured out. So I, I just think I have a bit more experience, um, disarming them in that way and then like asking the questions to give them space to show up with curiosity. Because We should all be curious.

JVN: I love how like that reframing that you were saying earlier, like reframing Valentine's Day, reframing um how we can celebrate Valentine's Day, also reframing like intensity versus intimacy. What does healthy attraction look like versus attraction that's just adrenaline and like kind of drama based?



SHAN BOODRAM: Yeah, I think sadly it's mutual, logical and gradual. I say sadly because, you know, when you're riding downhill on a bike, you're just letting yourself go. You're just like letting the wind take you, or or when you're running, and you're just like letting your legs take all the momentum. There's like such joy in that. It's so fun. You get the butterflies. You get the adrenaline, um, but then there's a little pebble that you couldn't see because you're moving so fast that takes you out. So when we have mutual, gradual and logical, you know, as our, our guiding principles for how we form relationships, we're having, we put the brakes on. And that kind of sucks because you don't get to fall and do it. You don't get that fast and furious fall. And maybe you take it off for a second and then put those brakes right back on. But when you're going slower, you get to spot stuff. You see what's going on. You get to reflect, you get to make a turn when you, when you want to make a turn. Um, and if you want to stop and take a moment and pause, you can do that. You have more control. But yeah, they definitely, you definitely lose out on something else, which is just like that free fallingness. I walked into love with my husband. I literally didn't even know I was in love with him until he said it to me. And then I like thought about it and I was like, Yeah, like I love you too. And that's a very different experience from people that I just madly fell in love with. But the end result has also been starkly different. So I think for people, you know, who are hopeless romantics, it's also redefining what romance feels like to you. Cause maybe it doesn't feel effortless, it feels intentional and effortful, and that's beautiful in its own special way.

JVN: That's so good. Um, what are, so if someone's like dating, they're not necessarily in like, you know, they're not in a monogamous relationship, they're definitely still dating. How are some ways that people can improve their hookup culture habits to make them more fun, safe, and fulfilling?

SHAN BOODRAM: I'm a big fan of compartmentalization. I'm not sure about you. I've actually, um, this doctor that I like, Doctor Bryant, she was saying recently that like it doesn't exist, but compartmentalization essentially means creating specific strict boundaries in order to keep the game fun. That's what boundaries are in general. boundaries aren't about keeping people out, it's keeping people in. Like how do I keep you in a space where we can actually enjoy each other, where I can show up for you in a way that I'm proud of, where I like myself. That's the most important thing I think in any connection. Can I, am I set up to enjoy me around you. It's less about like, do you have these boxes? It's when I'm around you, like, how do I feel in a reflection of you? And that also gives, in turn, gives me an opportunity to bring out the best in you, because I can't do that if I'm operating from a place of lack or insecurity. So I think that you just create smaller boundaries. I don't know. I'm very, like, I was really good at this at dating. I had my husband who was my uh sexual buddy, and then I had separately a cuddle buddy because I didn't want to cuddle with my, I don't know if we're swearing on here and I've already done it so many times, so –

JVN: Yes!

SHAN BOODRAM: Ok, he was my fuck buddy. I say that very purposefully because we weren't even friends with benefits, but so like he was my fuck buddy because we had amazing sexual chemistry and I just knew that from the first time that we had an experience. I'm like, oh, it's gonna be you. Like, and I, I wanted that specific role. And because I didn't want that to like go into anything deeper, I never cuddled with him. So I had somebody who was separate for that. I had somebody who I used to go to museums with. Like I had all

these like compartmentalized relationships where I can really generously give my best self to that other person, and vice versa with any certain parameters. And I never felt guilty for it because I'm like, I'm giving the person the best of me within the bounds that I know I can show up comfortably. So I'm a big fan of, of compartmentalizing during dating. And if you are kind of in your like hookup culture phase, it's also keeping that in mind cause and it should be the best. Boundaries should be created to benefit both people to play fairly, right? When you play soccer with somebody, it's not like one person's out of bounds is over here and one person's is within here. That's not gonna be a fun and fair game. So you have to make sure that person can set up boundaries as well, so they feel they can joyfully show up to the relationships. And you can't do that without honesty. So you need to be really clear about what you're looking for, what you're capable of, you know, what you're offering right now. And then say like, look, like this is the game that I wanna play with you. This is the way that I want to play it. What do you want in return? Um, and, and is it possible for us to have a good time together? And if yes, like rock on. And if no, um, I'm happier for you to like go and pursue something that actually fits within what your needs are, because I'm very clear about what my needs are.

JVN: So, ok, ok, I love that. So it's, it's, it's definitely about like asking for what you need up front, and I'm guessing that like sexually and relationally like heterosexual people on like Bumble and other dating apps, like, y'all just kind of say that like how gays do it on like Grindr and stuff, you're just like, I'm a verse bottom this and that. I'm looking for lalala –

SHAN BOODRAM: Not as good at all. We need a master class on that, um, even like. Talking about sexual health is like this, all of it, uh, definitely not as good. I think that that's the benefit of, of being queer or having a, you know, alternative commitment structures, being open, etc. is that you put yourself in the habit of having these conversations up front and not making assumptions. So I would love for you to teach everybody how do they have these conversations up front and why do they need to?

JVN: Oh yeah, we just like fucking do it. It's like the first thing that you say you're like, I got HIV I'm undetectable, um, and I'm on like like doxy, prep, and I like to do this and that, like, do you want to do that? And then also like if you want a boyfriend or not, like I feel like always comes up really fast cause you're like, I don't want to do that, and obviously there's like some dumb people, but ok, whatever. Ok, so, but wait, enough about that.

SHAN BOODRAM: I have a question though, question for that though, because people have a fear that if they tell somebody, I don't want a boyfriend or I don't want a partner, that that person's gonna say, ok, well then forget it. So they're like, I'd rather get something than nothing, and if I operate under the guise of this could be more, then I can get what I want. Why is that backward thinking?

JVN: Well, cause it's like you're manipulating someone if you're like not telling them that you don't want a relationship, but you're just like trying to get to having sex with them, it's like, it's just like gets messy.

SHAN BOODRAM: Yeah.

JVN: Right?

SHAN BOODRAM: I don't know if that sex is ever good.

JVN: Yeah, oh yeah, for sure. That's just like so well I guess um yeah, that hasn't really ever happened to me because like then before we like actually had sex like it didn't happen because like I realized that they wanted something else or they knew that I wanted something else, and then we just like didn't go through with it, which was good.

SHAN BOODRAM: Oh wow, that's good. And then are you friends? Were you friends or that was it?

JVN: That was kind of it, um, and like the one case.

SHAN BOODRAM: And you live to tell the tale.

JVN: Yeah, I was like fine, cause like there's so many people like. I also feel like one good thing, like, friend or professional rejection, I feel like it's kind of hard for me, but like sexual rejection is like not as hard because in gay world, you get rejected so many times sexually that it's like it's not like a big like sad thing. It's like not even really a personal thing cause it just happens so fucking much. Like everyone has such a type and whereas I've always been like my arousal templates very like wide, like I've always like joked that like I've never met a dick over the age of 25 that I couldn't find something about it I didn't like, like, I, you know, like I could like I could usually find something that I think is like kind of cute, um, but that's just like my superpower. I can't help it. I, I like people. What can I say? Ok, but wait, so for couples or situationships, how can they reignite intimacy if it's gone a little, eh?

SHAN BOODRAM: I think doing something new. Simple. Right, like that you probably don't have to reignite. If you had to reignite intimacy, the feeling of being close, of being vulnerable, and as it being special to the two of you. That might be going back to what you used to do before, um, that might be, you know, enhanced conversations. There's something called the levels of communication. I can't remember the name of the expert who came up with this, but they were just saying that most couples sit between levels 1 and levels 3, which go from like routine to opinions to facts. And then level 4. Is feelings, and then level 5 is the inner workings of your internal world. Like, not the decision, not the concrete feelings, but like the figuring out phase. And so they say a lot of long-term couples just get stuck in a loop between 1 and 3, where you're just repeating facts, talking about routines, and then at best, sharing opinions. I don't like chicken. I don't want this. Those blinds are ugly. Why? Well, why do you feel that way? Ok, now we're on to level 4. All right, well, what are your thoughts on blinds in general? Like, did you grow up having them as a kid? Were you guys the kind of family who let the light in? Um, were you guys the kind of family who wanted people to see? Did you always have your blinds drawn? Like, tell me how you feel. Um, explain to me, tell me, shared the story there. And then now we're into level 5. So I think that that's for the intimate. component of just assessing your conversations and being like, ok, what did that exchange give me? You know, what level did we get to and, and how can we go a little bit deeper? If you want to make things like exciting again, you just gotta try something new. And the good thing is, like, your brain is pretty basic, right? Like you don't have to reinvent sushi. She, you just might need a new sauce on your same favorite sushi roll. You might just need, um, a different way of eating it. Um, I actually talk about this thing called, uh, pea eating or pedundal eating, or pussy eating, where with every bite you contract your kegel muscles and you do it tight up and then you release down. And that helps to ignite your pleasure circuit when you're eating food. Also, when you go out for dinner, if you want to slow down the eating. If you didn't have sex before because you didn't have time, you didn't take your advice. It helps you to slow down eating. And of course, as you know, when you eat slower,

this is Oprah's advice, you end up eating less, so you're not as bloated, and then also too, like it gets your arousal going. So those are the small things that you can do to make the mundane fresh again. I think a lot of people here try something new in the bedroom and they're like, Got to go to Cancun. Gotta find someone to have a threesome with, and maybe it's that, or maybe you just put a red light bulb in your room and see how that works or slap on a blonde wig.

JVN: Oh you don't have to do so much. What are your thoughts on open relationships? Good, bad, somewhere in the between, different for everybody?

SHAN BOODRAM: I'd say that I'm in one. A lot of people will debate me on that. Um, but my relationship started out, like I said, like with an informal sexual connection. And we loved that so much because we gave each other so much freedom. We didn't take it personal. The person's going on a date with somebody else. We didn't take it personal. The person was attracted to somebody else. And we both acknowledged, I love what you just said too, with the arousal palette. I also I don't know why that was so palette. But it kind of feels specific. It's like a mix of both, but I'm also just like, I'm very flirty. I love making connections. I love having crushes, and I just acknowledge that in every relationship that I've been in that part of me has been an enemy to the relationship. But again, going back to unconditional positive regard, that's an intrinsic part of who I am. It's also why I'm good at my job, right? Like, I can see the sexiness in almost all people, so I encourage that out of them. I don't look at anybody as, uh, unworthy of love or lucky to be fucked. I look at everybody as like dripping with sex appeal. Like that's my gift, so. If I'm in a relationship, it now becomes an enemy to the relationship and something I have to like tuck away or hide. But within the concept of openness, that was ok and it was like matched by my partner's desire to also experience that with other people. So for us in our very specific personality types and our arousal palette, um, this configuration worked. We now have two kids, so like the, the practicing part of our openness is like not as robust as I think as people would like in order to qualify me for that. But I think the concept of, you are always, you know, you are the kind of person who likes to flirt. My husband loves going out with his friends and just being able to freely exist and not look over his shoulder or check his phone constantly. And, um, I love giving him that freedom in return. And I like, you know, going on trips and spending some time and chatting with somebody and having that connection. I have tons of flirty DM exchanges, like those fuel me up. So I think for the right people it works. And it's a friend to monogamy. Um, I think if you're a monogamous person, the worst thing that can happen is a world where monogamy is the status quo. Because what happens is that a bunch of people shoved themselves into that box where they don't belong. And monogamy is such a beautiful thing. It's a beautiful feeling to want to only be with. One person to only have eyes for one person, and to genuinely commit yourself to that. And so you want people who feel the passion that you feel towards monogamy to only be in that box. And so the more boxes that there are, the more you can kick out the frauds and the fakes. Um, so I think it, it works. It's a wonderful thing when it's genuinely who you are and you're with a partner who can genuinely handle that.

JVN: If someone listening is spending Valentine's Day just feeling meh, maybe they're solo, maybe they're in a relationship. Uh, is there something that they can do today to have them feel more empowered?

SHAN BOODRAM: I think lean into the mess. Write about the mad. Journal about the man. Collect with other mad people and talk about your mad feelings, because when you're on fire for it, you're gonna reflect back on that and it's gonna make that transformation feel much more meaningful. Like I think in general, like I talk about this, good sex is just authentic, right? So I realized as a mom that sex could be good when I was tired if I had tired sex. Like, I wasn't trying to pretend that I'm not exhausted. I literally was like, these are the positions I can get into. Please rub my back while we're doing this because I just want to be soothed. And when I started to do that, like it felt exciting and intimate and it met me where I was at. So I would encourage people to do that. Yeah. Like I said, my, my best Valentine's Day were just times I sat alone and made videos for myself or wrote letters. I actually wrote an email. I used to write emails to exes on Valentine's Day, and I got this scathing email back one year, so I stopped doing that. Um, so instead I just write them and keep them in my drafts. But yeah, write letters to people, write angry letters, rage letters, whatever it is, whatever the feeling is that you have, we all have a touch point with romantic love to some capacity. Even people who are a romantic have reflections or feelings about it, and let that be the day where you let those feelings out. Whatever they are.

JVN: That is so meaningful for me. I'm gonna take that into our key takeaways from this episode, so you better stick around to listen to it. Shan, thank you so much for coming on, getting curious and for talking to us. We love you so much. We're such a fan. Love you so much and happy Valentine's Day week and you're the best of all time. We love you so much.

SHAN BOODRAM: Thank you. Bye. Happy Valentine's Day to you too.

JVN: You guys, what a fun episode that was. I have so many takeaways, the psychology of comparison. If you listening to someone who's in an open relationship is really triggering or threatening for you, or you feel like pressure that you should be in an open relationship, like, what is that? Like, what is the psychology of comparison and what's like the chemicals of comparison? Why do we do that? And like what's physically happening in our brains when we get jealous or anxious around what someone else is doing and how that affects us? Cause if you think about it, that's like beyond sexuality and it's beyond gender, even though it's very sexual and gender, because even just like a trans person is so up for debate, like how they exist in the world by cis people because they are really uncomfortable with how that person exists in the world. Like why does comparison and how other people choose to do their things like rattle us so bad. Like what is like the brain chemistry of comparison. Um, I think some of the most interesting takeaways from our talk with Shan. I love that you can measure, like, is this logical, gradual, and mutual in terms of love, um, in terms of relationship, like, is this relationship logical? Is it gradual, is it mutual? If it's not those things, it could probably be be more infatuation, and you could probably be cruising for a bruising. Um, I'm also curious about like fantasy. One thing, just going back to things I'm curious about now for a second. Shan was saying that it's like we can fall in love with someone if you don't date multiple people at once, and you kind of just go for one person, you can fall in love with this like idea of someone. What role does fantasy play in our relationships? Like the idea of someone, um, especially like with online dating, like, what does fantasy mean? How does fantasy affect us? Does it make us delusional? Is it necessary? like, How can fantasy help us or does it hurt us or can it be either or? Ultimately, or ultimately though, I think my biggest takeaway from the question of how can I make romance work for me is that the idea of romance and relationships should be hyper specific to you. Like the idea that like no snowflake is the same way, well either is a relationship. Every relationship that comes into

being a long term relationship happens in its own unique way. And so whether you're in a relationship or not relationship, making that conscious decision to be proud of yourself, to find something that you are proud of, whether it's in your relationship, in your solo life, whatever it is, we do not have to be a victim of a day or like the victim of, like, our anxious comparison, or like the part of our brain that wants to be anxious and compare. We get to feel we have the opportunity to feel good about ourselves, period, full stop. And actually feeling good about ourselves, I think is like kind of a birthright. So we're not going to let Valentine's Day or romance beat us down, make us feel less than, we're going to find ways and strategies to make it work for us. And one thing I thought that Shan was said that was so important is like if you're feeling meh about Valentine's Day, feel meh. Sometimes the only way to process a feeling is to literally feel the feeling. We don't have to always be trying to replace our feeling with like a better one. Sometimes to get the better feeling you have to go through the bad one, or like the uncomfortable one. So I think that's really important. Another thing that came up for me in this episode is like my natural Judgment towards open relationships, like, I, I've and I've been in them, and I, I just, I don't know why I feel like an open relationship is like a threat to this idea of being like a good person, and I do wonder if that has a little bit to do with the fact that like gay marriage wasn't legal for so long. And I do think that there was this like push within the queer community to like assimilate into doing things in like a heteronormative way. So maybe that has something to do with it. I'm not exactly sure, but I just think that guilt and shame is kind of like the enemy of intimacy with yourself and your partner, um, and I think that there's so many ways that Shan kind of said that without necessarily saying it, but that's what came up for me. Um, so I want this day to be a day of connection with ourselves, with those that we love, and whether you're in a relationship or not, you deserve to feel joy today, and every fucking day, you're a gorgeous diva. Thanks for coming and Getting Curious, and we will see you next time.