

Bonus Minisode: Kalology -- Your Letters

Ologies Podcast

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Oh, heeey. It's me again! Twice in one day, your stepmom who's just [*deep inhale, mock distress*] doing her damn best, kids, back for a little more kalology. In the episode with Dr. Renee Engeln, we talked all about beauty standards and the history and the engine that drives the commerce behind it, and how appearance and confidence can be linked both for better and for worse.

I asked on Twitter and Patreon and in the Facebook group for your stories. I got almost a hundred emails from you. Men, women, non-binary listeners of all backgrounds and opinions. I wanted to share your stories, so I'm putting out a second, extra-bonus episode because I want you guys to have a voice in this.

I'm admittedly a little scared to put these kalology episodes out because, I'll quote a friend, "I don't want to yuck your yum." Beauty culture can be fun and empowering and artistic, and it can feel kind of like a treat at the end of the day. Self-care and beauty routines are super intertwined with each other and confidence affects us in work and in personal relationships. But beauty standards have also made us turn a pretty harsh and literally distorted, wide-angle selfie lens on ourselves. I'm just hoping that seeing the mechanisms of keeping us questioning our bodies and faces will take away the power and leave the choice of how you look up to you, not what you think other people expect.

I think beauty culture could be kind of like the holidays. Like it could be a tree. It could give you warm feelings, but it could also be a stressful drag that drains you of all of your money. It really depends on how much you're trying to match magazines and go above expectations that feel natural to you.

In this minisode solo, we're going to hear from you. We'll learn how beauty culture has affected your lives because I just think most of us think we're alone on this. Like I've had blackheads since sixth grade - every single day of my life since then, and I feel like I'm the *only* person who looks at their dotted nose and goes, "Why me?" I feel like I'm the only one on planet Earth. Also, Bioré strips don't work on me. I've googled all the tips. Nothing works. Whatever. I think my teeth look weird, I wrestle with my curls, and it has been suggested by TV makeup artists that I get Botox. And I have! In my case I looked like Carrot Top and I was out like 500 bucks. It wasn't good.

In fact, one of the things I love about doing this podcast *Ologies* so much is that I'm recording this right now in no makeup in my closet. My hair's in a bun, no mascara. It doesn't matter! You guys just accept me for my thoughts and my stupid questions and words and curiosity and not if my hair has been straightened and then meticulously recurled, or if my face looks symmetrical enough, or if you would, like, swipe a certain way on a dating app with me.

This podcast has been really empowering for me because it's made me value myself in ways that aren't revoked if my gray roots are showing or if I look tired. I've been there. I struggle, too, with appearance in so many ways, and in these episodes, I'm not posing any huge solutions. It's not realistic for a lot of us to just up and go natural, and be like, "Fuck you, World!" But we can get better handle on why we feel the way we do, and maybe find some power in saying, "Yeah—No. I see what you're doing there." Like you know when you rent a car and then they try to tell you that

you need a bunch of extra insurance, but really your own car insurance covers it. Once you know that, you can be like, “Yeah—No. I see what’s happening. I’m good. Thanks!”

Also, just an FYI: I read all of your letters, every last one, and I’m including excerpts from as many as possible. I left out some details I thought might be too hard to hear, but you know we do hear about everything from shaving, to body image, to mascara, and what we see on Instagram. Just so you know, we’re going to be talking about that stuff.

Your stories were personal. They were illuminating. They were super validating. I hope this makes you see that everyone, no matter what their social media looks like or how perfect they appear or how little you think you relate to them or if they look different from your friends—we all have similar insecurities and everyone deserves more kindness and less judgement. The fact that any of us have survived the journey from an embryo to an actual breathing person is just a fucking beautiful miracle of science and molecules and chance, and to criticize ourselves for not being replicas of a magazine ad selling hair gel is just criminal. So, let’s hear your perspectives. Here we go!

Alie Ward: First off, on the topic of social media, listener Mr. Anthony Black of *The Love Examiner* podcast (Delightful. I’m a big fan of his on social media.) said,

My friends and I are always talking about “Instagram is ruining our lives!” We follow people who look impossibly perfect and are constantly subconsciously comparing ourselves to them. It’s like we’re not judging ourselves in a mirror anymore; we’re judging our entire social media narrative on the number of likes we receive.

I think that’s a really good point. I think we all kind of do that. I mean, amen to that! Renee is like, “Just follow dogs.” If you can get away with it, it seems like a fine tactic. Maybe I should just open a secret account, and it won’t be called Schmodvord Von Podblast. I really might just open an account that just follows dogs. First letter we’re going to start out with is from Radha Vakharia who says,

I think confidence makes people beautiful. If you feel good about the way you look it shows, and smiles are contagious. You might even cause an epidemic. It’s kind of like wearing nice underwear for a big day even though you know no one’s going to see it.

We’ll have that as our starting thought. Thank you, Radha! Confidence: it’s like cool underpants! I wanted to hear from some people who love makeup and who like beauty culture. Kimberly Hudson wrote in and said,

Heey, I’m a 43-year-old lady (no brag) who’s been on a mild, year-long skin-care bender. I have sheet masks, clay masks, toners, serums, stuff with snail glue and vitamin C and maybe gold. It makes me feel better about aging since I can’t stop that from happening and Botox creeps me out. I’m a fan of self-esteem, and I think everyone is easier to exist with when they like themselves.

Paula Herrera says,

Well, I have a lot of strong feelings about the pressure how women have to wear makeup in society, like how a woman wearing makeup will probably get a job over a woman not wearing

makeup. Ugh! I do like the feeling makeup can get me. I work from home and I rarely have to go out and see anyone during the workday, but I still love getting ready in the morning. I don't go full glam or anything, but my mood definitely changes when I finish up my morning routine with some fresh mascara. Just my quick thoughts this morning while I get ready for the day.

Caitlyn wrote in and said,

I think there are a lot of unreasonable standards out there for women and men. On the other hand, I love makeup. My collection is out of control. I've been known to do a full face of glam makeup by myself at home on a Tuesday night before bed. Of course, it always works best when you aren't leaving the house. What annoys me most is the assumption that people think I feel like I have to wear makeup. I don't. 80% of the time I look like a swamp monster. Doesn't bother me, but I love the creativity and the artistry that can go into makeup. I guess I just wished that people realized that there's room for everyone to just do what they want and what makes them happy. Sorry if this is rambley, it's past my bedtime.

Sarah Nichelle wrote in and said,

Though I don't wear makeup very often myself, I absolutely love it and admire artists who can create everything from beautiful, glamorous looks to scary illusions, and even special effects makeup with normal, everyday beauty products. Shout out to Glam and Gore on YouTube. Hey, Girl!

I spend a lot on my own makeup because it's fun to play with, and who doesn't like to pretend they're making a makeup tutorial in the bathroom by themselves at 3a.m? No? Just me? Okay. I can't speak to anyone else, but in my experience as a bisexual girl who is moderately open about her sexuality, I do find that some people are surprised to learn of my orientation and that I don't look gay. It happens. I don't get offended by the phrasing myself. Signed: Your weird stepdaughter who will put any type of leftovers into a tortilla.

Best sign-off! Mads Clement wrote in and they said,

Beauty standards have messed me up for a long time. I'm not traditionally attractive. In fact, I don't identify with either side of the gender binary. Never in my life have I fit the mold of a beautiful person. Mainstream beauty culture for a long time destroyed me. It still does; however, I found a lot of comfort in makeup. It's expensive. I think that the beauty industry preys on people's perceived flaws, and don't even get me started on racism, but makeup is an artform and I think it's great. Humans like to paint things on our body. That's cool! I'm glad we've continued that tradition. However, I don't think there should be an obligation to wear it because you're imperfect without it. Makeup is art. It's a choice and people are beautiful with and without it.

I was curious what dudes thought of beauty culture. I was like, "Yo, dudes! Write in!!" Olaf wrote in and said,

I generally like what women can do and bring out with makeup. I partly don't want to know how much time is spent on something and the discomforts that go with it. I can only hope it's worth it and women gain what they would like to gain. If I look at it from the perspective of

what sparked love, that was never looks. I also was never attracted to the more beautiful girlfriend. Bye, Olaf.

So, Olaf is like, "Don't tell me how much it hurts. I don't want to know. Also, "If I love you, I love you." Okay. Jeffrey wrote in and said,

As a cis, straight, older, mid-forties, white male, there have traditionally been few socially acceptable modes of physical adornment. One of the few ways I can adorn myself with something (in a word) pretty, and have that adornment not carry with it a lot of societal implications about my sexuality and personality is via tattoos, in my experience. Take for example: Flowers. Pretty flowers. Right now, I have on my body four colorful, pretty, peony flowers and one large rose bloom.

So sometimes dudes want to have pretty stuff and they're like [*puffed up and manly*], "Well, okay, I inked it into my skin," which is also cool and painful, but not as painful as waxing. Rob wrote in and said,

Newly single, again. I've been working the various dating apps and I'm finding it a bit disheartening when a woman's posting specifies, "Only guys over 5-10," or "No one under 6ft." Is this height shaming/discrimination or am I being too sensitive? I'd have no issue with someone being taller than me. Certainly with the whole body-acceptance thing, can judging someone by their height still be okay?

That's a great question, Rob! I don't know. I definitely think you should talk to other dudes about it. And ladies, if you're hearing this, just think: you could be missing out on really cool ologites on those apps. You could be like, "You want to go on a bug hunt with me?" Think about it! Joe wrote in and said,

As a man, I would really like to have more style choices and have more information available on how to take care of my skin and things like that. On the flip side, I really like for women not to feel like they need to compare themselves to impossible beauty standards. In closing, I'd really like for everyone to be who they want to be. Everyone should be allowed to be comfortable with the way they look.

Yes, Joe! Joe for President! Agreed! Russell wrote in and said,

The closest I came to understanding my ego came in college when the website Hot or Not was unleashed on the world. I uploaded a few photos and got rated as high as 7.5. When my ratings fell into the mid-6 range, I felt vaguely upset but also ashamed of being upset.

Bob wrote in and said,

Being a straight man, most beauty standards don't apply often. That being said, I think women place far too much emphasis on their beauty routines. Most men I know are really indifferent as to a woman's appearance as long as she's clean!

And I wrote back, "Hah! Good point! How do you define 'clean', Bob?" And he said,

At the moment my standards have been adjusted to just not having noticeable body odor.

So if you don't stink, hit up Bob! Dylan wrote in and said,

I've had a bit of debate over whether or not I should send this, but in the words of everyone about to do something wrong: Fuck it! In high school I always went to school with perfect hair and I had an emo-fringe.

We have all had dark fashion moments. I got a letter from Mike who said,

I have a lot of conflicting thoughts about beauty culture. For reference I'm a cis, hetero, middle-aged, mixed-race, Polish-Mi'kmaq dude. I think, like everyone, I've been insecure about my appearance both for my ability to attract women and because my looks favor the Native side of my family, and I'm often treated like an outsider and suspected by the white majority community.

That sucks and I'm sorry. He writes,

Before she had cancer, my wife, Melissa, was an attorney. She had to be extremely careful about what she wore and how she presented herself. She had to look professional, to appear confident but not too soft or feminine because she needs to control her often violent, sexist, and crude male clients. Since she's been sick, she's lost her hair twice from radiation, gained a lot of weight from steroids, and uses a walker to get around. She's still the most beautiful woman in the world to me. Despite my statements to the contrary, she still feels that people are judging her for how she looks. This is the harm I think our society's emphasis on beauty does. She is the strongest, smartest, kindest woman I've ever known, but she's been conditioned to feel embarrassed that she doesn't look better while fighting a terminal brain tumor.

Thank you for sending that, Mike, and please hug Melissa for me. So yes, plenty of you guys wrote in to me saying that you hate beauty culture. You feel oppressed and pissed by it. I related to so many of these which is why I'm going read them! You can hear what other listeners had to say about this. I got a letter from Dr. Trista Edwards who says,

I feel like I'm spending a ridiculous amount of time discussing with other female friends how much we hate our own appearance and how much we spend on trying to change, accept, and improve our appearance. Intelligently I know it's all BS - patriarchy, capitalism, yada, yada, yada, so I still don't know why I spend so much time hating on myself and my appearance. It's so ingrained that the mind beasties always seem to win out over what I actually value. I will believe in the narrative that without makeup I look old or tired, unkempt. All of which I know is completely absurd. I feel like I can go on endlessly about this, but I love that a growing media presence about gender fluidity is changing the makeup game. I love that women and folks of varying sizes, body types, color, and variabilities are changing the standards of beauty, but we all have a long way to go. Mostly with acceptance for ourselves.

Lisa wrote in and said,

There is the general resentment with how long it takes me to get ready for a day of work. I try to move faster but somehow it always takes me about an hour to get ready. Meanwhile, my spouse is up and ready in five minutes! That means he ends up with more free time to do his own things while my workday is extended.

Oh my word!

Over the years I have slowly been able to break free, and now I can go on makeup-free vacations and weekends which is such a freeing move! The time back and the break from the stupid routine is so excellent. Definitely wish there was more parity on this. I would love to see more men wearing makeup and women more free to wear less.

Stephanie wrote in and echoed that and said,

I wish it was more acceptable to not wear makeup. It's frustrating because I just don't care about makeup and I can't be bothered to put any on most days. I remember reading several articles about women who don't wear makeup were seen as less professional at work than women who do wear makeup. On the other hand, for women who do wear makeup, if you wear too much, apparently that can limit you professionally. It seems like we're damned if we do, damned if we don't.

Anonymous wrote in and said,

I'm a 41-year-old cis, asexual, white woman who has gained and kept about 50lbs over my doctor's preferred weight from depression treatment. I'm very uncomfortable appearing in public the way I am most comfortable in private. Does that make sense?

Yeah, girl! You're talking to someone who's not wearing a bra and my hair is in a bun right now. So, yes! Anonymous threw out some math (and this is pretty genius). She says,

My perception is that people who present as female are allowed one deviation from the ideal. You are deemed attractive or acceptable with fuzzed hair if you're also able-bodied, thin, symmetrical, and dressed richly, but you can dress like a slob if you're thin, white, young, pretty, etc.

Great point! Another Anonymous wrote in and said,

I'm in my mid 30s and terrified of getting older. I feel my value depreciating as I age. It's wrong and sad and uncool. I try so hard every day to look pretty with makeup, hair, nice outfits. I spend my money on products intended to reduce signs of aging. I keep the grays covered. I shave my legs and my junk. It's a lot of work and I'm still not what one would consider attractive. It's hard because I know that it's what's on the inside that counts, but it is difficult not to stress about appearance in this competitive, looks-driven society.

Jocelyn wrote in and said,

I have rosacea and I hate it. I don't want to feel pressure to wear makeup when I'm at work or at the shops or something, but I usually do because it helps me feel normal. How is that right? I should be normal as I am without any additions or modifications. Sometimes I enjoy putting on makeup and going out, but some days it's a chore and I feel like I have to do it.

Jordan wrote in and said,

I'm a cis woman and I don't fit the ideal, hourglass, pear-shape mold. I've struggled with my relationship to my body. I'm very light skinned so I'm definitely privileged in that sense, but I fall prey to the Eurocentric beauty standards pushed by our society. However, until a few years ago I spent a lot of time and money on makeup and trying to change my appearance to meet

these standards. I'm not sure about how I feel about spending so much money, because while it gave me more time with myself and a comforting routine, it didn't change my relationship with myself and my appearance. I think it's down to someone's choice. Sometimes grooming can be a peaceful ritual, but it can be a symptom of being trolled or not enough as we are.

We also heard from Anne who mentioned,

I was at a family gathering a summer or two ago arguing that some new Disney movie was misogynistic, and my aunt, exasperated with my feminism and overthinking, said, "Well at least you don't have freedom pits!" At which point I raised my arms and showed her. It was complicated though. I was proud but later I couldn't help but wonder if I should be embarrassed? What do all the other family members think? Why do I feel that people feel threatened by women who don't shave?

Also, I'd like you to know that her email was titled, *Freedom Pits*. Freedom pits are a thing!! [gleefully] I'm learning so much. I got an email from Shannon who was a model who said,

When I was 16 during the modeling years, one of the things I saw up close and personal was how our bodies in advertising are just to sell a product. We are no different than a shoe rack selling high heels or a set table marketing silverware. But I also saw so many girls in my grade try to be the size of the magazine girls which is barely the point of the ads. The shoe's the point. The money's the point! The photographer probably didn't even know that girl's name. I'm sad at how much body sadness I saw in the industry, when in reality the designers don't care about anything other than how a garment falls. Models may as well be plastic.

I got a letter from a friend, Sara, who says,

As to your question: How much do I think about all this-beauty culture? All the time! I can logically look at this dilemma and say, "My appearance has zero correlation to my self-worth." I feel like this is true for everyone. Every person has an intrinsic value that has nothing to do with what they look like. However, growing up as a girl in America, the idea that what I'm worth is almost entirely based on what I look like is deeply ingrained in me. As much as I call bullshit on this idea, I can't seem to let it go. The central idea that I grapple with is: how can I feel good about my appearance when I believe feeling good about my appearance shouldn't matter?

Oh, this is a great point!

How should I treat my beauty routine when I believe it shouldn't matter? How I usually deal with this dilemma is to completely avoid it altogether. I feel so bad about the way I look that I feel like if I ignore it, I can sort of feel like it isn't there.

Part of what Sara deals with is alopecia. She says,

Part of it is comfort, too. I feel uncomfortable wearing makeup, and of course the wig is the worst. But it's more that I feel so conspicuous when I dress up. My heart hurts for my daughter that she will feel even a tenth of the pain I feel about my appearance. I'm actively working on it though. I guess I just wanted to find for myself what it means to feel beautiful and how much of a beauty routine would go into it.

Love you, Sara! I got a few other great emails from moms who had different perspectives on beauty culture after they popped out some babies. Vanessa says,

I'm a white, cis, hetero woman. Personally, my biggest struggle has been with acne. I had cystic acne so not only did it look terrible at the time, but it hurt a lot. My skin is now much better than it has ever been, but I will never get peach skin. I mostly avoid wearing makeup since my skin tends to break out more easily afterward. But since I've had kids I'm trying real hard every day to love myself just the way I am.

The most important thing for me is not deprecating myself in front of my kids, especially my daughter who is now seven years old. Her style can be pretty gender neutral, but even then, I see her giving more and more attention to how she looks. Sometimes I find it hard; she's just a kid! I don't see my boy in front of the mirror placing his hair up in the morning. He goes out the door with peanut butter up to his forehead without giving a fuck! Clearly, society is sending a toxic message to girls and women or any people identifying as women, and as a parent I sometimes feel clueless. I mean, you want your kids growing up loving themselves. You want their self-esteem to be through the roof, but yet as a 30-something adult you still struggle with all those things.

That's a great point: The idea that little dudes just leave the house, peanut butter up to their eyebrows! Don't give a fuck! Stephanie also had a different take on beauty since she became a mom. She says,

Anyway, maybe a weird take on your question. However, over the last year I've had a complete shift in how I view beauty, modesty, and the female body in general. I was raised really conservative, so very modest. Flash forward to being pregnant with my wee little babers, and having my bod wrecked by pregnancy. In case you didn't know, pregnancy is rough. Between your body taking on a completely new shape and it leaking weird fluids constantly, you don't particularly care what other people think of you. At least I didn't.

I found some hella beauty, though, in myself and the other moms around me. Like women are strong as hell. When you whip out your tit for the millionth time in public you find your own version of beauty, and you find yourself cheering for every single body type, every single expression of a strong body in whatever form that may take. Now I'm rocking literally whatever the hell I want to wear, whatever I think looks good. Stuff I was too worried to have people judge me in before.

So, moms: open in minds over here! And I heard from a lot of people who dealt not so much with beauty and makeup and lipstick and mascara but just being comfortable in their own bodies. Lisa says,

I'm a plus-size teenager who's just starting to accept her body the way it is. Looking back at photos of me I now realize how skewed my own perception of myself used to be. I saw myself as a lot bigger than I actually was because people tend to taunt you whether you have 5lbs too much or 50lbs. So, I'm hopeful for the future as I'm trying to look past society's beauty standards and find my own.

Someone named Kat wrote in and said,

I was bullied at school for being tall and skinny - what many people see as the ideal. I got teased for looking anorexic when I was just a growing, lean kid. As I got older, I gained weight and felt pressure to be skinny. I still feel these pressures today, but I try to remind myself that I should only keep myself happy and healthy and the rest doesn't matter.

Amen! Someone named Rachel wrote in and had a similar experience saying that she grew up as a skinny minny. She'd have strangers come up and ask her with concern if she was aware that she was too skinny, and she envied the hell out of 'real' women who had curves and stretchmarks and chub.

I knew our culture said that my thin frame was the ideal, but I felt like it was a false equivalent of beautiful made up by selfish, greedy people. It was a weird space to be in. Anyway, I've come to like myself a lot more in the past few years. I've accepted that my beauty doesn't have to compete with anybody else's, and I've come to realize, what bullshit a lot of beauty standards are anyway. Sorry this turned into a bit of a therapy session!

Hey, Rachel! I loved it! Thanks for opening up! Jay wrote in to say that her parents' favorite form of shit-talking when they were young was to call other people fat and ugly. She said,

My folks loved me unconditionally and never said anything unkind to me, but they were brutal about themselves and other people. And this is from two intelligent, kind, liberal people. So growing up in that environment made me self-conscious about how I look, obviously. I still don't go out in public in a sleeveless shirt because I think my arms are too fat. And the feminist in me is pissed. Who the hell cares?! Love yourself the way you are! Screw everyone else!

I'd say 90% of the time I'm there but it's tough and it pisses me off because I could be spending that energy and brainpower on about a million other things that would make me happy or make the world better. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with beauty in and of itself but it's all just so fucking exhausting. Anyway, I guess my check for our session will be in the mail. Super looking forward to this episode.

I will not invoice you. I enjoyed your emails tremendously! Liz wrote in to say,

As a person who's always had issues with my appearance, I feel like there will never be an end to my self-criticism. And although I am often satisfied with what I see in mirrors when I get ready, I always feel embarrassed when I see photos of myself. I can't tell what to believe, and I feel like I genuinely have no idea what I look like in the world.

Me personally, I always think of myself as what happens when you open your front-facing camera. That's what I think I look like all the time. Just the fact that we have front-facing cameras that open accidentally is probably ruining so many people right now at this moment. We have to just remember that that's not reality. Tracy, a guy, wrote in to say,

For me, having just come out as gay to my unsupportive parents, a few supportive family members, and a supportive close family friend, it's hard to write what I desire as I was never able to openly express who I truly am. All through high school I was athletic, so now I'm trying to get comfortable in my own skin as an openly gay male. Well, openly gay to some and still working on the rest. With love and support, Tracy.

Anonymous wrote in to say,

I would say that beauty standards are on my mind about 80% of the time. I'm a plus-size, 25-year-old woman and the world of beauty, the world in general, doesn't really cater to people like me. For most of my life I've had horrible self-esteem. My body issues tend to be very much related to modern standards of beauty and whether or not I meet them. I think we as humans have a long way to go when it comes to kinder beauty standards.

I hear you with that! I also heard from listeners who struggle with racism in the beauty industry. Anonymous wrote in and said,

Hey Alie, I wanted to give some perspective from that of a 'Halffrican'. I'm half black and half white. Being mixed is so crazy for tons of different reasons. Sometimes you're shunned for having the good hair, like Becky, by the black community. Then there's the "Of course black men date you" because I'm curvy, and "Why on Earth would a white guy date a curvy woman?" So, I've struggled with body image my whole life. And why is it socially acceptable to walk up to someone and ask, "What are you?" I'm a fucking human! You? Also, having to defend my answer that I'm mixed and people not believing - it is frustrating!

In terms of some of your other questions: I hate my hair; it's curly and I always want to straighten it. I've been leaving it natural more often, probably because of humidity. There's zero point in straightening it. I think I started straightening my hair because of society though. Curls were never a thing that was highlighted growing up. I've no time for makeup; that's a going-out thing only. These are some quick thoughts that came to my mind.

Kennedy from the Patreon page says,

It took me a long time to be happy with my curly hair. I used to straighten it every day for years when I was younger. Not only was it damaging to my hair, but I hate to think of all the time that I wasted that could have been spent elsewhere.

Kaitlin Donald says,

I second Kennedy's point about curly hair. My sister is a lawyer with very curly hair who's been told multiple times to make her hair look "a little more professional." And should I mention her hair is beautiful? She does a great job of keeping it pulled back off her face and things like that. The only issue is because it's curly.

As a person with curly hair, I get it. Audra wrote in and said,

Here are my tidbits on kalology in the adopted-from-Asia population. I'm adopted from China. I grew up in a predominantly white area, thus I grew up surrounded by American beauty standards. Being born into one culture yet raised in another results in a lot of pressure and two different sets of standards. Sometimes I feel like I'm being judged by both simultaneously. I now just do what I want, but the high school and college years weren't so great. Thanks for listening.

Thank you for listening, Audra! Huy says,

As a Vietnamese American, appearance pressure, and beauty culture's a mixed bag. I've been overweight since I was a teen. My aunts mean well, but there's always a recommendation on a diet, a tea, or an exercise routine so that I can lose weight and be pretty. My daughter is mixed

race and can pass for white. I've been asked by shop owners if I'm the babysitter, and I know she'll face hurt for not looking Asian enough. Sorry for the rant!

No apologies! Old Dad Pod is here to listen. Now, for all of this pressure to look one way and wear makeup, I also heard from a bunch of people in academia and in the STEM fields who say, "It's the opposite!" Dr. Tori Espensen says,

I'm a neuroscientist, or a psychopathologist, if you will. As a woman in STEM, I feel like there are the same pressures on appearance you see in the 'real' world, except they're flipped! I like to wear dresses, jewelry, and makeup, and I found that having a traditionally feminine appearance and putting effort into your appearance discredits you and leads to judgement. People I meet are quick to tell me I don't look like a scientist. I've heard faculty members speaking poorly of women who put effort in their appearance. It's important to note that this feedback comes from both men and women, and it's a bizarre, flipped, twilight zone of what we currently think in terms of women's beauty standards.

I heard that from Jordan too, who says,

Given my experience in the engineering field, I've never experienced any kind of expectation for women to wear makeup at work.

I heard from another female scientist who says,

Throughout my time in science I had to balance that impossible, no-right-answer dilemma of looking good but not too good. Particularly because of the young scientists, so much depends on your ability to get old, white men to tell you things. They have to be interested and willing to talk to you and teach you stuff, but not so interested that they get handsy.

Sam wrote in and said,

I've never cared too much about my appearance, instead being the sort of person who'd rather sacrifice makeup application time in the morning for sleep. This has worked out for me because I'm an academic scientist. Often, I notice that there's a sort of reverse beauty standard effect in academia. If someone, a woman especially, takes what is perceived as too much time or care on her appearance, often people conclude that she must be compensating for poor research.

[*incredulously*] Can you believe that?!? Jordan wrote in to say,

As an engineer, I do not hesitate to show up to work makeupless if I don't feel like wearing it that day.

I have a friend, Dr. Crystal Dilworth, who is a neuroscientist who did an entire TED talk in very bright high heels just to prove that women in STEM can also be girly if they want. I will link it in the show notes. So clearly, beauty culture is confusing. We hear, "You have to look glamorous and perfect." In some cases, we also hear, "Don't look too glamorous or else no will have any faith in your intelligence." It's a complete and total mindfuck! I heard from some really wonderful trans listeners. I feel super privileged to get their voices in here. Tay wrote in and said,

As a recently out and recently transitioning trans man, I've been conflicted about the old beauty habits when I presented as a femme woman. While on principle I support men wearing makeup, if I do wear makeup or reveal any of my girly habits, people misgender me more often. I'm still really into makeup and skin care and all that, and sometimes I still put on my whole face, but it's been difficult dealing with the constraints of traditional masculinity.

I also heard from Jake, who is a non-binary trans man, who says,

I'm an electrologist. (Ooo, an ologist!) I remove hair with a cool machine that zaps people's pores, so it would seem like I'm all about beauty, right? But it's actually the opposite. I hate beauty culture and the expectation for women to be hairless. I hate that there are multiple billion-dollar industries devoted to creating and then profiting off insecurities. I'm not against people wanting to feel beautiful, I'm against the industries that have taken a financial incentive to make people feel ugly.

All that gets a little bit more complicated when it comes to trans people, and that's why I remove hair. Because for some trans people, hair removal isn't just about beauty, it's a dysphoria and a safety issue. I'm a non-binary trans man and all of my clients are trans women. The worst beauty standard specific to trans people, in my opinion, is the expectation to 'pass', or look exactly like cis people. It ranges from easy to impossible to achieve.

But even if it's easy, I wish it wasn't necessary. A lot of trans women have facial hair that they wish wasn't there. It makes a big quality-of-life improvement when I get rid of it. One thing I can comment on, from personal, is the terrible expectation for women to be underweight. Being seen as a guy has been a huge relief, not just for my dysphoria but also being allowed to be bigger.

Jake says that they struggled with diets as a kid and went on to say,

There are many people involved in creating and marketing these diets that have destroyed my life and health and the lives of tons of other people. And that's my main beef with the beauty industry; it's hurting people. I love the art side, but the dark side is much larger and way more profitable.

Anonymous wrote in and said,

Hey, okay, so I guess my main thing I want to say is I'm a trans, masculine, Korean person adopted by white people. My identity is complicated to say the least, and western culture definitely feminizes Asian men. The examples of Asian men considered attractive that I see in media are, like, K-pop stars. As an Asian person assigned female at birth, it often feels hopeless. It's a really hard thing to navigate as I'm trying to present myself in a masculine way. I guess that's all I have to say. Cheers!

Cheers back at ya! And thank you for emailing me from your vacation. Anna also wrote in and said,

A bit about me - I'm a full-time trans woman. I'm married to a cis woman who's simply the greatest. I've been on hormone therapy for about six months now. I don't pass as female on any day, really, but I do what I can. Beauty standards is a tricky one for me. They're very intertwined with my transition and self-perception. They are all at once positive and negative. I spend a lot of time occupied with beauty standards, sometimes painfully so. I'm always

comparing my face and my body to cis-gendered women seeing how I size up to conventional female beauty. I will get made up when I'm alone because I feel more feminine and happier when I see myself in the mirror.

I also wish it was more accepted for cis men to wear makeup and just generally for people to be who they want to be. I really think, now and historically, the trans and the queer community has opened doors for cis-gendered and hetero people to say, "Is this stereotype of what I'm supposed to look like or what I'm supposed to behave like, is it really fitting well for me?" And so, I just want to say a big thanks to the LGBTQ+ community for opening those doors.

I heard from Corey, who says,

I'm a white, asexual, aromantic, cis woman in my 30s and I've never really cared about makeup. I do wish that makeup and hair weren't so gendered. I feel like I'm not always taken seriously in business environments because I don't wear makeup, my hair isn't done. A beauty regime is something you do for yourself, so mind your own business everyone!

An anonymous woman also wrote in and said,

*For a long time I was questioning whether or not to describe myself as asexual, or 'ace'. The people I did talk to about being asexual often told me that I couldn't make that decision because I'm a plus-size woman and thus men weren't interested in me. My sexuality apparently had to be tied to how beautiful and attractive other people found me. The thing is, being asexual is about the amount of sexual attraction and/or desire **you** feel and experience. It is distinctly not about the amount of sexual attraction or desire other people feel or experience towards you. That takes away my agency over my own body, takes away the idea that women are sexual beings without men around, and disregards that plus-size women experience attraction and desire and are in good relationships. It's pretty offensive.*

Very good point. Those people suck. Wesley who signs himself as a Baby-Lawyer-To-Be says,

I'm a cis male who's recently lost some weight. I'm 23. I'm young, however I have some stretch marks. Stretch marks are something I feel gay men hide a lot. A bunch of us have them, but no one talks about them or shows them.

So, Wesley, Baby-Lawyer-To-Be, the more you talk about them, the less people don't talk about them. Does that make sense? Yeah. Way to go.

I really loved reading all of your letters, and I'm really glad that I put out this episode because giving voice to all of your thoughts and your different perspectives is so important to understanding that our specific insecurities might be different, but they all affect us in, really, the same way. We all question whether or not we're good enough. If you listen to the fearology episode with Mary Poffenroth that was one of her big tenets. We just worry we're not good enough, and that's what these beauty standards do to us.

I really also just wanted to put my thanks out to the LGBTQ+ community. I said this in the gynecology episode, but you are all out on the front lines in terms of changing the way we look at super-binary gender norms. I think they hurt us a lot. And not only can we all learn about being who we truly are, in accepting yourselves, you're also helping other people accept themselves. So thank you for that. One of the last emails I'll read is from a white, cis woman named Alyssa who says,

I want to tell you what happened when I started to watch RuPaul's Drag Race with my kids. It was my birthday. I really wanted to watch it, so I let my kids watch along with me even knowing there would be a lot of swearing. This first episode and the rest of the season that we watched together sparked some really important and interesting conversation about beauty, appearance, gender, sexuality.

When we watched drag queens get dolled up, we had a conversation about how boys and girls don't have to follow rules about how people think they should dress or behave. When we saw the drag queens put on makeup, we talked about how makeup can be a way to have fun and express our unique personalities. When we listened to the drag queens talk about their sexuality and rejection from their families, it started a great conversation about accepting people in themselves no matter who they choose to love.

Within a few weeks of watching these episodes, my son decided to dress up as Ruth Bader Ginsburg for a class presentation on his hero. My daughter signed up to be the only girl on her T-ball team and now proudly proclaims that blue is her favorite color. While I can't prove it, I suspect that their choices were due in large part to Drag Race and the conversations that it prompted. And, of course, I'm attaching pictures.

She attached pictures of her son dressed as Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her daughter on a T-ball team, and I'm literally crying right now. She says,

PS: I told my kids about slug penises today and they laughed their asses off.

Alyssa, cool mom, dude! In closing I wanted to read an email from a listener named Tara Schuyl [phonetic] who had written me one email about her conflicts with beauty culture and then sent a follow-up email called "Beauty Thoughts, Part Two":

I realized that I forgot to mention to you what I find beautiful. The Earth. Wild animals. Nature. David Attenborough - my crush for life. Love on others. The eyes of everything living. Whales. Lions. Elephants. Rhinos. Frogs. Spiders are a phenomenal creature. Birds. I want to be a bald eagle in my string-theory universe. Trees are freaking amazingly beautiful. Innocence. Freedom is awesome and beautiful. The Hubble Telescope and the pictures we make with it. Pictures of the Earth are so beautiful it hurts. Camping is beautifully gross in temporary spurts. People who are kind. Science can be beauty. DNA is freakishly gorgeous. Your podcast is beautiful because of you and your guests. Have a beautiful day. Thanks for asking us beautiful fans questions.

Thank you, listeners for answering them. My aim with this is to really make everyone feel seen and heard and included, so if I said anything in language that was wrong, please let me know because I want to do better. I hope I covered all the bases and thank you guys for listening. Thank you for being so curious and kind. I really love making this and I can't tell you how much *Ologies* has meant to me in terms of learning about you guys and learning about myself and learning about the world. So go out and ask smart people stupid questions and make sure to appreciate the body that you're in because old Dad Ward von Podcast thinks it's dope as fuck!

Berbye!

Transcribed by Tina Eastman

For comments and inquires on this or other transcripts, please contact OlogiteEmily@gmail.com