

Kalology with Renee Engeln

Ologies Podcast

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Oh heeyyy, it's your stepmom who's just doing her damn best, okay kids?! Alie Ward, back with another episode of *Ologies*.

Hey, are you a dude who's listening to this? Because, congratulations! You're probably one of the good ones! So, you're curious, and empathetic, and you give a shit about things that may affect you less than other people. But also, you know what? Chances are your mom, or brother, or the person you're in love with, is deeply affected by beauty culture. So, good on you for understanding the whole thing better.

Okay, but your job isn't done! Tell a few more guys to listen to this, because this is about you too. We'll talk about body image issues for men. How gender ideals screw with us all. And maybe, how you can be more of an ally to something that's really confusing and conflicting for so many people!

Now, do you own lipstick? Or have you stepped on a scale? Or do people expect you to look a certain way and it's very irksome? Well, buckle the fuck up! This episode is gonna take everything you think and feel about getting ready in the morning, and it's going to put it in a food processor, and then make eye contact with you, and calmly turn the dial up to high.

But first, let's do some quick business. Thank you to the patrons who support the show. If you listened to *Oology* last week about eggs, patrons get to hear an extended version with 13 extra minutes of asides that I cut out at the last minute, because there was just too many damn asides! So, there's a lot of extra content up this week. Also, patrons can ask questions to the ologists. And if you're up for some *Ologies* merch, you can go to OlogiesMerch.com. Sales help support the show.

Also, Portland, I'm coming for you September 15th, 2018. We're doing a one-day event there called Camp *Ologies*. We're gonna to hang out and talk about science. Some of the ologists will be there, I will be there. There will be shirts, and crafts, and bug hunting. Tickets are on Eventbrite. They're \$40 bucks and it includes food, which is a pretty good deal. A link is in the show notes. It's just going to be an opportunity to go hang out in the woods for a day. I'm pretty stoked.

Rating, reviewing, and subscribing, that costs you zero cheddar friends. And it keeps *Ologies* up in the charts for other people to stumble upon and say, "Why am I here? What is happening?" Which they sometimes do. And I know this because I read all your reviews like a creep. You know that I read them. And to prove it, I read you one each week. So, this week, thank you to someone calling themselves 'Wardbury'. No relation. They say:

I have never written a review for a podcast but given the fact more than once, found myself taking the long way just to keep listening to the interchange between fascinating experts and Alie Ward, I figured it only is appropriate. So, as my first review, I thought it was necessary to put it in haiku:

*Nerd wax poetic
Ward acts out our inner geek*

Asides are podcast gold

Thanks, Wardbury!

Now, Kalology. What the hell is that?! Okay, ologites, it's obscure as hell but a real ology. It comes from the Greek *kalos* for beautiful. And thus, it is the study of human attractiveness and the ways in which beauty influences society! Whaaaaaat?! Okaaay. So, hoo boy, here we go! Big thanks also to Josh Anderson, who is a student of this ologist and tipped me off to her work. And I was like, "Oh HOT DAMN, yes!"

Now, this is a topic that has gripped me since high school as a buck-toothed goth who was always bent over feminist literature. In my 20s, I got a copy of Naomi Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth* about what a mind-fuck beauty culture is. And that forever changed the way I look at makeup counters, and cosmeceuticals. So, in a word, I'm PISSED about them. And I'm also confused why I can't quit makeup. I'm very conflicted.

Here is my current take on it: it feels nice to feel attractive. People seem to be nicer to us when we put effort into it. But not too much effort. Just the right amount for them. But what is attractiveness? It has no bearing on anything biological. It's no longer a predictor of someone being healthy enough to mate with us. I mean, we wear pants, we have TV, we use medicine. There is a Tesla in space with a dummy in it! This life is not natural! So, any correlations to mate selections are just garbage, right?

Remember the Ophthalmology episode a few weeks ago? I can't see without my contacts. Just based on that, no one should wanna mate with me, ever. I would not produce successful offspring in the wild, but it doesn't matter. Because we're not in the wild. So, beauty, eyebrow shape, lip color, hair shininess, is not a predictor of reproductive success. So, why do we spend so much time worrying about it?

How you look should be as important as if our earlobes taste like raspberries. Which is not important, at all. Let's say you were like, "Hey. Hey, I wanna set you up with my friend." And someone was like, "Oh cool, okay. Do her earlobes taste like raspberries? Because they better!" Meanwhile, half the population is buying berry flavored earlobe serums and dabbing on, like, subtle pink creams to suggest that they do. And we think, "Well, everyone loves raspberry earlobes! And so, I feel empowered when mine *do* taste like raspberries." Meanwhile, the other half of the population has flavorless ears! Mostly. And no one says shit to them!

So, does it serve me to have earlobes that taste like raspberries? Or does it serve me to think that if someone tasted my earlobes, they would be impressed by the raspberry nature of them? Because, guess what? When you're in a room, you're the only person who can't taste your earlobes. And you are, likewise, maybe the only person in a room who can't see your own face. So, who are we doing this for?! One thing is for sure: the people who make money off us.

In this episode we talk about body image, billion-dollar industries, fake feminism, skin color pressures, makeup tutorials, old timey beauty rituals, perspectives from the LGBTQ+ community, men's takes on beauty. Plus, psychological experiments, hair expenses, dogstagram, and rage. Now, in a lot of episodes, I'll describe the ologist because I've heard that you like to draw a mental picture of where we are, and what the scene is, but for this one, nah! I will tell you we met at Northwestern University on a muggy summer day and we chatted in her office for so long that I made her late for

another appointment. But I could listen to her for hours! So, please open your non-raspberry flavored ears and your beautiful minds to the insight of Psychologist, author of the book; *Beauty Sick*, and Kalologist, Dr. Renee Engeln.

Aside: So, to be totally transparent, I didn't know how to say Renee's last name. I was like, "Engeln? Eln-geln? Eng-el'n? Enganlleded? Ahh!"

Alie Ward: Every time I spelled it I got the "n" in a different place.

Dr. Renee Engeln: Everyone wants to tell me that it's spelled wrong. Dude, I get it. I'd like it to be spelled a different way, too. That's not really an option.

Alie: So, "en-geln," that's so pretty. Speaking of pretty, first question. How long have you been studying what you study? When did it start? What's your origin story?

Renee: My origin story. I guess we're looking at around 1998, which still sounds recent to me, but is a year that makes my students laugh just by its existence.

Alie: It's only twenty years ago!

Renee: Yeah! Not that long ago.

Alie: That's not so long ago.

Renee: I was in graduate school...

Aside: So, a little background. Renee is a psychology professor at Northwestern University. She got her Bachelor's of Science in Psychology. She got a Master's in Clinical Psychology and then her PhD in Applied Social Psychology with a concentration in Women's Studies. Now, during school, she wasn't sure exactly what she would end up doing, but then she noticed something that really fascinated her. And by fascinated, I mean upset her.

Renee: ... And I was getting really worked up about things, because in part that's what you do in your early twenties, and then that's also what you do in graduate school. I was studying clinical psychology, maybe I was going to be a therapist or something like that. And I got really worked up about the way we were talking about therapy clients. In particular, women who were clients, that it felt like there was a lot of language that was very focused on, "You're broken. There's something in you that's broken, there's something not right in you."

And I was looking around at a lot of the things that these women were complaining about and worried about, seemed to be coming from outside of them. I sort of latched onto this idea that I was more interested in a sick world than I was in sick people. I turned my focus to looking at the ways that our culture around us is making us sick. And that is how I landed on this topic, because at the same time I had started teaching, which is ridiculous because I was 22.

Alie: Oh my God! *[laughs]*

Renee: Let's just pretend that wasn't the case. I wasn't really much older than students in my class at all. And I think, in part because of that, they would talk really openly in front of me. *[laughs]* And maybe say things that you might not normally say in front of a professor. And the shit I heard women say about their bodies was just alarming, right? That they were fat. They were ugly. They were gross. They couldn't come to class because they were too gross. They couldn't be seen in public. They were... You know, it was just on and on and on.

I tell this story a lot, but it really struck me because I'm like, wait, these women? These women are so privileged, these women, we sort of need them. We need them to not be worried about this stuff because we need them to be the ones that go fix the things that we've messed up.

I got worried about all that energy they were putting into their appearance. I also didn't think it was their fault. I think at that time, anyone I would talk to about this, they would say, "Well, that's boring." I even had a professor say, "Smart women know better than to worry about that stuff."

Alie: How many things did you break after she said that? Like did you break vases? Did you break plates? Because I think I would have broke some stuff.

Renee: Here's the problem, now I'm really into breaking things, but at the time I was really young. So, I tended more toward that thing where your mouth drops open and you kind of freeze and you make that noise where you go "Uhh...uhh!" and then later at night in bed, you start thinking of just the most fantastic responses, like the most awesome, beautifully put responses.

Aside: Side note: God bless other languages because there is a word for that feeling when you think of the sickest of burns when it's just too late to deliver it. Like the next day, or driving home from something. It's called *[recording of a French schoolboy "Esprit de l'escalier."]* Le whuuut? Okay, this translates to - are you ready for this?- the wit of the staircase.

Denis Diderot, a French Enlightenment-era philosopher coined it in the 1700s, writing, "A sensitive man, such as myself, overwhelmed by the argument levelled against him, becomes confused and can only think clearly again at the bottom of the stairs." So, this same thing happened to Renee when that advisor told her that "smart women know better than to worry about appearances." What did she dooooo?

Renee: But no, I just sort of froze. I'm like, what do you mean smart women know better? These are smart women!!

Alie: Ugh, oh my God.

Renee: These are smart women, right?

Alie: And was it a female or a male who said that?

Renee: Yeah, it was a woman. And, it was a woman I really admired, too. I look back at that moment a lot, and I think it was defensiveness. I think she had the same struggles. There was no reason to think she didn't, right? She had the same struggles that all these young women had, but I think there's this idea that if you're smart woman, you're not supposed to admit you care about this stuff.

Alie: Exactly.

Renee: You're not supposed to admit that it's affecting you or that it hurts, but it does. Being smart doesn't get you a free pass from our beauty culture.

Alie: No way.

Aside: Now, Renee runs the Body and Media Lab, nicknamed BAM, and studies among other things, something called objectification theory. In Renee's words from her book *Beauty Sick*, she says:

"Objectification is what happens when you're not treated as an actual human being with thoughts, feelings, goals and desires. Instead, you're treated as a body or a collection of body parts. Even worse, your body is seen as something that exists just to make other people happy."

She and her colleagues have also examined self-objectification in specific contexts like, a sorority rush, or as feminist writer Naomi Wolf put it, display professions; jobs that rely heavily on your appearance. I myself, your old PodDad, have struggled with my choice to be in a display profession, working in TV.

A lot of my own beauty culture angst is bound in the conflict of my own self-objectification. But especially now, with social media, objectification theory can affect anyone; cis (meaning you identify with the gender you were assigned at birth) to nonbinary, trans folks, people of all colors, and classes, and backgrounds.

Alie: How do you look at, kind of, the intersectional nature of this?

Renee: Yeah. I often will get this question and basically, it's not a question. What they're trying to say is, "Beauty concerns are for rich white women and that's who this affects." And I just have to say it's categorically untrue. This is a worldwide problem. You see this in every culture. It takes different shapes.

I just spent some time in Hong Kong for a documentary there and the number of whitening creams that are sold in stores. Just walls and walls of them in beauty stores. I would talk to people there about it and they said, "You don't all want to have super white skin in the US?" and I said, "No..." (Well, some people do.) I said, "In fact, a lot of people go to tanning spas. Women will go to tanning spas to get darker. And they're like, [*shocked*] "Oh, how could that happen?"

Aside: But while aerosol tans are the rage for some, the pressures on people of color run far deeper. The 2011 documentary *Dark Girls* addresses this and it's

wrenching to hear. [clip from *Dark Girls*: "I can remember being in the bathtub asking my mom to put bleach in the water, so that my skin would be lighter."]

I asked you listeners how beauty culture has affected the way you see yourself and I heard from nearly 100 folks with personal stories that really echoed each other. No one ever seems to feel good enough as they are. Again, there's an accompanying episode out today with all of your thoughts and it's really comforting to hear that you're not alone.

For example, a listener named Liz [phonetic] wrote in and told me:

I'm a 38-year-old Cuban heterosexual female, and there are beauty standards within beauty standards within my family and culture. In my family, a woman is considered beautiful if she is always in full makeup, with her hair done, even when relaxing at home. Total bullshit and I find it exhausting. I hate that guys don't have to work as hard.

Another ologite named Warren [ph.] wrote me that:

I feel that as a gay male there are certain standards in the community that lead to negative body image issues. There seems to be this notion, and a lot of the media surrounding gay men, that all of us are ripped with perfect 6 packs, but that's not the case.

I asked to hear from straight dudes too, and a listener named Karl said:

As a cis-het male, who isn't positive he's using those terms appropriately, (I think you're fine) I would rather spend next to \$0 on beauty. However, sometimes I pay a salon what I feel is a stupid amount, \$16 plus tip, for a cut.

Based on that, I'm just going to generalize and say that straight dudes might have it the easiest here, overall.

Renee: Right? So, it doesn't really matter the shape it takes. It's happening to women everywhere. Beauty standards are the land of socioeconomic bias, but also classism, basically. But also racism, heterosexism, cissexism they're all bound up in that.

Alie: And the amount of money and time that African American women are expected to put into their hair - Chris rock did a great documentary, *Good Hair* - just to, almost, assimilate into European beauty standards for hair in a way that's so time consuming. I mean, I have really curly hair and I joke about it a lot because...

Renee: I don't see that!

Alie: I know! Because I put literally formaldehyde on my head next to my brain and I pay a man to straighten it with heat. I destroy my hair because I just can't deal with the curls and because it would be difficult for my job, continuity-wise. So, I have some experience in that. But just what African American women are put through, the amount of time and care and money and hours it takes.

Renee: And discomfort. Pain.

Aside: Just as an aside, I definitely would not consider myself a “Becky with the good hair” but my curly struggle is nothing compared to what some people go through. But just thinking of the time put into chemical relaxing, and the dread I feel at pool parties and in humidity, I can empathize so hard. Of course, hair texture, color, and tweezing it off of our faces, is only one aspect of beauty pressure.

Alie: And do you study different things in terms of like, I'm going to be looking at body image, I'm going to be looking at skin, I'm going to be looking at hair, or do you separate experiments?

Renee: So experimentally, we focused mostly on the body. I do a lot of qualitative work, too, where we cover a lot of these different topics. And I think it's interesting. Like you said, there's certainly an intersectionality about it. No one ever pressured me about eyelid surgery. Whereas, a lot of East Asian women feel that.

I grew up, baby oil under the sun trying to get darker skin. Whereas, even in this country, a lot of women of color are still trying to have lighter skin and are still so worried about that. I talk to women about a lot of those topics, but most of the research is on the body because it links so clearly to things like eating disordered behavior, and anxiety, and depression. And so it has a lot of these downstream outcomes that we worry about a lot.

Alie: Right. Of course. When you talk about beauty culture, what do you think the biggest contributing factors are? I feel like any woman, and men too, know and understand that there is a pressure to look a certain way.

When I was in college, I remember reading Naomi Wolf's book and I felt like one of those cartoon thermometers that you see the temperature rising, being like, “Oh, my God.” There is a certain amount of money and time and energy that's being sucked, particularly from women, that weakens us in other areas of our lives.

Renee: Yes!

Alie: But we're told that it empowers us and I'm like, “AHHH! I want to speak to someone's manager!” But I didn't know who to call!”

Renee: This is one of the many big lies, right? That it's empowering to think of yourself as an object and you might get some things out of it. It might feel temporarily good, but there are a lot of things that feel good to us that are bad for us in the long run. You asked what the biggest contributor is, and I'll give you the psychology answer, which is: it's a multivariable problem, right?

Alie: *[laughter]*

Renee: There's not one contributor. When I first started studying, we were focused on fashion magazines. That sort of dates me, right? I don't really know women who read these anymore. I'm sure they're out there. I see 'em at the nail salon.

Alie: I was just going to say, "Only at nail salons."

Renee: They're there! This is an ongoing issue. This is my confession for your listeners. I get pedicures. I want to tell people this, it's not about, "You can't engage in any beauty practices." That's not my argument.

But when I'm there, the woman always tries to hand me like a *Cosmo* or *Vogue* or something and no matter how many times I say, "No thank you, no thank you," it's like they really feel like they haven't done their job unless you have a soul-destroying magazine on your lap. And I'm like, "I just want to get my feet rubbed!" [laughs]

Alie: It's like, "Here, relax with this," but by the time you close it, you're like, [wimpy] "Oh, I guess summer braids are in and I probably should rip my jeans more."

Renee: Yeah. And, "I guess there's more parts of my body to hate than I even realized, I better get out that list and add to it." So there's certainly media influence, but today it's less the magazines and it's more social media.

Alie: Right.

Renee: But they're also influences that we take for granted, like the way we talk to each other. The way women talk to each other, the way our parents talked us, the way people talk about other women, right? The way that even if you're interviewing a CEO, or an important politician, if it's a woman, we're going to talk about what she's wearing and how she looks. It's really just, like, getting hammered with this series of messages just over and over and over again. So, you can't really look very many places in the culture and not see this. So, it's not really coming from one source. It's everywhere.

Alie: You're a scientist and this is a question I've always wanted to try to figure out through science. Why is it, if you look at like ornithology, you see male birds with these like huge tails. They're like, "Somebody, fuck me, please! Look at my tail. I am amazing." What happened in humans and primates where it took a turn and women are now on display?

Renee: Yeah, so it's an interesting thing. Our men *do* display. They display in different ways though.

Alie: Okay.

Renee: They display with a Porsche or a Rolex. It's not that our men are not displaying. It's still that same basic dynamic that an evolutionary psychologist will talk to you about, where the women are seen as the selectors, the choosy ones, and the men compete for them. That basic dynamic hasn't changed. It's just they're showing in a different way.

Alie: That's interesting.

Renee: Right. We, in fact, you can easily call it 'peacocking' the way you see men behave often when they're trying to compete for women.

Alie: Yeah, true.

Aside: Uhhh, by the way, 'peacocking' is a real word and it's what pick-up artists, also known as weird, sad guys, who dress like casino managers and try to neg you into dating them, do. I was curious, which peacocks are bigger choads? Guys who have to learn how to insult women to mate with them, or actual peacocks, whose brains are the size of a pecan?

After learning that the peacock bird hangs out in roving groups of horny males called "leks" and shakes its ass desperately to have babies, but then lets the peahen raise the babies on her own, I was like, "Maybe they're about the same." Also, a peacock, seconds before doing the nasty with a peahen will emit a loud love honk, [*loud peacock love honk*] just to let other ladies know he's about to get laid, and they should also lay him after. I hate these birds now. But let's get back to humans. Why do things suck?

Renee: It's a bigger question, how did we get to this place? I think it's important to admit that some of it is evolution. I hear people say like, "Oh, beauty is all in the eye of the beholder." No, it's just not. Would that that were true. It would be like a much lovelier planet to live on. There are some evolutionary pressures, I think, that make us very attuned to how people look in general, but to how women look in particular because signs of women's fertility are more visible.

You can see them, and people say, "Well that's not true. You can't tell if I'm fertile." And it's like, well, yeah, I can tell if you're 60 or you're 20! So some of that information is out there and available to the eyes. And that might be the root of a lot of this, but then we as a culture have taken it and twisted it and turned the volume up to unrecognizable levels.

Alie: Right. When did it start? When did we go from being like, [*old timey accent*] "Well, Myrtle's fertile looking!" When did we go from that to having it affect our jobs and our psychology? Was there a turn after the industrial revolution?

Renee: That's a good question. I think there'd been a lot of turns along the way and I think it always affected us to some extent. You can look through history. You see this emphasis in particular on women's beauty, right? But one of the big changes was the introduction of mirrors.

Alie: [*gasps!*]

Aside: [*clip from Snow White: "Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?"*] Whaaaaat?! This fact blew my mind. Mirrors in houses fucked us up!

Renee: Into homes, in particular. Joan Jacobs Bromberg, wrote a history book called, *The Body Project*, where she talks about this amazingly. That we take for granted that we've always been able to stand in front of the mirror and enumerate our flaws, or pick at our skin, or do whatever we do. But that's actually relatively recent. We didn't really see that until indoor plumbing became a thing.

Alie: Whaaaaat?! Oh my God.

Renee: You had a bathroom, so you put a mirror in the bathroom. That is really the opening for young girls in particular to fuss and fuss and fuss and fuss.

Alie: I never ever thought about that. You look back at like the myth of Narcissus. Narcissus? Narcissus?

Renee: Narcissus looked in the water! It was a man, by the way.

Alie: He was a man. *[laughs]* But back then I guess you'd have to go find a pretty still pond to pop a zit.

Renee: During some period of time if you went to a department store, you could see there in windows, you might see a reflection, but there really wasn't that opportunity to obsess. And once that door was open, a lot of things changed. It was not too far from that that we also saw the introduction of wide scale advertising.

Aside: *[old timey special effect, like an old record with upbeat piano, Alie reads:]*
"Maternity corsets. Dress as usual. Normal appearance preserved."

P.S. that was a real ad. For maternity corsets!

Renee: It used to be the beautiful people you worried about; the beautiful people you saw. They were people, they were human, they had flaws, they looked real. And then once you started having mass advertising, you got flooded with these images of a pretty unrealistic beauty standard, that over time has gotten more and more unrealistic because we've gotten technologically better at manipulating it.

Alie: Right, so we can tweak them into an ever-changing standard. How have standards changed between, say, like Titian portraits and Instagram models now? And do you have to study a lot of images of female beauty and history to compare?

Renee: There's a lot of argument about this, because you have evolutionary psychologists that'll say things haven't changed much at all. They'll point to things like waist to hip ratio or the fact that we've always liked smooth skin, youthful skin. This is nothing new. And then there are other people who will say, "No, these standards are bouncing around a ton and they shift across cultures, even today."

Whereas some places, heavier bodies are desired, in other places thinner bodies, and that's certainly true. I don't know if there's one point that it took a turn, but part of what we don't think about much here in western cultures, is that we just show more of women's bodies than we used to. When your body was more covered, you didn't have to worry about things like, "Oh, is that one lump on my thigh showing?" It wasn't really an issue.

To some extent, the freedom women have now, to dress in the ways they see fit and to expose more of their own bodies, also opens the door to obsessing about body standards more. Thighs didn't have to be perfectly thin until we started seeing them all the time.

Alie: Right. Yeah! Who cares about a thigh gap when you have 16 pounds of petticoats! And not to mention, how many people were like, “Oh, I guess it's April, I should start shaving my legs again.” When we don't see our legs, we're not tweezing every single thing on them, you know what I mean?

Renee: Absolutely.

Alie: Backing up a little bit, how do you quantify in your research what is attractive and what is not? And do you ever feel like a dick having to do that?

Renee: Yeah! Oh, I feel like a dick all the time in my research. And not just because of that, but also because sometimes we make people feel bad. Like, “Here, come look at these media images.”

Alie: Right.

Renee: Now, I don't feel as bad because we're doing it all the time anyway. We're not asking women to do anything that isn't part of their normal life. Or we've had to do things like, “We need two attractive confederates for this study.”

Alie: [*gasp!*]

Aside: What the hell? Oh, okay, this is a science term!

Renee: Do you know a confederate is?

Alie: No!

Renee: Confederate is the term for somebody that the research subjects think are just another research subject, but they're actually working for the experimenter.

Alie: Oh! I did not know that.

Renee: Right. Social psychologists in particular like to do this all the time.

Alie: Oh my God, so they think that they're a peer in the waiting room, but really, they're a bit of a snitch!

Renee: They're part of the manipulation, for example.

Alie: That's so fascinating.

Renee: So, we might need two women to start engaging in a fat-talk conversation in front of the research participant.

Alie: Oh my God.

Renee: But then you're in this position to be like, “We need those two women to be pretty attractive and thin.”

Alie: You're casting, though. I mean, I live in LA so I'm like... You literally see, like, "We need this person with this size bra to come in for this role because it's an oatmeal commercial." And you're like, "What is happening in life right now?" So, casting a confederate for a research study to help those things, it's got nothing compared to those.

Renee: So, if I want to feel like less of a dick, I just need to think of LA. Like, that's a general rule! [laughs] Okay, that's perfect.

Alie: It's a roiling apocalypse of self-esteem. It's the worst, so don't worry. And that's where images come out of, too. That's like, the source of the leak or whatever. So how do you quantify attractiveness, and when you're looking at when people feel confident, is there a correlate between attractiveness and confidence, or do you find that those are caused by two totally different things?

Renee: That's interesting. To quantify attractiveness, it depends on how we're doing it. A lot of times what we need is to show people images and then we need to know that they find the images attractive. So, that's a pretty basic question. You pretest it, where you have a lot of people rate the images. And what you find, which I know a lot of people don't like this finding, is that people tend to agree. They agree which faces are more attractive and which are less. And so in that case, we're quantifying attractiveness as the average rating. That's pretty straightforward.

But when it comes to how people feel about their own attractiveness, that's very different. It moves around from day to day and hour to hour and minute to minute. And sometimes we're moving it on purpose in the lab to see what we can do with it. And if you're happy you feel more attractive. So, our perceptions of our own attractiveness are anything but objective.

Alie: You know, that's so interesting because I feel like women are put in this position where it's like, if you feel too confident you're looked down on. There's definitely a curve where your confidence is endearing, and empowering, and inspiring to like, "Okay girl, like, calm down about yourself."

Renee: This, I *love* to talk about this mostly because sometimes the rage feels good, right?

Alie: Right. [laughs]

Renee: This is a real problem, from my perspective, with a lot of the body image movements that are happening out there. And I write about this a lot and we study it a lot because I'm really tired of this, "You are beautiful. Everyone is beautiful. Everyone is so beautiful!" And there's two reasons I'm tired of it.

One is because it doesn't work anyway, but that's another problem. But the second problem is that we don't seem to actually want women to feel beautiful. The way our culture works is that if you *actually* feel beautiful, we got words for women like that. And they're not kind words. So what we really mean is we want you to feel beautiful if and when we decide that you are beautiful.

Alie: [gasp!]

Renee: Right? That it's always this, like, gift from someone else; because when you see a woman out there who says, "I feel confident, I feel beautiful," and she doesn't meet our beauty standard - you know, I always say, "Don't read the comments," but - go read the comments.

Alie: Why do we want women to be beautiful for us, but not for them, necessarily?

Aside: Renee told me stories about how photos online can present the glossiest attempts at perfection and then the comments reflect the darkest, shittiest parts of human judgement. And that particularly in the case of women, our beauty sick culture wants them to be beautiful for us to look at, but not necessarily for themselves to feel. Which is why comments can be so cruel and so cutting.

Alie: I knew coming into this interview, I was like, "I don't even know how I'm gonna talk because I'm gonna be so filled with questions!" Who is doing this? Who is telling us "You're doing it for you"?

Renee: Who's telling us that? Marketers are telling us that all the time. They're doing what's called 'femvertising', which is like this faux-feminist advertising. It's like, "You know, 'cause you deserve it!" Look at Dove. [with sarcastic enthusiasm] "We have some really empowering cellulite cream to sell you!"

Alie: [laughs] Oh. My. God!

Renee: Right? [sarcastic enthusiasm] "Because you're taking charge of this world with your shiny hair."

Alie: [sigh] Oh my God.

Renee: We don't take charge of the world with shiny hair. That's not what's going to do it. So, that's part of where we get that message. But I have to be careful, some women find some practices empowering. Or they just enjoy them, or they think they're fun, or creative, and there's nothing wrong with that. But this illusion of choice is a big one.

Aside: So, I heard from listeners who were all over the map with this issue. Like, are we doing our makeup for ourselves because we enjoy the art of it? Even if it's art that we wash off at the end of the day? Or do we enjoy doing it because it's empowering? And why do men feel empowered without makeup? Like, shouldn't our actual faces just be enough?

So, listener Christa Avampato said:

I really focus my beauty routine on myself. What haircut do I love, what clothes make me feel good, and what makeup makes me feel my best? If what I'm doing makes me feel my best, then I go for it.

But another listener says she's the mom of a 15-year-old and, in her words:

Whoo buddy, beauty culture plays a big role in our life. My kid prefers non-binary pronouns. I will call them "R". R is super involved in cosplay, which is an amazing outlet for them to express themselves. And R is amazing at doing their own make-up. Outside of cosplay, R will also spend hours doing make-up, at least 2 and a half to 3 hours on school mornings. Sometimes they struggle to wake up at 5 a.m. because they're just so tired, but then think that if they don't do their make-up, they'll be worried all day at school that everyone will think they're ugly. I still try to boost their confidence by telling them that they don't need makeup to please people, to which the response is, "So, why do you wear make-up, Mom?"

Now, another ologite Ray Casha is a cosmetologist and she wrote in saying:

I'm surrounded by the world of beauty. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy beauty, beauty products, looking sexified and feeling it, but boy, oh boy! Do I have mad problems with, quote, "beauty." It's such a one-sided street! Women are so often held to ridiculous standards and that shit is ingrained so deep. I'm in the business of making other people look good and it's understandable that I need to look the part. Even though I love hair and hairstyling as an art however, I'm totally not comfortable going into my community without "looking the part." God forbid I run into a client because, I shit you not, if I don't look like I normally do, the first thing they ask is: "Are you sick?" Fuuuuck!

Ana emailed me and said:

A bit about me. I'm a full-time trans woman. I'm married to a cis woman who is just simply the greatest. I've been on hormone therapy for about 6 months now. My morning routine has changed tremendously. As a male, I never tried on more than one outfit in the morning before leaving for work, and now I do get comments when I touch up my makeup like, "You put in so much effort," and, "I don't know how you do it." I usually respond, "Because I look like a man without it?"

Another listener, Colleen, is a nurse and said:

It was not until I became an RN that I found such pressure on appearance. There seems to be little or no pressure on female MDs to wear makeup, dye their hair, get boob jobs or tummy tucks. But for some reason, RNs are expected to spend tons of time before a busy shift looking "camera ready" and that is pretty ridiculous to me.

So your ol' Uncle Ward does not have an answer to this this, necessarily. But Renee definitely looks at the aspect of what is choice and what do we think is choice, because we're under subtle - or sometimes not so subtle - pressures?

Renee: I think as humans in general, we're not good at acknowledging when we're not so free, and Americans in particular suck at this, right? Everything we do, we want to be like, "Because I chose it!" Well, how do you know how much makeup you would be wearing if you grew up in a culture where women weren't treated this way? You don't know what that would feel like. You don't know what kind of choices you might make in a different world.

Maybe it's comforting to *think* that it's entirely free, that you're doing it for you. That's not what 'doing it for me' means. 'Doing it for me' means, "It makes me feel more confident when I go out in the world." But then we need to take that second step and say, "Well, why is it making you feel more confident?" What is the world doing to you that that's where we get our confidence?

Alie: Exactly. And what is the world doing to us?

Renee: Really shitty things, right? Really, really shitty, degrading things. I try to calm down when I talk to journalists. But I was talking to someone from CNN just yesterday, about these two new modeling agencies that are offering models with names and profiles, and they're entirely digitally created. They're not real, they're just avatars.

Alie: Weird.

Renee: And all these companies are very excited about them, "They'll look so good in their clothes, they have names!" The tone of the interview was like, "Isn't this a fun, interesting thing?" What are we doing to women? We're basically saying, "Well, our beauty standard wasn't unrealistic enough, it wasn't unattainable enough, so we're literally just going to use avatars now and decide that that's what sexy, and that's what's beautiful. But then, also, we're going to criticize you if you feel bad about it."

We don't have a magic wall that shuts us off from culture. We can't live in this world and not be influenced by it. I get really tired of people who say, "Well, just be confident. I think this is really just all about confidence."

Alie: And what is confidence? Like, in your studies?

Renee: I'm less interested in confidence than I am in efficacy. Self-efficacy, which is like this feeling of 'I can do things, I have the skills I need, I have the resources I need, I can make a difference. I can shape the world and my environment in the ways that I'm trying to do.' That's what I want women to be able to feel. I think that we are sometimes willfully blind to how much that feeling is connected to what we feel when we look in the mirror.

Alie: And how much money and time do you estimate, or do you ever have to quantify this, do women spend on appearance, as opposed to, you know; reading books, relaxing, or sleeping?

Aside: Side note: reading books, relaxing, and sleeping, are just my personal favorite things to do, that I don't do enough of. But you may be skimping on, like, whitewater kayaking or learning Korean. So just insert: what do I wish I did more of?

Alie: How do you quantify that?

Renee: This is a really difficult thing and I'm not an economist. I'm not great at quantifying this stuff, and the problem is we are also really bad at reporting it. We're not good at keeping track of this sort of thing. "Well, how much? Okay, I bought a \$70 anti-wrinkle cream, but how often do I use it and over how many days and when do I replace it?"

It's hard to get that number, but I can tell you, I do an activity in a class I teach, where I ask people to do this worksheet and add it up. And they're college students, so their numbers are probably somewhat low, and even still, they are often shocked at how quickly they get into the thousands of dollars a year.

Alie: Ohhh.

Renee: But when you start adding up, the waxing, the special dermatology stuff, the creams, the lotions, the stuff you do to your eyebrows. And that's not even including, that gym class you take just because you think it's going to change the shape of your butt. Where it's not really about health or fitness, it's like, "No, you promise to lift my ass! That's why I'm here." I think those things matter, too. I don't know what we would do with that time and money if we had it back.

Aside: Heads up: this is great advice from Renee.

Renee: But the way I think of it is "Well, why not take a little bit of it back and be a good scientist?" Why not do an experiment in your life where you say, "I'll see how it feels. I'll get rid of this one thing and I'll decide what I want to do with that money." And maybe even more important than the money is the time. The way I think about it is, there are some women who have plenty of money. They can do whatever they want in terms of beauty practices and spending, but I don't know people who feel like they have enough time.

Alie: Oh yeah, no one does! No one feels like they do, especially now. But the amount of time that we spend on watching videos, watching tutorials, going to Sephora... I mean, I face this all the time and I know. I think the thing that frustrates me so much is that I see it, I hate it, and I keep doing it! In between the hating it and doing it, is this band of frustration that I feel so many women probably feel. And you know, I work in TV and I get to set an hour earlier than my male co-hosts because I have to glue human hair onto my eyeballs before I can be seen by a camera. If I went into my work like the men do, they'd be like, "What's wrong with Alie? Why is she so hostilely unattractive?"

Renee: Yes. Like, "You look tired. Are you sick?"

Alie: Yep!

Renee: We pretend like it's a choice and I get really angry when I hear that. It's like, "Well, just don't do it then! Just don't do it then!" And I think, "Wait, there are real consequences to not doing it."

Alie: Yeah, if I buzzed my hair and stopped wearing makeup, I would not have my job. If any of my male co-hosts did, they'd be like, "Oh, you got a haircut." They'd still have their job. I would not have the career that I do if I didn't dye and curl my hair.

Renee: I think about this a lot. When I was first on my book tour and I was doing interviews, like different morning shows, news things, whatever. I would always talk to the makeup artists because that's really interesting. I would say, "How long does it take you to do the

women who are the hosts of these shows and how long does it take you to do the men?" And most of them are doing hair and makeup. And the answer is like, "around 45 minutes for a woman," is what I usually heard. Especially because some of these places will do your hair and makeup at the same time, which is actually sort of terrifying when you're in that moment. I find it completely overwhelming. And they said, "About seven minutes for the men."

Alie: Seven minutes?

Renee: And that's a real chunk of time.

Alie: That's a lot of time.

Renee: Like, what might you have done with that time? Maybe slept. That's important too. Let's not underestimate that. But maybe, you would've worked on your story or looked at your lines.

Aside: Being on a book tour or working in TV seems like outlying circumstances at 45 minutes to 1 hour in the makeup chair. But I looked up the average length of time American women spend on getting ready every day and it's 55 minutes! So, samesies. And women in the US spend on average \$3,000 a year, or a quarter million dollars in their lifetimes, on beauty treatments and products. And, side note, I found these statistics all over the place. They're pretty well publicized. In one article, *People Magazine*, [annoyed, sarcastic, fake cheerfulness throughout] had a cute little spin, and they couched the stats this way, with handy hyperlinks, and I'll read it to you verbatim:

Out of that money, \$3,700 is spent on mascara alone. [Hyperlink: shop our favorite here!](#) Another \$2,700 is allotted to eyeshadows. [Hyperlink: blue is totally in right now.](#) And \$1,800 is dedicated to new lipsticks. [Hyperlink: these are the celebrity shades we're loving right now.](#)

Ahhh! Sooooo, yeah. It benefits all kinds of companies to keep you spending.

Renee: Then I hear people get really defensive and say, "But women are doing an excellent job," and I say, "Yes, they are!" Like, what's that great quote? Is it Ginger Rogers?

Aside: [clip from Ann Richards' keynote speech at the 1988 Democratic National Convention: "After all, Ginger Rogers did everything that Fred Astaire did, she just did it backwards and in high heels."] [applause] That was Democratic Governor of Texas, Ann Richards, borrowing from a 1982 comic strip, *Frank & Ernest*.

Renee: We shouldn't have to do it backwards and in heels. The fact that you're doing an excellent job as a journalist, despite the fact that you had to take the time to glue human hair to your eyelids, that doesn't mean everything's okay.

Alie: [giggle] Yeah. Do you think that it will change?

Renee: No.

Alie: [*sad, small tone*] Okay.

Renee: No, I hate that I said that too fast! I was supposed to think about it first, right? I mean, I'm skeptical, I'm a scientist, I need to be persuaded. I get that question a lot and people say, "Well, don't you think things are getting better? Because look at all these positive body image movements!" But they are a drop in the bucket! They're like pushing back against a tidal wave.

As long as we live in a world that knows making us feel vulnerable is probably the best way to get us to buy things, it's not going to get better. As social media continues to grow in popularity, it's not going to get better. We've increased the flood of images we're exposed to. Just when you thought there couldn't be more. There's more and more and more. We're dealing with the fact that filtering and photoshopping and photo editing is now available to everyone, whereas, we used to be able to say, "Oh, they're models, they've been airbrushed, who cares?" And now you don't really know when it's happening, or not happening, and now you have 12-year-old girls who do it to their own face before they post that picture.

Alie: [*gasp*] Oh my God.

Renee: No, I don't think it's getting better. I think if you want it to be better, you have to make it better in your small world.

Alie: How do you do that?

Renee: So, get a little angry first.

Alie: Oh, okay. Check.

Renee: Check? You're good? [*laugh*]

Alie: Check!

Renee: You're like, "Wait. A little?!" And then you do something with it. Sometimes I get criticism because they say, "You should be focused on capitalism and on challenging advertisers," and I'm all for that stuff. It's just not my area of expertise. My area of expertise is individual behavior. I'm interested in that because we're in control of it. It's an easier place to shift some variables around. We can easily change the way we talk to each other. I think we've got some bad habits, that are not our fault, but that we can change.

The first time we see a woman, stop. And instead of complimenting how she looks, say something else. If you're feeling bad about your body, instead of dragging all the women around you into this, you know, sick circle of body hatred, do something else instead. Try to cut down on the media you're consuming, particularly if you know it hurts you. We hear young women all the time say like, "I don't want to look at the stuff on Instagram. I hate it! I hate it. I hate it. I can't stop, I can't stop!" You *can* stop, right? If looking at all those before and afters from that fitness professional you follow isn't helping you, just shut it off. Just shut it off. I think we can do more of that and I think we

need a fundamental shift in the way we think about our bodies. This is a long rant. Can I keep ranting?

Alie: Go on, because we've got tape.

Renee: Here's the thing. I get this question all the time, well, it's not really a question. It's just a troll.

Aside: Warning, what this troll says is infuriating on so many levels and then is followed by a revelation.

Renee: It's, "You're trying to make people fat."

Alie: Really?!

Renee: Yeah. It's this idea that like, "Well, you don't want women to feel so badly about their bodies, but feeling bad about your body will help you be thin." And I always need to say, that is just not true. And I don't mean it's my opinion that it's not true. I mean, empirically, it's not true. In fact, feeling awful about the way you look does not help you take care of your body. It makes you less able to take care of your body. It makes you more likely to binge eat, for example. It makes you less likely to want to exercise or to stick with exercise. It makes you less likely to make healthy food choices. I think we need to let go of the idea that feeling ashamed about our bodies is a requirement for being healthy. It's the antithesis of that. We need to remember that our bodies are things we can take care of, that they're not performance art for other people to evaluate.

Aside: Once again: "*Our bodies are things we can take care of, that they're not performance art for other people to evaluate.*" [airhorn, angels singing Hallelujah]

Renee: But it's hard.

Alie: Ugh, I have so many questions.

Renee: Excellent, excellent.

Alie: Where do you think the line is? Where does beauty obsession becomes pathological? Where does it become a bad behavior, versus self-care?

Renee: [laughs] Self-care.

Alie: I feel like I've seen a spike in the words "self-care." It's called self-care, but is it good for us?

Renee: I think first thing to say is that the line is probably different for everyone. I don't think there's this hard and fast line. The rule I would use would be one we use in clinical psychology a lot, which is, we would say, "Is it causing impairment in your life?"

Alie: Okay.

Renee: So, is it making it harder for you to do your job? Is it causing challenges in your relationships? Is it keeping you from being able to enjoy some social things that you might otherwise enjoy? Is it putting a dent in your finances that's actually, maybe, creating debt and stress around that? And if those things are happening then I think it's problematic. I think you have to decide for yourself. If *you* feel really good about the amount of time, and money, and energy you spend on how you look, then cool. That's great. But I talk to a lot of women who don't feel good about it. They say what you're saying. "I don't really want to do all this stuff, but I feel like I have to."

Alie: And when you watch movies, especially with old movies...

Renee: Yeah. [*laughs*] Oohhhh.

Alie: Again, how many things do you break? Looking at *The Wizard of Oz* and being like, "Oh cool. Oh, the bad people are ugly. Got it, got it." The image of a witch is one of the most villainous visual images we have of women. In a TV show, that I won't name because of spoilers, a character is revealed to be an old crone. She's an old witchy woman, and it's like the worst thing she can be. She could be a murderer, she could sleep with her brother, whatever, but if she's, I'm sorry, she's ugly?! She's old?! It's like the worst!

Renee: And it's not just that she's bad anymore, right? She's also terrifying. Because there is nothing scarier than an old woman with power. There is nothing we like less than somebody who isn't pleasing to our eyes as a woman, but is still able to do shit in the world. I watched, last winter when it was snowing, and I was grumpy because it was snowing, and I was like, "Let's watch *Love, Actually*."

Alie: Oh no!

Aside: [*slo-mo replay*] Ohhhhh nooooooo!!

Renee: I had this memory of it being a super sweet holiday movie and the fat shaming started immediately! Like, I mean there's other problematic parts of that movie like stalking as well, but the whole shtick of fat shaming Hugh Grant's love interest.

Aside: [*clip from Love, Actually: "You know Natalie, who works here?" "The chubby girl?" "Woould we call her chubby?"*] That Grant's character, the Prime Minister, has Natalie removed from her job because he's attracted to her, is only one major problem in this 2003 Christmas staple. Also, Natalie:

Renee: Who, by the way, wasn't even fat, of course. And her whole family fat shamed her, and it was just the fact that that's a go-to joke still... I don't think it's funny to start, but also, are we that uncreative? Like, if you've got a lull in your movie, just call a woman fat and it's like, "ha ha ha."

Alie: Is that getting any better?

Renee: I think one of the good things social media has done is it gives people a platform to say, "Okay, enough of this." I'll be honest, I haven't watched it, but the Amy Schumer movie, *I Feel Pretty*, there was immediately, sort of this, backlash. And actually a pretty, well

informed discussion about some of the concerns people had with that movie. And what it was saying about beauty, and prettiness, and also race, and class, and privilege. And I think that's good that we can have those conversations, and over time I have to believe that filmmakers are going to want to avoid mass anger. And so, they might start to be more sensitive to that. But also, we need more women writing.

Alie: For sure!

Renee: Some of the stuff I think, "Who wrote that? Who thought that was okay? Who thought that was funny?" And my guess is: probably a room full of people that did not include women.

Aside: This is why representation matters. Okay, just a few stats: UCLA professor of Sociology and African American Studies Darnell Hunt looked at 234 TV series from the last two years. He found that two-thirds of the shows had no black writers in their rooms. According to WomenandHollywood.com, 67% of shows in the same time period had no women writers. While Gladd.org had a great report on the diversity of characters represented, and the need for more, I couldn't find stats for LGBTQ+ in the writer's room. But, I'm willing to guess, it's not great. So, what do we dooooo about all this? Does saying, "Just be confident" really work? Is it that simple?

Alie: Why do you think some people find, "All you have to do is be confident" empowering, and other people find that problematic in nature? Why do people have different reactions?

Renee: Part of it is just a big human failing. Which is that, we are often not very good at what's called 'Theory of Mind'. We don't realize that what's in our mind and our experience is different from other people's. If you happen to have a temperament that makes you feel, sort of, confident and happy all the time, it's really hard for you to understand that other people can't just turn that on, that it's not so easily accessible to them. You don't know what kind of thoughts are in their mind, what kind of messages they had growing up. You don't know those sorts of things.

And I think also, people say it because they want to believe it. cause it's a lot easier than looking around and being like, "We are screwed." This is actually a big, ugly, complex problem that may never be unraveled, and that we're going to have to just chip away at over time, really slowly. It's a lot easier to say, "Look, I made a meme about confidence and now everything is good." We don't work that way. I think any time you hear that kind of message, you have to say, "If it were that easy, we would do it." I don't buy that hundreds of thousands of women just want to move around in the world feeling like shit.

Alie: I also feel like... It feels a little bit like climate change. We know it's getting worse and we're like, "Oh God, what do we do?" You're like, "I recycled a can." And you're like, "Well uhhh, good for you, but like it's more systemic than that. It's bigger than that."

Aside: One documentary that Renee shows her students is called, *The Illusionists*, and it's about global beauty pressures. [*clip from The Illusionists: "It's often seemed to me*

that a person who feels happy and secure isn't going to be a very good consumer.”]
Another buffet of enlightenment: the documentary, *America the Beautiful*, which may leave you looking at your reflection with way more compassion, and then have you flipping the bird to magazine ads. [*clip from America the Beautiful: “A lot of it is airbrushed, so women are coming in and asking for surgeries that the actual models don't have.”*]

Now, what are Renee's standards for fictional movies?

Renee: I wrote about this recently, that it's my extension of the Bechdel Test. Which I think it should be, “There are women, they talk to each other, not about men and also not about how they look.” Like, I want to see that too.

Alie: Oh my God.

Renee: Because I don't find it empowering to see two sexy movie star women complaining about how they look.

Alie: Right. But do you feel like there has to be a certain level of self-deprecation that has to balance attractiveness? I feel like we're always looking for a balance, where if we do see a movie star, like Jennifer Lawrence being like, “Oh, I'm such a klutz!” It's like, “Oh, she's accessible!” Where does that come from?

Renee: Oh, our own insecurities, I think. Right? It's that song, that horrible song.

Aside: [*clip of One Direction's “What Makes You Beautiful” plays: “If you don't know oh oh. You don't know you're beautiful. Oh, oh oh! That's what makes you beautiful!”*]

2011. One Direction. 975 million plays on YouTube. Probably mostly from 13-year-old girls who now think that self-repulsion is a virtue.

Renee: Really? Our ideal is a woman who's going to look 18 forever and be super stunning but thinks she's really ugly because then she won't be such a threat? That's sort of what we're looking for? But I think as women, we can also be honest about our own jealousy, right? That sometimes it's hard to see these women who look so perfect, and so put together, and maybe they have the body shape that we wish we had, and I think it's human. But it's also hurtful. Sometimes that comes out in nastiness. And so a way to avoid that nastiness, is to be like, “Oh, but look, I got a pimple and I put it on Instagram!” And then you're like, “Oh, she's just like me!” Yeah, she's just like you with a personal trainer, and a chef, and a team of hairstylists, and makeup artists.

Alie: Do you think it would be healthier for all of us to just not acknowledge our appearance as much as we do?

Renee: I do! And people often don't like this message, because they think the answer is just tell all women and girls all the time that they're beautiful and pretty no matter what.

Aside: So, this can go for all genders and non-binary, too. I heard from trans guys, trans women, bisexual listeners, queer folks, who all said that they too feel appearance pressures from society at large, and the groups they identify with. And even a few cis white guys wrote me to say they were self-conscious about stuff like abs, and weight, and freckles.

Renee: What I want to live in, is a world where our beauty is a side note. Where, sure, maybe you get dressed up sometimes and that's sort of fun. It's nice to feel like you look good, but where it's not the main event, the way it is today. Where it's not taking quite so much of our attention, and our money, and our time. I don't think we can turn it off. I don't think you should have to turn it off. A lot of people don't want to, but I think we can turn it down. That's the world I want to see, where it's just not so much of our focus.

Alie: How do you feel about the last few years in beauty culture? I feel like something took a shift. I feel like once Kim Kardashian put up a photo of herself with contour and what the contour looked like before it was blended, something happened where everyone suddenly was like, “[*gasp*] Kim Kardashian does contouring! What's contouring? How does it work?”

Aside: September 4, 2012. The fateful day that makeup went, in my opinion, from a Gizmo to a Gremlin. Or rather, like one Gremlin to like, a bunch more Gremlins. So, Kim Kardashian tweeted a photo of her unblended contour and the world was like, “Yessss! Let's spend more time blending faceshadow, and making all of our faces look like the same face every day!”

But reality stars are professionally glamorous and have practically unlimited resources to be so. But don't give Kimi K. the credit for contouring, because most makeup historians agree that the practice originated for the stage and was passed down to drag culture, which has been absolutely killing it in the activism and makeup departments for decades. So, this contouring, baking, and generally taking fabulousness to heightened levels then found its way into the daily routines of public figures like the Kardashians and to YouTube vloggers who shared her techniques.

Alie: I don't know if it's Instagram, Kardashians, or whatever, but the beauty industry financially has gone so crazy. And you know, I emailed you about this last night, but I was just reading an article on *Forbes*, about how Kylie Jenner will be like the youngest “self-made” billionaire, all by selling lipstick. And the next other billionaires on the list, Anastasia, sells eyebrow cream. So the top-ranking women, other than Oprah, seem to be women who sell other women things to put on their face. What's happening?

Aside: So, in reference to everyday life versus a reality show, a drag event, or beauty vlogging, Renee says:

Renee: It's a performance. And I think the first thing I want people to think about is that performing is exhausting. Ask anyone who performs on camera or on stage. It's exhausting. Or if you've ever had to perform, like, you were at a party and you were in a bad mood, but you had to sort of perform like you were happy. It's exhausting. And

that's what we're asking women to do every day with their beauty. That level of performance. I have a friend who's a makeup artist, and - you're like, "That's ironic," but no, she's great. *[laughs]* - And I guess it's a thing now? High school girls will get their prom makeup done professionally? Which, I didn't know that. And they all asked for contouring.

Alie: Of course!

Renee: They demand it. They want to look like Kim Kardashian. Right? It's really widespread. What I see this as is a trickle-down. It used to be that these products, these techniques, only lived in the land of celebrities. They were not accessible to us. You needed professional expertise, you needed special brushes, and powders, and creams, and just your average person couldn't just get those. Now, not only are these products readily available, but that's another thing social media has done, is the tutorials you talk about, that you can go look online.

Aside: Now, aside from prom makeup expenses, I was curious how appearance pressures affected women as they age.

Alie: I think that there is something where it's like, women experience a death, while they're alive. Certainly, like, you cross the line of no return, where you stopped trying to convince yourself, other people, strangers, lovers, whatever, that you're...

Renee: 20? *[laughs]*

Alie: Yeah, that you're a 20-year-old, highly fertile individual. And then you die that death, and then you live in a weird sort of hazy purgatory, where you're like, "I still have another 40 years to live, but I'm living almost a different phase." Like, insects have different phases of their life. And different women experience a death while alive, that I don't know if men experience. And it is very performative but it's like we get off the stage at 40 and we're just in the wings.

Renee: That's interesting because you're saying that you "get off the stage" as though you walked off, but that's not how a lot of people experience it, right? They experience it as becoming invisible in your culture. Our media is a lot to blame for that. There's a term for it: symbolic annihilation. When there are these whole groups that are just not present in our media imagery.

Aside: Okay, - are you ready for it? - this is where my ingrained conversational habits reveal themselves to be problematic. Renee is about to just own me, and rightfully.

Renee: I've undergone that shift, I think, recently. I'm 42 now, so maybe that's around the time it happens.

Alie: I would say how lovely you look.

Renee: Nope!

Alie: But I don't want to!

Renee: We're not doing that!

Alie: [laughs]

Renee: Yeah, we're not doing that! Sorry, I just shut down the interview.

Alie: No, no!

Renee: But do you see how natural that felt?

Alie: Yeah, but that's what we do!

Renee: That when, even if a woman tells you her age, it wasn't like I was saying, "Oh my God, I'm 42?!" That you know the thing you're supposed to say.

Alie: Of course.

Renee: And what you're supposed to say is, "You don't look 42!" And I want to be like, "Who gives a shit if I do?" Right? Like, it's okay if I look 42 because, I *am* 42! Right? It's a very strange world, but that's part of what I think we have to stop. Is this immediate, "You don't look 42."

Alie: But it's something we do all the time. And not knowing to stop it is, like, we perpetuate it in our own lives, and our own minds, without realizing the damage that it does to ourselves and others. Because I feel like we're told so much that that's a way to empower other women, is to complement their looks. And what you don't realize is, when those compliments stopped coming or when that's all you have to rely on... You're getting complimented on a shell essentially, but does anyone care about who you are inside?

Renee: Well, and let me tell you what just happened in that almost-comment that you didn't make, but which I heard in my head anyway because I knew it was coming, right? Is that I immediately started thinking about how I look.

Alie: Really?

Renee: Yes! Because that's what happens when people make those comments to you. If they say, "Well, you don't look 42" or "You look lovely," then I start to think, "Well, do I look 42? How are these lines on the side of my eyes? Is it because I wore makeup today? I don't usually wear makeup, but I did to be polite.

Alie: Whaa...?!

Renee: Because that's the thing you do as a woman, right? You know what? I got my first gray hair, I'm actually kind of excited about it. It's sassy!

Alie: Is it?!

Renee: It's in the back of my head and it's got a completely different texture and it's going straight up!

Alie: Oh! It's wild!

Renee: I make people check on it to make sure it's still there, I get worried about it. I like it! But that's what happens. And so, instead of thinking about research or ideas, at least for a moment, my brain went to, how do I look? How I look? How do I look?

Alie: Of course, yeah!

Renee: I don't want help going there, is how I think about it.

Alie: Yeah, I get that as well. And, there's a rhythm where you tell someone your age and then there's a *[gasp!]* feigned shock or surprise on their part.

Renee: It doesn't matter what you actually look like at all!

Alie: Oh no, of course not. But if they're not shocked at how OLD you are, "That is astoundingly old! And you look amazingly not old!" Then there's an exchange where it's almost, like, a courtship dance or something, where it's like, here, I put this down, you do this, I do this. And I go, "Oh shucks! Who? Me?"

Renee: "Oh no, I do, I do."

Alie: "Oh, look at my hair today!"

Renee: "I do, it's just... I'm wearing makeup. That's why."

Alie: Yeah, exactly.

Alie: But that's *so* ingrained. We don't even realize it's happening.

Aside: So, before we dip into a rapid-fire round, one more quick question:

Alie: Oh, I didn't ask you this one thing, how you feel about high heels?

Renee: *[laughs]*

Alie: Because I feel like every time, I'm at an event, someone's wedding, an awards show, we're all dressed up, we've spent money, we've spent time, da da da da da, all of that. And then there's the experience that most of the people on the happiest days of their lives are in excruciating pain and are literally hobbling.

Renee: Yes.

Alie: What the fuck?!

Renee: I know!! The worst troll I ever got was for writing an op-ed about high heels.

Alie: Really?!

Renee: Yeah, this man was really upset. And then I also had a woman email me who says she can run just fine in her high heels.

Alie: Oh my God.

Renee: And I thought, first, no. Second, are you running in your high heels?! *[laughs]* How do you even have this data? I live in this culture like everyone else, I think they look good. I wish I didn't. I do.

Alie: I know!

Renee: I like to feel tall. I very rarely wear them now, but I do. But that's the question, why is it that one of the things that it takes to be considered beautiful in this culture, is to walk in something that is not only painful, but also dangerous? And given how often, I hate to say it, that women might need to run, why do we ask them to wear things on their feet that will make it difficult for them to get away from an unsafe situation? And why don't we ask men to do that? And would they do it if we did?

Alie: No.

Renee: NO.

Alie: Are you kidding?

Renee: No.

Alie: No. I mean, but it pains me to think of how many people at their own weddings, at their best friend's weddings, at ceremonies where they're being honored for something that they've done with their brain, the night is completely eclipsed by an excruciating pain and we'll look back and think, "What the hell?"

Renee: It's not just shoes, either. We just did a big survey, we haven't published it yet, but basically asked men and women all these questions about clothing that either hurts, or distracts, or makes it so they can't move in certain ways, like you can't bend over, or it leaves red welts on your body, or it makes it so you can't stand for very long.

Aside: I have worn all of these and I'm not even into bondage. *[fancy voice]* Pain, part of special occasions!

Renee: And this is not a shock to anyone, but women are doing this at much, much higher rates than men. We can't pretend that that's not affecting our lives. Our ability to concentrate, our ability to feel comfortable, and to move around. It's not an accident that fashion does this.

Alie: Right, of course.

Aside: Okaaay, your questions! Let's get into it.

Alie: I am going to get to rapid-fire round. Sarah Pressman wants to know: When did hair removal for women first become a thing?

Renee: So, to some extent hair removal has been around a very, very long time with different techniques, but it's come and gone in different cultures. But leg hair removal, you can find historical references to it.

Aside: Quick aside, even in ancient Rome and Egypt folks got rid of body hair, but partly for looks and partly... for lice. So, I guess that's a benefit.

Renee: We're at new heights of hair removal now. In part because of what I talked about earlier. We wear clothing that shows more.

Alie: Yeah. Right. We can laser ourselves from head to toe.

Renee: Or just rip it out too, yeah.

Alie: Oh, God.

Renee: Just rip it, burn it, pull it. It's disgusting! Haven't you heard? Haven't you heard that your body is disgusting?!

Alie: It's disgusting! How dare you be a mammal? How dare you?! Porpoises are smooth. Why can't we get it together?

Renee: No kidding!

Alie: I did once talk to a guy who had, like, neck tattoos all over his body. He was, like, an old punk rock musician and we both got zapped by a Tesla gun because we were doing this science thing.

Renee: *[laughs]*

Alie: And he said it hurt worse - I know, long story - but he said it hurt worse than his tattoos. And I was like, "This hurt a fraction of what..."

Renee: Getting a bikini wax?

Alie: Yeah. Try getting your buttohole waxed, and then talk to me about it, Henry Rollins!

Renee: You tell him!

Alie: Yeah, for real! Neck tattoos? Nothin'!

Aside: *[clip of Henry Rollins getting zapped by a Tesla gun: [long zap] "Ah! That's... uh... Definitely feel it. Definitely can smell it. It's like a tattoo needle on steroids."]* Also I fact checked that, and the former Black Flag singer doesn't actually have neck tattoos, but he does have a lot of them in other places, including a full back piece like a skin mural, and another that says, "Life is Pain, I want to be Insane." And I'm telling you, bikini waxes hurt more than that Tesla gun, which hurt more than his tattoos. So there!

Alie: Catherine Travis wants to know: Why is it even though we know TV and magazines are altered, we still strive to look like those people?

Renee: Oh, it's so hard! Part of it is because the comparison process that makes us compare ourselves to those images is superfast and automatic. So, it's hard to interrupt it. What happens as you compare yourself to that image and you're like, "I don't look that good." And then the voice comes in that says, "That's not real anyway. That's fake." So it's like we're fighting back after we've lost the battle.

Alie: And maybe our brains are just not advanced enough to really grok that that is a fake image. You know what I mean?

Renee: The problem is even when we do, it makes us look at it more because then we become kind of fascinated. Well, what's fake about it? And where did they change it? And what did they do? And then the end result is, congratulations, you just spent more time looking at it. And you've also gotten the message that whatever they did to that woman it was important enough that she looked that way, that they did it.

Alie: Right. You know, we go into 3D movies and the truck comes barreling at you and you still flinch. We know there's not a truck coming at us, but we still do it. We cry at movies we know are not real people. So, to expect that our brain is like, "Well, we know it's photoshop."

Renee: It gets back to that whole, "Your smart, you know better." Knowing better is not enough. Not in this world.

Alie: Ariel Belk wants to know: What drives societal beauty standards to change so drastically? For example, how we used to find people with heavier shape attractive, and now it's just very skinny people. Is it just influencers or is there something inherent about the societal evolution?

Renee: Oh, that's interesting. I would first say they don't change that quickly. It sometimes feels quick when we look back, but it's usually happening slowly. There might be some exceptions to that. Like the model Twiggy is very famous for coming on the scene and being very, very different and then sort of driving a fashion revolution in that way. But for the most part it's happening in these slow shifts and it's only when we look back that it seems fast.

If you take a cross cultural perspective, there are probably some evolutionary types of influences. As food becomes more readily available or particularly high-calorie food, the population gets heavier and we value thinness more, because beauty is rare. But in places in the world where rates of infectious disease are really high, and food is more scarce, heavier bodies are prized. That's part of it, too. But it's also coming from a fashion industry that benefits monetarily from change. They're not interested in us wanting to look the same. Because that doesn't cost as much.

Alie: Right! I mean it's fast fashion. Why buy a different jacket next season if nobody tells you that last season's jacket is garbage?

Renee: Or why have to do that new workout technique if no one's told you that now you need a bigger butt. It can't have cellulite, by the way, but it still needs to be big. So figure that out.

Alie: Oh God. I mean, we're going to have 3D printed butts soon.

Renee: 3D printed butts.

Alie: I'm sure they're just going to reprint our butts.

Renee: I'm sure there are 3D printed butts.

Alie: There might be.

Aside: Okay, so you know I'm looking out for you, and of course I then went Googling on the topic of 3D printed butts. Number one, I stumbled upon a five-minute informational video via plasticsurgery.org that explained how butt implants work and at first it was all giggles and games. [*clip from plasticsurgery.org video: "The buttocks you were born with may or may not have the musculature or curves you desire."*] Until like, three minutes in when they showed graphic animation of butts being surgically opened, retractors holding back the muscle, and implants squished in. I was like, "Oh my God, what are we doing to ourselves?!" But that didn't answer the quandary about 3D printed future butts, and those do not appear to be on the market, yet.

Although I did read about one team inventing breast implants that are like an absorbable 3D-printed Ziploc bag that you fill with your own fat and shove it in your boob. So your boob implant is like your own body, which is a nice thing to invent for cancer survivors who are, like, not so into silicone, or whomever else doesn't want a foreign object in their body. So, those will probably be available for butts in the future.

Now, in the amount of time we've now taken to discuss butt implants, we all could have done, like, 30 squats for butt strength or made a sandwich for a homeless person. What is life?! What are we doing?! I just wanna to move to the woods. I want to let a pet squirrel nap in my armpit hair.

Alie: Justin Weibo wants to know: Is Pi or the Golden Ratio still used in measuring beauty standard, or is that a thing of the past?

Renee: There's a lot of argument about that. It was this very, sort of, cute thing that a lot of evolutionary psychologists were into. This idea that you could sort of map all this mathematically. I don't think the evidence is there that well. I think we do see good evidence for things like preference for symmetry in facial features. I think that's there, but I don't think there's good data for the Golden Ratio stuff.

Alie: Okay. Just curious. Rolando de Cunday wants to know: Does it bother you how ass backwards the standards are here in the US versus other countries?

Renee: I don't know what he means by "ass backward." They're asinine. The standards are different in other countries, but they have the same result, which is, "Feel bad, spend money, spend time."

Aside: Once again: Feel bad. Spend money. Spend time. [*cash register cha-ching!*]

Alie: Alyssa Seavers wants to know: Is there a universal face shape or features that are biologically considered attractive?

Renee: To some extent, right? We like what are called 'neotenous' features in women, which means like, big eyes, full lips, sort of rosy cheeks, smooth skin.

Aside: Side note: these neotenous traits, which are the same traits that make domesticated dogs look and act like wolf puppies their whole lives, are also what we find cute, especially in the pets that we call women. Now, I did some digging on this, and the scientific term for this is - are you ready - it's a super complex word: *babyfacedness*. I found a psychology paper called, "Social Psychological Face Perception," that stated people exhibiting babyfacedness are, "More likely to be exonerated when charged with intentional crimes, but more likely to be found at fault when charged with negligence," [*babytalking*] because they look like babies so they can't plot things! That is how deep our weird, innate, and conditioned programming goes.

Renee: Symmetry also, right? There are some basic features that we tend to find attractive. Cross-cultural readings of attractiveness are remarkably consistent. More consistent than you might imagine.

Alie: And those neotenous traits are all youth based. Which is fertility based, right?

Renee: They are all youth based. Yay!

Alie: Anna Thompson wants to know: Is there any truth to the tidbit that we like our appearance differently in photos versus mirrors?

Renee: Oh, that's sort of fascinating. There is this psychological effect where we like familiarity. And we are familiar with the way our face looks in a mirror, because that's what we see most. So people do tend to like that mirror image. But other than that, it's hard to answer because no one just takes a regular photo anymore. Most of the people I see are not happy with photos at all until they've taken 200 and filtered and cropped and changed them. So, not sure how to answer that.

Alie: Oomph. Yeah, that's a good question though.

Aside: Hey, just heads up. If you take 200 selfies and feel like shit about yourself, number one; don't feel ashamed, because everyone feels that way. Everyone. And you know why? Because we weren't meant to see our faces that often ever in life, and also, your phone has a tiny wide-angle lens, like a peephole, that acts like a funhouse mirror. Camera distortion is so bad on cell phones that experts say that it widens the nose by up to 30% and has led to a huge uptick in requests for rhinoplasty in the last few years. So,

your cell phone can be a terrible, bitchy friend. Except for when they play you podcasts. Haaaay!

Alie: Brooke Sheridan wants to know: Personally, what do you think is the most outrageous practice you've seen throughout history to promote beauty?

Renee: Oh man, I'm not a historian, so I'm afraid I might be missing things. I almost hate to say, but a lot of these practices that we find shocking, like foot binding, for example, or scarification, I think when you compare them to things we're doing here in this culture today, they're not that different. If anything, it's a matter of degree and not kind.

Alie: Katie Trivalino asked about the same thing: What are some beauty standards from other cultures that ours might find unique and unusual? But yeah, like scarification or foot binding, we do things that are probably just as painful or permanent.

Renee: Waist trainers. Thank you, Kardashians, for popularizing the corset.

Alie: Ugh...

Renee: Right? We thought we were free of that.

Alie: I know! I know! And I love that they're called "waist trainers" and not corsets.

Renee: Yeah. Well, it's like you're working out. You're working out while you damage your organs, yeah.

Alie: I mean it's essentially just a rebrand and a resale of old stuff.

Renee: It is! And I would like to be able to breathe freely. And I'm not interested in beauty practices that take away my ability to breathe.

Alie: Respiration. Top of the pyramid!

Renee: Yeah, pretty high up there.

Alie: Top of the pyramid! Levi Like the Jeans wants to hear your opinion on the recent surge of the "dad bod."

Renee: The dad bod. Yeah. Are we already over the dad bod? I'm not sure.

Alie: I don't know!

Renee: I mean, people talked about this a lot. It was so completely sexist, right? This idea that we find it charming when a man gets a little belly fat, right? Like, we think that makes him sweet, and if a woman posted a picture showing that online, she would be accused of ruining all future generations with her slobitude and be called disgusting. So yeah, dad bod.

Alie: Anna Bestvader Norton says: As a trans woman, I struggle with beauty standards all the time, and constantly fight between seeking conventional beauty and acceptance of my

body. Do you see the body acceptance movement having an impact on what's considered conventionally beautiful? She asks: Hopefully?

Renee: Hopefully. Oh, I love the hope. I think the body acceptance movement is really trying. It's trying hard, but it's got such an uphill battle to fight, right? There are so many forces trying to push you back down that hill, but I think it's really difficult. I hate to crush your hope on that wonderful question.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't women who have felt a change in their individual lives. I think if you can find a place like that, I'm all for it. I am a big proponent... empirically, I think there are better data for compassion. So, acceptance suggests that you have to just be like, "It's fine. It's okay the way it is. I completely accept it," and I think a lot of women find that very, very difficult. It can be easier to do something different, which is to feel compassion. To say, "Yes, sometimes I hate this part of my body, but I forgive it and I show it love the same way I do a family member after we've had an argument," that I can show kindness to my body even if it's not perfect, even if I don't love everything about it. I think there's a lot of power in that.

Alie: And also, speaking of gender and power, do you feel the acknowledgement and the movement toward more of a non-binary kind of a gendered culture could be helpful? Because I look back and women weren't allowed to wear pants in the '50s. Like, you would get arrested.

And I think that we owe so much to people who broke those stereotypes, and it was very scandalous at the time. I feel like we are going to owe a lot to people fighting for non-binary gender roles and trans rights, to breaking down some of what is oppressive in our own gender roles.

Renee: I'm open to that happening. I don't think we have the data yet. I don't think it's been long enough to tell what the influence will be of our thinking about gender in a more non-binary way. But I think there's possibility there for some real good.

Alie: It would be so lovely to see in the future. I mean, if we're not careening off a cliff, you know.

Renee: Right, and we might be.

Alie: And we might be. My hope would be that more men could wear concealer, and eyeliner, and breezy skirts if they wanted to. And more women could not cut their hair short without someone saying, "She seems aggressive."

Renee: "You like a lesbian!" Right? Like, that's the immediate reaction.

Alie: Immediate!

Aside: Quick aside, I got multiple letters from listeners who expressed this very thing. Annika, from Germany identifies as bisexual and told me:

I can say that lesbians, from my perspective, seem to have to be a lot more self-confident regarding their style or their appearance, because they will always get shit for it. In Germany, if it's girly, we hear, "Ooh, you can't really be a lesbian, you wear lipstick." If it's a bit more sporty they'll hear, "No wonder you're gay, you dress like a man."

Liz wrote in and told me: She identifies as pansexual and says that women never believe she likes women because she doesn't "look gay."

And Cori wrote me and said: She has male and gender-fluid friends who feel like they're not taken seriously when they wear makeup and more feminine hairstyles.

Moral of the story, if you ever find yourself judging someone, stop and say, "Hmm, this is an artifact of generations past, and this person is cool and brave." Because it is and they are.

Alie: We are sending so many signals with how we look because there are so many things being picked up on by other people. The idea of, like... If it didn't affect my job, I think I would want to cut my hair short. I don't want to deal with this! You know? I do feel like people who are fighting for those kinds of rights are with a machete at the forefront, you know?

Renee: Yeah.

Alie: Last two questions. What is something about your job that you haaaaaaaaate? That sucks so bad.

Renee: I thought, like, the sweet answer is to say, "I hate hearing how much people are suffering all the time," but really the first answer that popped into my head is, "Oh my God, I hate grading." I hate grading! I love teaching, I hate grading. That's the honest answer.

Alie: [laughs] Do you hate having to read essays?

Renee: I love having to read them. It takes the joy out of reading a student's essay that you have to grade it.

Alie: I'm sure. I remember I used to be a waitress at a sushi restaurant and there was this one woman that would come in and she would always ordered like a \$5 glass of white Zinfandel, and then sit there with a stack of papers and she just had to look in her eye, like, just keep it coming.

Renee: Just one glass?

Alie: Yeah. No, no, no.

Renee: [laughs]

Alie: Usually it would be like two or three by the time she left. And I was like, "What happens on the bottom of the stack when she's, like, 1.5 glasses of rosé in, or whatever?"

Renee: So yeah, does it get better or worse? I haven't tried that.

Alie: I dunno. I dunno maybe, because you'd be more honest, but maybe you'd be like, "I love this!"

Renee: This sounds like a really great experiment!

Alie: [laughs] Yeah, you should try!

Renee: [laughs] I should do this!

Alie: And then, what do you love about your work?

Renee: I love so many things, it's hard to say. I think people are interesting. I want to know about people, I want to hear their stories, I want to talk to them, and the fact that I can get paid to do that, it just blows my mind every day.

Alie: And so the individual narratives and how those, sort of, pull back into a more cohesive trends and movements is fascinating?

Renee: Yeah. I love data. I love it little. I love it big. I love all forms of it, and I want to know what kinds of stories it has to tell.

Alie: And so you're able to, even from surveys and from footage, make that into data points? Like, that boggles me. That you can look at camera footage and that can become a data point on a spreadsheet.

Renee: Yeah!

Alie: I'm like, "How does that happen??"

Renee: If something exists, it exists in some amount, and if it exists in some amount, it can be measured. I did not make that up, and I can't remember who did, but I love that quote! I love that quote for psychology because people say, "Well, how can you possibly measure that?" And my answer is always, "Watch!"

Aside: This was either said by French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes or a psychologist named Ed Thorndike. The internet is still arguing about it. Also, I was never, ever interested in metrology, the study of measurements, before this, but, maybe lookout metrologists! I might just find one of you. Speaking of that:

Alie: And then, where can people find you, and tell me about your book.

Renee: Oh, I would love to tell you about my book! My book is called *Beauty Sick: How the Cultural Obsession with Appearance Hurts Girls and Women*, and it is a not entirely heartbreaking tour, it's got some hope at the end. A lot of these topics we've been talking about and how our empirical research can inform the way we think about these things. You can find out more about my book at BeautySick.com, but if you want to know more about my more traditional research, you can go to BodyandMedia.com.

Alie: And are you on the Twitters or the Instagrams?

Renee: I won't be on the Twitter. I am protecting my mental health and staying off the Twitter, but I have an Instagram profile @beauty_sick.

Alie: And do you scroll on it at all?

Renee: I'm going to tell you the truth, which is that my publisher told me I needed to do Instagram, and so I did. And I have this difficult relationship with it because I think we need to see fewer images of women and this is part of what Instagram is. And then I said, "Okay, well I'll post my things, but I won't follow anyone." And I was told, "No, no, that's not how it works. You have to follow people." [*laughs*] One of my students came up with this brilliant idea and she said, "Just follow dogs." [*crowd in unison: "aaawwe"*]

I follow a few feminist sites, but mostly what is in my feed, I kid you not, is dogs, and puppies, and the Evanston animal shelter, and one of my students who has a cat named Juno the Floof. Really cute. And, yeah, I'm really into Samoyeds.

Alie: Oh my God!

Renee: And Puppy of the Day.

Alie: All right. Well, if any of my friends listen to this and find that I'm suddenly unfollowing them and only following puppies, they'll know.

Renee: Yeah, but so every time I unfollow someone for showing us what I think of as a toxic image, I add a dog.

Alie: God, that's brilliant.

Renee: I'm telling you, it's the mood manipulation to beat all others. Everyone else feels awful after they look at their Instagram. I feel amazing and cuddly. You should try it.

Alie: Changing my life! Thank you so, so much for being on. You're amazing.

Renee: It was very fun.

Alie: So great.

So, some parting pieces of advice: Ask smart people stupid questions because, come on, they love it! Also, that's how they learned everything. And if you're curious, no question is stupid and probably everyone else around you has the same question. Also, follow animals on Instagram. Also, fuck the system, and remember your spleen, and your gallbladder, and heart, and lungs, and your brain are doing great and no one gives a shit what they look like! And your face, and butt, and boobs, and lips, and everything else is perfect the way it is, because it is you.

Now, to hear more about others' perspectives on beauty culture, you can listen to the accompanying episode. I'll put it up today, too. I loved hearing so many ologites' stories and it gave me so much

confidence that the more we talk about this, the less of a grip it'll have on us. Sharing can be so, so powerful that way. To get more of this, listen to that episode next.

You can find *Ologies* at Ologies on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). I'm on [both @alieward](#). There's more links up at [AlieWard.com/Ologies](#), for all the episodes. You can become a patron at [Patreon.com/Ologies](#), for as little as 25 cents an episode. [OlogiesMerch.com](#) has all kinds of pins, and totes, and hats, and shirts, and cool shit. Thank you Boni Dutch and Shannon Feltus for that. We'll see you in Portland on September 15th at Camp Ologies.

Thank you to my non-blood-sisters Erin Talbert, and Hannah Lipow, and River for adminning the wonderful [Facebook group](#), which is pretty much the only reason I go on Facebook anymore, to be honest.

Thank you, Steven Ray Morris and your mustache for editing this episode and being just generally the best. The music was composed and performed by Nick Thorburn, who also did *Serial* theme and is in a band called Islands.

Now, if you stick around toward the end of the episode, I tell you a secret. And I will tell you that one of the best things that I have ever done, was I took my scale, maybe 13 or so years ago, to the dumpsters near my apartment. And I took a hammer, and I smashed the shit out of it, and I threw it in the garbage. It wasn't enough just to throw it away, I had to smash it. Before that, I had the scale, and every morning I would check my weight. But no matter what that number said, that dictated my mood for the rest of the day. If I was down, I was in a good mood. If I was up, even a pound or two, bad mood. And your weight doesn't matter! Your weight is not a reflection of how strong or healthy you are, which is what bodies are for. So, if you have a scale, if you step on it and it makes you feel bad, fuck that scale. Don't just throw it away, smash it into a billion pieces if you want to. So, that is your secret of the day, a little tip from Ol' Uncle Ward. Anyway, you're perfect the way you are. Thank you for listening. I love you all a bunch.

Berbye.

Transcribed by Jennifer Hollinghead, who transcribed this when she was at work instead of fulfilling her actual job description. Bur-bye.

Some links which you might find helpful:

[*Dr. Renee Engeln's work*](#)

[*"Beauty Sick," the book*](#)

[*Peacocks are shady choads*](#)

[*Peacock love honk*](#)

[*Peacocks who are humans aka jerks*](#)

[*Chris Rock's "Good Hair"*](#)

["Magic mirror on the wall..."](#)

[How about a maternity corset HOW ABOUT NO](#)

[How much do you spend on your face?](#)

[People Magazine tries to tell you to buy more stuff](#)

[Ann Richards shouts out Ginger Rogers](#)

[Thanks, Bob Thaves for the Ginger Rogers quotes](#)

[Statistics on black TV writers](#)

[Stats on women writers in TV](#)

["The Illusionists" documentary trailer](#)

[Kim K kontours](#)

[History of Drag](#)

[Butt Implants Video That Is Highly Disturbing](#)

[3d Printed Boobs](#)

[Clinical babyfacedness](#)

[Selfie Distortion is a real thing](#)

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