

Marriage & Tackling Tough Conversations - Jonathan Van Ness - Fidelity Modern Life

Transcript

Jonathan Van Ness: As many people as there are in the world, there are that many unique ways for us to be in relationship with other people. Everyone's lived experience is just so incredibly different.

Jamila Souffrant: Hey everyone. This is Modern Life, a brand-new podcast from Fidelity Investments here to help you live your best life. I'm your host Jamila Souffrant.

Life is full of big decisions. At some point we all start to ask ourselves, do we want to share our lives with another person? If so, how do we find that right person? And when is the right time? There are many questions that go into the decision to get married, everything from whether to have kids to how money will be earned, saved, and spent.

I'm excited to be joined today by someone who recently got married and face these very questions. Jonathan Van Ness. They're best known as the grooming expert on the hit TV show, *Queer Eye*. They also host the podcast, *getting curious with Jonathan Van Ness*. And they're a touring standup comedian and a hairstylist working in both New York and Los Angeles.

I'll be talking with Jonathan about their marriage, the decisions they made to get there and what lessons we all can learn from their experience. Jonathan Van Ness, I'm very excited to be talking to you today on this episode of Modern Life, about the topic of marriage.

Jonathan: Thank you for having me.

Jamila: This episode is all about marriage and you're such a great guest because you actually got married during the pandemic. But before we get there, let's take it back, how did you and your husband meet?

Jonathan: Mark and I met - not to quote *Golden Girls* but picture it - it was in 2019. And I think Mark slid into my DM's and said something to the effect of like, "I like that jumper, where did you get it from?" And I was like, "oh my gosh, he's the cutest guy I've ever seen."

But I didn't say that. I think I said "COS" cause it's from like COS and then which I think is, COS and then from there we just like had one little baby date in New York. And then later on, we hung out further when I went to the United Kingdom on my comedy tour in 2019. I was there for three weeks. And we ended up hanging out, like basically every day. And, um, I quickly realized that he was someone who I just hadn't like, I just really, really liked a lot right away.

Jamila: That's wonderful. Shout out to him for taking the initiative and sliding into your DM's.

Jonathan: It wasn't like hard core initiative of it. It was like, "you know, I like your sweater." Like "I like your jumper, you know?" So, it was like, it was like a moderate initiative, but it worked. It totally worked.

Jamila: Yeah. So, what was it about him that made you know that he was the one?

Jonathan: I don't know, we have so much fun together and...I felt like I didn't have to like be someone else. I felt like I didn't have to be on. I felt like he was someone who just really appreciated where I was, wherever I was. He's really like a nonjudgmental person. And so, I just really quickly felt like just really loved and accepted by him. Which is such like a cool thing for that to even happen.

Jamila: Beautiful. And what made you guys decide to get married during the pandemic?

Jonathan: Well, because I think, you know, we realized that like, if this is something that we really wanted to try, like long-term, we needed to do it. That was really kind of what our only option was for us to be able to stay together. I think when we first started talking about it, we were like, "oh my gosh," like, we weren't ready to be long distance again. We weren't ready to like, take that step backwards and like not know when we were going to ever be together again.

And so, we went for it, but I think within like a week we were like, "wow. It just, it really felt right." And it felt like something that we, we were really excited to do it.

Jamila: Wow, that sounds lovely. Now, what was your perception of marriage growing up? Did you always know that you wanted to get married?

Jonathan: Well, when I was growing up, I didn't know if I would ever be allowed to be married. It was like illegal in the United States. I identified as gay and never thought that we would have marriage equality in the U S. It felt like something that really probably wouldn't happen in my lifetime. It's how far we've come is really amazing because I really truly never thought that I would be allowed to be married. But it's definitely something that I desperately wanted. And I think when I was growing up, like I wanted to have that relationship. I wanted to have like that movie marriage, I wanted like "My Best Friend's Wedding," you know. I wanted to be Cameron Diaz. I really wanted that. I love that movie so much, I love the Cubs. I love nachos. If you guys are like, why did he just say that then you haven't seen "My Best Friend's Wedding." Okay. And it's amazing. So, I always really loved the idea of it. And I'm just so happy that it's been something that I've been allowed to do, and that the universe allowed me to be able to have this in my life. It's just been so incredible.

Jamila: Now the pandemic did either bring people together and make them realize they wanted to get married or maybe it, you know, made them realize they didn't want to be together.

What would you say were some reasons financial or otherwise, that you considered before you got married? And what would you say to someone who is considering marriage that they should talk about with their partner in advance?

Jonathan: Well, I think kids and career and, in our case pets and, I mean, obviously finances are a really big thing and I think having clear communication is so important before you're making like huge, big life decisions.

And I think one thing that I know that I can speak up, you know, at least from our experience is that it just feels so awkward when you're going to just start having this conversation. But I just also know that it feels so good, like the clarity and like the direction. You know, my therapist calls it feedback. When you have these conversations, it might feel awkward, but really like the information that you're getting back from these conversations is really just feedback. There's a lot of clarity and power that comes with, with the feedback that you get from those conversations.

Jamila: Do you remember having your conversations with Mark about finances, the pets, or the important things that really mattered to you both and how you approached it?

Jonathan: I guess you could say like direct or clunky cause it's kind of both. I'm just kind of like, "OK, so we are going to talk about this now." And then, you know, we kind of do. You know, like I said earlier, Mark is like one of the most non-judgmental people. He's like really go with the flow. He's really understanding. I think for us personally, like once I decide something or like once I set my mind to something, I feel like I am really focused on that. Whereas like Mark, he is too, but I feel like it takes him a little bit longer to like, be like, "okay, I'm into that." Like, I'm like. I have my whole Erin Brockovich case laid out.

I'm like, these are the pros. These are the cons. You know, this is totally hexavalent chromium three. Just kidding. I don't know why I'm full of all these like movie references today. Let's just be honest. My life is defined by like nineties and early two thousands movie quotes.

Mark likes to kind of like, really think about it and be more discerning, which has been so good for me because it's the opposite of me. So, I feel like we're a really good balance for each other.

I think, especially like when I was younger, I kind of put off some of those conversations cause I was scared of like maybe hearing something that you are scared to hear, but I do think that with this pandemic, it has kind of laid bare like

you're either going to go for it or you're not.

Jamila: Yeah. And I mean, I know not everyone is in the public eye like you, but what you said is so relatable, you know, especially having partners who communicate differently and coming to a compromise or getting to the same page. And so, when it comes to big topics like career and finances, what are some just tips based on your experience with navigating this with Mark, do you have, for people who need to get on the same page?

Jonathan: I am definitely not perfect, so I love that. You're just like caveating that with like your experience because no one does it like perfectly. Like I said, I'm kind of really direct. I feel like I kind of like barrel into the conversation. I think ultimately compassion for yourself and for your partner is always so important because I remember I read in this book. It was about like yoga and vegetarianism. But this author said, "You know, we're all doing the best we can with what we know." And I think that in relationships, it's just the same way. So, we are all really doing the best we can with what we know. Life is stressful and we're all going through so much and we are all trying to do the best we can, but sometimes I can get reactive, I can get defensive. And I think when I try to be more compassionate with myself and with whoever I'm in conversation with, or relationship with, it yields like better results.

Jamila: Yeah. And I mean, you talk about, you're bringing two separate people with two separate backgrounds and experiences and the way that they were raised or how things were talked about in their family. So, have you saw based on your upbringing and Mark's upbringing that the differences or similarities have helped you come together or you're finding ways to bridge the gap based on your past?

Jonathan: I just got to meet all of my in-laws for the first time. And it was so amazing because I've face-timed with everyone, but never met everyone in real life, obviously through the lockdown. So, I just got to meet like, Mark's grandparents and his mom and dad and his step mom and his mom's partner. And I'm like, "oh, like they have the same facial expressions or like mannerisms," or like just seeing how they may be in conversation with someone else. And you're like, "Oh, I see that. in my husband and it was just so. interesting and cute." I think one thing that's really important for us, like I love therapy. I think therapy is so important. I think that, you know, learning your relationship with yourself is really difficult and that's been key to my recovery, like just in my life.

So, I'm a huge proponent of like therapy, both for yourself and if you're in a relationship. Like I love couples' therapy. I obviously never really got a chance to delve into it to this extent is I have with Mark because it's been like my longest and most committed relationship that I've ever had in my life.

But yeah, I mean, we love therapy. We do couples therapy and that's really helpful for us to have like a safe space where we can talk about our upbringings and ways that our families have totally been different it's really been so good for us.

Jamila: You talked about this storybook image or idea of a wedding and marriage that you had. And now there is like a new standard. The world is changing. We have a far way to go, but what for you is the new definition that you've learned to see and that you want other people to see when it comes to marriage and weddings.

Jonathan: Marriage is something that is for you and your partner to decide because you want to be in this relationship. And it is really a relationship that you and this other person are deciding to be in. And it is just such a special and beautiful bond to be able to enter into. I know that for Mark and I, like we took so seriously and take so seriously. And it's just such a beautiful experience to be able to share that with someone. And I think as long as you're doing it because you really want to and you feel this is a relationship that you would invest in for the rest of your life, then you should go for it, but it's not for your family and it's not for society. It's not for like a pressure. And I want everyone to have that freedom and autonomy and making what can be such a beautiful choice, for so many people.

Jamila: When it comes to the topic of money and finances, that's usually like the, one of the biggest reasons for discontentment or just arguments with couples.

So, when it did come to not just making the decision to get married, but then afterwards, like what happens after you get married, how do you talk about money? How do you manage it? How do you spend it? Are these things you intentionally talked about or have they evolved and come out over time?

Jonathan: There's certain things that we definitely talk about ahead of time. I mean like big life decision things we are talking about ahead of time. You know, where are we going to live? If we're making like a big investment in something like, that's definitely like an all of us conversation and obviously we have seven kids, our two dogs and our five cats. We all gotta take everybody's temperature, see how everybody's feeling about it. If it's me like impulse buying a piece of who knows what it is, maybe there's a new bathrobe, maybe it's a toaster. Mark is like really into gardening. So, like we love a tree. I love like a new tree, a nice cool bush, like literally. So those types of things, we don't really talk about that. I do love to like be a little bit of an impulse shopper. I'm also really into like mutual aid and like helping folks that need it.

So, if it's stuff, that's not a gigantic investment, I kind of do what I want. You know, I'm like an independent person. Mark's an independent person. So, if it's smaller stuff, we don't really talk about it cause I feel that's like a micromanagement thing that I think would get on our nerves, you know? But if it's big stuff, we talk about it a lot.

Jamila: Well, and I mean, I like that because you'll hear, sometimes people give advice, you know, you should make all decisions together, big, or small, and that might just not work for everyone. Right? And so I think there's so many people who are watching other people's lives, maybe on social media and they're trying to model what they think they should be doing.

And so, for someone right now, who's saying, all right, I wanna take the leap into marriage, or I am married, but we need to talk about certain things or come to a decision together - what advice would you give them around tackling these difficult conversations?

Jonathan: What you just touched on is so important that what we think about how other people do it or how things should be done, I think is such a damaging and like corrosive thought as many people as there are in the world, there are that many unique ways for us to be in relationship with other people.

So, every relationship is totally different. And what works for one couple may not work and will not work for the next couple right next to them because everyone's lived experience is just so incredibly different. So, I think knowing what really feels right and what doesn't feel right, that is really an intuitive thing. Like if you have maybe had a conversation or done something in a relationship that just doesn't feel right, you know what does not feel right. For me, I usually feel it in my throat or my stomach, a thought will come up get like a tightness somewhere where I'm just like, "Ugh." If you have felt like you could have done better, or maybe you felt like you got taken like advantage of and the other person could have done better here, that feeling will manifest itself. And so being able to talk about that and your relationship is just so important. I actually think that it's part of why my relationship with Mark like kind of works is cause like, when I'm worried about something to have a conversation, he's just, like I said, the most open non-judgmental person which is so important because I got a lot of stuff honey, you know? I got a lot of stuff and he's very like open and cool about whatever.

Jamila: I mean, that's great. It sounds like too, you know, there's so much that you have to think about when it comes to finding the right partner and making that decision. But sometimes it is, like you said, it's like in your gut, you feel it, you just know, and with COVID, you know, obviously that has put pressure on people or have shown people if they want to be together or not, but even without COVID, you know, relationships and marriage, they were difficult. So, what advice do you have for people who are watching you and are listening and saying, you know, I think I want to get married or, you know, this is the next step, but they're unsure, what would you want them to keep in mind?

Jonathan: One thing that I've learned in my life and also through therapy is that clarity is a really good indicator that you are making like a self-led decision that like you're really making a choice that like is from your, like most aligned part of who you are.

So, if you don't have a lot of clarity around what you you're wanting, if you're really. back and forth. At least for me with getting married there was never like a, "uhhhh.", like I knew that I wanted that. I was like super-duper clear. And so just because if you aren't that clear, that is fine. It just means that you need to do things in your life that bring you more clarity. And for me, what brings me clarity is like moving my body, it's like gymnastics, it's figure skating. It's like lifting some

weights. It's like going on a fast walk. Meditation. Sometimes it's like a needle point moment. And it might not come in like one day, but if you're lacking clarity, I wouldn't make any like huge decisions like marriage. And I think actually for me and my case with Mark, it was like right before the pandemic, had gotten to this point where I was like, "Oh my God, I think he's the one." And then the pandemic happened and then I was like. "Oh, my God. Get over here. We're never gonna see each other again. Oh my God." And like he literally got on like the first to last flight like out of London, if not like the last flight out of London. I was clear beforehand, but then the pandemic happened, and I was like, "Oh my God, I don't want to lose you." And we've weathered so much since then. We're actually going to be coming up on our like two-year anniversary of dating really soon.

Jamila: So, you just brought up you guys have been together for two years, but now you've been married for a bit of time of that. So, has marriage changed anything? Like, do you feel a difference in your relationship since you took that step?

Jonathan: I definitely feel like a sense of like more security. But I feel like we both do really respect each other. And I feel like that has been something that has not changed. At least in our case, I feel like, we keep prioritizing each other, even like more because we keep learning more about each other. And not to say that things are always perfect because they're not, and sometimes it is like a, you know, three steps forward, one step back sort of thing. Um, cause a lot of times your relationships do heal through like disruption, like through the healing of those disruptions, but I just feel like it's been just getting better and better and better. which is just so fun.

Jamila: One of the last questions I have for you is what's the best unexpected thing that you have experienced since being married?

Jonathan: Probably having like a whole new family and culture and like whole person's experience in that culture with that family to like, get to know. Cause UK is like different honey and like, it's just like a whole other different place. And his family's so amazing and also my unyielding obsession with English breakfasts, I love it so much. And Mark makes like a really good one.

Jamila: Nice. Nice. Okay. So, our listeners would love to know what's going on with you. What can they expect from you in the near future?

Jonathan: Um, my biggest thing going on right now that I'm so excited about is we're launching my haircare brand. It's actually like my haircare company. It's called JVN hair. It's launching at the end of August and we're so excited. It's going to be in Sephora, United States and Canada. and There'll be more to come, but I'm just so proud of it. and my podcast every week, you know, we're working so hard on that. We're constantly proud of the episodes that we're covering and the folks that we're getting to meet there. And my YouTube has also been a really fun new foray where like, I really kind of miss doing hair in the salon and like getting to do hair color and like cutting.

And, and I missed it. So, the YouTube stuff has been just kind of like a fun, new creative outlet as well.

Jamila: Well, congrats in advance on the success of your brand launch, and Jonathan, it was a pleasure speaking to you about this topic of marriage, and I'm sure our listeners will gain a lot from this.

Jonathan: Thank you so much.

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