



The Millennial Life

podcast

with Liz Higgins

Episode 20: What Are Your Relationship Reference Points?

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all, Liz Higgins here! Welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:34):

Hi, everybody! Thanks for tuning in today. I want to talk with you about checking your reference points for a great relationship. And really, this is me asking you what has shaped the narrative that you hold about what a great relationship looks like. I think it's very safe to say in our modern world and this millennial generation, we want... We want a great relationship. We want an EPIC relationship. One that brings us friendship, partnership, companionship, passion, desire, flair, security, all the things. Just all the things. And I think it's really important to have this conversation about what are the avenues, the areas, the things in your life, the people in your life, that have shaped the narrative you hold about what this kind of relationship should look like for you. I always find it really fascinating when we work with premarital couples in our therapy practice in Dallas and do exercises around expectations that they have around relationships.

Liz Higgins (01:42):

And I'll even speak on this topic sometimes with groups of couples. And when we get to the conversation about expectations, it's really fascinating to hear the things that people are pretty aware that they're carrying into their relationship templates and the things that they are completely unaware of that have been those very insidious but, like, consistent messages they were given about what this great relationship should look like. So I want to explore that, and I have a few different realms to talk about, starting with one that probably seems pretty obvious, which is movies, media. The exposure that we as millennials have had from a very young age to some of those shows... By the way, side note for anybody that's watched *One Division* - I love that it's kinda taken this whole format of, you know, going old school and throwing back to some of those, like, "sitcom settings" that remind us how, not too long ago, we looked at marriage and family life.

Liz Higgins (02:46):

So really good show and, and y'all should check it out. But for me, um, lots of things in this realm shaped the fantasy that I had about marriage. Um, certainly the romantics of it all. Disney, I mean, come on! Like movies, media, all these pseudo-relationships that I was looking at that were fueled by that journey of discovering each other, getting to each other... Nothing that really defined what, what would their relationship look like after that moment? Like after the happily ever after, THEN what happens? And I wasn't even thinking about that! I wasn't even looking for that or asking that question growing up, of course. But now, as I reflect back and I have this

awareness of, wow, how much of that media and idealized, um, search for passion that I was so getting in, you know, it, it makes me think about that.

Liz Higgins (03:46):

It makes me wonder how much that influenced what I felt like I needed in my partnership and in my relationship, because I think those very questions are the things that ended up giving me a lot of anxiety when I was engaged. It was like, okay. The passionate piece was there, the pining for each other, the journey to each other, it was all happening. It was all exciting. But I started thinking about like, everything that would happen after that and feeling like there wasn't... There weren't major and frequent messages and reference points for me around, like, what that piece of 'and then forever' would look like. So I think the, the getting to each other, the happily ever after of movies, media, TV, that's the easy part. Honestly, that's the energized part. But what about after? I also think reality TV has done us no favors.

Liz Higgins (04:46):

Um, and it's important to ask - are some of these people that are real people in real relationships... Now, are these really relationships that you are using as a reference point for what your life and relationship should be like? And, uh, full disclosure. I, over the past few years (probably both because of just busy-ness and, um, having kids and growing a practice and working in my businesses and trying to still have life with family and friends), I've really pulled away from watching reality TV. I don't really watch any of it at all. I don't know who's on the latest season of the Bachelor or Bachelorette. I mean, I am just not plugged in. It was actually kind of news to me that KimYe was getting divorced. Um, I'm just not keeping up with that stuff anymore. And I gotta tell ya, it's kind of nice because that is stressful and stressful to watch.

Liz Higgins (05:41):

It's hard to watch and you just don't know - what are the parts that you're seeing that are real, and what's scripted? This is still stuff that is on TV for a reason, and they want you to be plugged in. They want you to keep watching. So, you know, it's one thing to indulge in some drama every now and then. I'm certainly not dogging on that, but for me... Removing all of that from what I am taking in to my brain, to my body, to my expectations, I think is making a positive difference. Because with all of those instances - reality TV especially - like... You just are not getting the full picture. You aren't. And very quickly we villainize people in these scenarios. And as a therapist, I can wholeheartedly say, even the worst villain typically has a broken heart in there. So, that has been something that I've really looked up for myself. And I think it's incredibly important to look at on your end for whether or not media, movies, and TV are a reference point for you and for what makes a great relationship.

Liz Higgins (06:53):

Now, this shifts us obviously to social media, which remains under this realm as well. But I think with social media, we quickly get comparative. We quickly get obsessive, REALLY comparative, and it's not healthy for us. Again, we are not seeing the whole story of anybody's life on that realm, even mine. Like I try to put some real stuff out there on my Instagram to help connect with people, to help others out there know that, you know... There are people out there going through similar things and we need to connect. And we need to have these public conversations with each other about relationships, life, and all that kind of stuff, but you're not seeing anybody's life 100%. So it's important to filter your usage and find healthy profiles, healthy platforms out there to connect with others. Um, I'm really against the mindless use of social

media or social media as a means of escapism from your own life and your own feelings, not healthy.

Liz Higgins (07:57):

Uh, look, we're not going to get away from social media. It's here to stay. It's a part of our lives. We've all got it. We just need to be smart about, uh... Not even smart. We need to be conscious about the pieces of that whole world that we are letting influence our relationship template, our relationship expectations and the script for what a great relationship looks like. Okay. So another reference point to look at are the relationships around you. And I'm just going to say this - I think the fact that we don't learn relationship skills in school, like actual tools to help our future partnerships thrive, tells me that there's a strong chance that some of the relationships around you might not be healthy ones. I'm not saying all of them, but definitely some of them. I think we also tend to look at other relationships through rose-colored glasses.

Liz Higgins (08:51):

Um, especially if we're single, we see our friends that are in relationship and we just want that. And what you're wanting is that partnership, that connection, that belonging with another. And that's valid, but don't mistake that for looking to any other friends you have around you and assuming that that's a great relationship. I always think it's interesting to hear people talk about how shocked they are when their friends get divorced, or separate, or go through something like that. Um, I think it just speaks to the truth that sometimes even friends, they're not sharing the full truth about what they're going through. And that's okay, that's their boundary. Um, it's not that they need to do that, but I think as a whole, as a culture, we need to be putting more of a realistic view of relationships out there so that we're not just romanticizing these ideas of how easy it should be, how, how simple it should look, how happy everybody should be all the time.

Liz Higgins (09:50):

It's not reality. So be aware of, you know, what kind of pedestal you're putting others' relationships around you on. No matter how much we think we know, we don't know the full picture about another person's relationship. We just don't - even our best friends. We don't know the whole thing, we're not there. So the story we tell ourselves is very important here. Comparison is the thief of joy. And, um, I mean... that quote will never be irrelevant. It's just always going to be true. So next, we look at our parents' relationship. This is a big one, right? Some people grew up with parents who had a pretty secure relationship. Um, perhaps they were respectful in how to navigate their roles in their relationship and in the family life. Um, I love hearing from people that feel like they grew up in a really healthy environment. They saw some conflicts happen and their parents figured it out and they didn't just hide that from the kids.

Liz Higgins (10:53):

So maybe they even showed that in front of you (and any other siblings) - how they could resolve conflict and repair with each other. That is what we know today, through plenty of research on couples, through plenty of work in the therapy realm, is what really takes a couple - long-term - being able to make repairs. It is not to not have conflict. No, no, no, no. Many people don't get that kind of experience with their parents, though. The one where, you know, they see the healthy balance of security and closeness and, you know, respect, uh, happening between their parents, but then also the ability to navigate conflict. A lot of people don't, don't see that. They don't experience that. So fighting might be doubled behind closed doors or in front of your face or involving you and you didn't experience how to repair. So maybe you moved away from

this childhood experience, learning a narrative that healthy relationships should not look like this.

Liz Higgins (11:59):

They shouldn't have conflict like this, where you come away learning that you need to emotionally caretake someone else. Um, and this leads to issues of developmental immaturity later in our adult lives. And we become either avoidant, and it's really hard for us to rest in a relationship and show up and receive it. Or we're boundary-less. We're fighting for control, fighting for certainty, and that can lead to a lot of issues for us in our partnerships. So I think a struggle many millennials face (no offense to the boomers) is that they didn't quite learn what resolving conflict and making repairs looked like in their parents' relationship. And I think it's important to note here too, that there's actually a boomer divorce surge happening, and it's been happening in their later years. It's been really interesting to learn about those trends of the boomer generation. So it's, it's interesting as a therapist and coach working with millennials to have these young adults in their, you know, um, early to mid thirties who are coming in and dealing with the effects of their parents' divorce that is happening at this point in their life.

Liz Higgins (13:19):

You've got all these years seeing your parents together and they're divorcing now. So for many millennials, maybe they thought their parents had it together. Even those reference points, may be kind of crumbling. I know this is a little bit of a, you know, um, it's deeper than how I'm just describing it right now. There's lots of different factors. And I'll say something that might feel kind of controversial, but all divorces are not bad. Uh, maybe these things needed to happen. Maybe these were really unhealthy relationships. Maybe they did the whole 'stay together for the kids' type stuff, which we now know is probably NOT the way you want to go about it, but it has certainly happened in our culture. But you know, all divorces aren't bad, but many of them are. Many of them are, many of them are characterized by conflict, tension, triangulating children, putting kids in the, in the driver's seat where the parents should have been.

Liz Higgins (14:16):

A lot of that can go on. And a lot of that can happen as we are older and into our young adulthood. Like, you know, those tendencies can be there. So I want you to think about the areas of life that are your reference points for a great relationship. All the areas that I've described, like media, technology, social media, um, reality TV, the relationships around you, friends, whatever, and then your parenting relationships - what you saw modeled through your childhood. Those are incredibly important places. And I don't want you to hear me saying, um, only negative things about each of those things. We take away some very healthy things as well. What's modeled and what we, where we have the opportunity to get more in tune with ourself and our own needs. That's always a strength. So that's wonderful, but be aware of the ways. Um, you may have even unconsciously started writing out narratives around, like, certain things you need to make sure happen for your relationship to be "great".

Liz Higgins (15:21):

Here's the reality. It's not romantic to read books, to go do, like, a relationship course or go to therapy. But what if I told you those are the very things that could transform your mindset about what a great marriage should be like? I think that part of our invitation as millennials is to use this breadth of knowledge that we have access to as a way of bettering ourselves. Part of our challenge as millennials is bringing ourselves down from this idealistic fantasy that we've called marriage to the reality of what it has to be in this modern world. What Dr. David Schnarch called

a people growing machine. That's what he called marriage. It will be hard. It will be ugly. Sometimes you may be ugly sometimes. (And I don't mean physically.) Real marriage or, you know, long-term committed relationships, ones that promote the psychological growth of two people, trying to make it through life together, collaborate through life together.

Liz Higgins (16:35):

It will give you so many benefits, but it will be a lot of work. I want to bring voice to that reality and help people get the tools they need to get there. Um, and that's the thing... I don't want to overwhelm anybody that feels like, Oh my God, but I'm not. I am not there. I don't have those tools. I didn't see healthy relationships around me. I saw terrible stuff. I was involved in painful interactions with family and whatever I understand, I hear you. And your story, what you've been through is going to be a huge part of what helps you tap into your greatest potential for your relationships, all relationships that you're in. You just have to say yes to this process and tap into some desire to learn more because I promise it will be worth it. Some of the real benefits of a long-term relationship today, we know this through research, through studies, is feeling a sense of belonging and connection. Which by the way, is the total antidote to deep feelings of shame and unworthiness.

Liz Higgins (17:43):

A relationship can give you that real intimacy, Terry real calls, real intimacy today, fierce intimacy. It can be like a fire. It can be passionate. Yeah. You can have passion term in a committed relationship to another person. You can have security that brings a lot of freedom. Believe it or not to become who you are meant to be within this relationship. People have less health problems overall and longer life span. I don't know about y'all, but I'm kind of down with living as long as I can. And I know a part of that is like healthy diet, healthy, uh, you know, taking care of myself and healthy rituals that I promote into my routine. But I do look at my relationship as a source, like a life-giving source, not just generationally in choosing to have kids and stuff, but like me, it brings me life and it can bring me energy if I allow it to be that source for me. All right. Y'all so think about your reference points, check them. And if this feels like something you want to deep dive into more definitely head over to my website, get on my list, follow me. Let's let's connect. And let's talk about where you are and where you want to go in your relationship journey.

Thanks again for listening to the podcast. If you like the show, leave us five stars or write a review. If you're interested in learning more, sign up for my free ebook "The One Barrier to Commitment All Millennials Face" at millennialrelationships.com.

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