



The Millennial Life podcast with Liz Higgins

Episode 8 with Rebecca Wong, LCSW-R

A New Way of Viewing Modern Relationships: Relational Life Therapy

Liz Higgins: (00:02)

Hey, y'all! Liz Higgins here, and 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)

Hey, y'all, welcome! So, I bet if you are a millennial who is listening to this podcast, that you may be in a relationship, or you may want a relationship. And I bet when you think about that ideal relationship, it's, it's one where you, you get what you need out of it and you give your partner what they need out of it. You're able to listen to each other. You're responsive to each other. In the therapy and relationship world, we say we are attuned to each other, you get each other. And also in this relationship, you can set limits. You can maybe have healthy boundaries and hold on to things that you have cultivated for yourself already in life. Ways that you've already become established, that are important for you to maintain and to keep a sense of. In this ideal relationship, you probably want to feel cherished.

Liz Higgins: (01:40)

You probably want to feel like your partner partners. Like yes, I found my person and you want to feel that way too. There's this level of, I don't like to say it, but it feels like you're complete because you finally found them. We also want a relationship where we have fierce intimacy with each other. We are physically compatible with each other. We have shared interests, maybe even shared hobbies, certainly some shared values. We feel supported and encouraged - like our partner is our cheerleader. Okay. Now I'm starting to feel overwhelmed because, as you can see, there's a lots of things that we tend to want and actually expect out of a relationship in today's modern world. So my guest today is very knowledgeable in this new approach to working with couples and just relationship work, which is called Relational Life Therapy. Terry Real created it. We're going to tell you all about it,

Liz Higgins: (02:47)

Um, in a little bit here. And this model that he's created, it is my jam and it resonates so much when I think about us millennials and this experience we're in, uh, finding commitment, finding compatibility, finding a compassionate, intimate partnership in the modern world. And Terry is very outspoken about the fact that marriage has undergone a true transformation, a revolution. We want so much from our relationships and the kicker here is that most of us have not gained an understanding or true education on what these relationships we want so badly truly take to succeed. So where his RLT approach has become life changing for me on a personal and professional level, is that he has outlined the roadmap. It's truly there in the sense of the skills, the things we actually do and implement into our life and our relationships that make it, the leveled up partnership that we crave, the desire for connection...

Liz Higgins: (04:00)

It's never going to go away. That's not a generational thing. And relationship problems aren't inherently a generational problem. Each generation has their thing. They have their crunch, but for us millennials, there are some pretty unique things that go into why we are the way we are in our relationship. So we're going to talk on these themes and more today. And please, if anything touches you, I hope that you will write me and let me know about that because this is the conversation we need to be having together. And I am pumped to bring you this one today.

Liz Higgins: (04:43)

Hey, everybody, thanks for tuning in today! And I am so thrilled to bring you some very, very real talk today with my interviewee for today's episode. This is Rebecca Wong and she is the founder of Connectfulness, and the Connectfulness Podcast, which I highly, highly recommend you put that in your ears and listen to, because it is some transformative conversation that she brings through her work, through her deep understanding of relationships and intimacy, and the generational impact, um, that healing and going inward can have on your life. So, I could sit here and talk for quite a few minutes on that, but I have to pitch that up front and tell y'all to tune in and... Welcome Rebecca. Thank you for joining me today!

Rebecca Wong: (05:37)

Thanks Liz. Thanks for having me! Just to go back real quick. It's um, Connectfulness.com or it's the Connectfulness Practice Podcast.

Liz Higgins: (05:46)

Perfect. Thank you. Yes, we need to get that right. And it will definitely be in the show notes too. If you guys want to take a look on there and connect with Rebecca after our conversation.

Rebecca Wong: (06:57)

Thanks for having me.

Liz Higgins: (06:57)

Yes. I'm, I'm so excited to have you here. It's like a little bit of a fan girl moment, as silly as it sounds, because I've read your stuff. I've listened to your podcast. And I am really excited because I know that you are a Relational Life Therapist, and RLT is something I have become very excited about the past couple of years. It's the therapy model created by Terry Real. And I won't spend all the time right now going into the details, but it's truly transformed my life personally, the way that I experienced myself and my relationship to my husband and others... And it's just transformed the way that I see how we do relationship and partnership in our

generation as millennials, and in our culture and world. So I think, um, I know that you're going to have some amazing things to share today. And maybe you can just tell us a little bit about what got you into this model and this journey of relationship work.

Rebecca Wong: (06:59)

So one of the things that Terry says, and you know, this is probably one of his more famous quotes, but it's that "Family pathology rolls from generation to generation like a fire in the woods, taking down everything in its path until one person, in one generation, has the courage to turn and face the flames. That person brings peace to his ancestors and spares the children that follow." Pretty profound. Right? That's so powerful. Yeah. So the reason that I love that quote is that I grew up a child who was holding on to so much stuff that wasn't mine, that came from generations before me. And it was totally affecting how I did relationship. And this model helped me learn what's mine and what's not mine, how to give back the stuff that isn't mine and how to really learn how to be in this different way, in my modern, current relationships. So it's healed me, it's helped me as a human and it's made me a better therapist.

Liz Higgins: (08:01)

That's amazing. I really, I really think that as therapists, it's oftentimes the thing that leads us deeper into our own healing and our own growth forward, that really resonates in terms of the way to get there. That the model that we use, the language that we speak... Um, so that's, that's amazing that it had a profound impact on you personally, and then obviously professionally. So, you know, I wanted to ask you some things about how this approach to relationships and intimacy can relate to millennials, because that's what I like to talk about on here. That's the focus of my practice in a lot of ways. And I think that us millennials, we have been given an interesting hand - as each generation has, right? But certainly with the pace of technology, just the way that our world has literally changed so much over the course of my generation's experience.

Liz Higgins: (09:02)

It's just amazing. And, Oh my gosh, we could go into all those different things like the student loan debt and how that impacts people. Um, you know, difficulty trusting... And larger organizations, or religions and stuff. I mean, I, I sort of look at our generation as struggling to trust in a lot of ways. And then we get thrown into this mindset growing up, being told that we, we were really important and, and that's certainly a healthy thing, but then in some ways being seen as this entitled bunch that is selfish and narcissistic and just self-serving in our drives. And there's just a lot that I think people get wrong about our generation, but, but I understand too where maybe some of that comes from. And so I guess all of these things, I'm just wanting to hear a little bit from you in terms of what you think about this generation and our experience relationally speaking, or maybe as it has to do with trust.

Rebecca Wong: (10:09)

Well, so I want to break down trust because I think a lot of us walk into a therapy room, walk into life, walk into relationships, kind of feeling like we should just be able to trust. And that's a fallacy. Trust is something that is built up and one of the best ways that we can, um, learn how to be in an intimate relationship that is kind of embraced with, with trust and warmth, and, um, that feels safe is actually through discord, right? Because if we don't experience how we can do that repair work together, then we can't trust anything. Right?

Liz Higgins: (11:17)

Yeah. I think that hits the nail on the head. I talked in another episode the other day, just by myself, about the role of conflict in a relationship and how it's supposed to be there. And it doesn't mean you're with the wrong person, but sometimes I get a little baffled that here we are in 2020, and there's still so many of us that have this idea or this narrative that if you're with the right person, it should feel easy.

Rebecca Wong: (11:18)

Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah. It should be easy. And we shouldn't have to work so hard. We're working so hard. So that means there's something wrong. No, it doesn't. What it means is that you're both coming into this with a different template about what relationships look like. And, you know, one, one of the things I heard you talking about before is that, you know, millennials are often called selfish or narcissistic or self serving. And I think this has a lot to do with how we parent through generations for a long time. Parents had been told, you know, um, that they shouldn't coddle their children. And then they were told, um, praise them, praise them a lot. Right. So there, there are all these different ways that we grow generations up. And I think there's something to be said. I don't want to like make a huge sweeping, um, piece here, but that may be the millennial generation, not each individual.

Rebecca Wong: (12:14)

I'm not speaking to you. I don't know who you are yet. Um, but the generation maybe is a little bit more on the grandiose side, a little bit more on the entitled side, a little bit more on the, we feel pretty good about ourselves, you know? Um, and that can be hard to hear. It can be hard to notice that and to hear it. And what I think RLT does, what Relational Life Therapy does, in a way that other forms of relationship therapy don't necessarily, is that it deals with that part of the power dynamic within our relationship. Because what often happens is that somebody might be feeling like they're in a one down or a shame position, which kind of sounds like 'I'm no good. I don't matter. Why do I even bother?' Right. Right. And then somebody else might be feeling a little bit more like, 'you're no good. You don't matter. Why do you even bother?' That's more grandiose and that's a little intoxicating, right? Like it feels kind of good to be in that position where, you know, you know what you're doing, it feels pretty good to be you.

Liz Higgins: (13:19)

And what RLT does, is it rebalances the power? Yes. And I, I know what you're talking about there, and I'll ask you some more on that, but I, I want to give you full permission to, to embrace that statement because I, I agree. I, I see that generally speaking, our generation knows how to go up. We know how to get a little grandiose about things and... To just share a little bit personally on that, I think I really noticed that in myself when I had children, when I became a mom, because before that it was the Liz Show. Yes. That involves a relationship and a marriage and intimacy brewing there. But, but when I had children, it was like a true encapsulation of like, no, no, no, like a huge part of myself now. I mean, I have to be involved, and the caretaker and just a hundred percent needed at all times. And it was a real struggle for me, which isn't abnormal. But I think I really felt that in the form of resentment sometimes, um, have more of this one up like, um, frustration that I was losing myself. Yeah. And that's something I hear from millennials a lot, even when it comes to partnership, it's literally people saying, I don't, I don't want to lose myself. Well, we're, we're this lie

Liz Higgins: (14:52)

In life that we are the accumulation of the things we do, the accomplishments that we have, the way we look

Rebecca Wong: (15:03)
Or how other people like us.

Rebecca Wong: (15:05)

Right. And so all of this that I'm talking about right now, this is all self-esteem work. Yes. Because when we're talking about self esteem, if we're getting our sense of esteem from outside-in versus from this internal knowledge that we all have inherent worth, we just do. And there's nothing in the world that you can do that can add to that. And there's nothing you can do that would subtract from that. You just have it, you just have this inherent worth, it removes this need to prove ourselves. And I think, I mean, I'm a mom, I have two twin girls. I'm in my mid forties. I'm going to place myself in the gen X group. And there's this thing that happens when we become parents, where suddenly we don't know who we are anymore, because all of the,

Liz Higgins: (15:55)
It happened to you too!

Rebecca Wong: (15:58)

I don't know anybody that it doesn't happen to! You know, it, there was this time when my husband and I were new parents, where he was commuting in these long days to go to work. And I was home with the babies and he wore two different shoes to work. You know, like, I mean, couldn't even figure out how to put his shoes on anymore. It's just, we lose ourselves in this. But the thing is that we don't lose the essence of who we are. We just forget that essence, like throughout most of our life, it's like, no one's been tending to that little flame. And that's what this work gets us back to because we've been misguided throughout much of our lives. We've been focusing on what's coming from the outside in, instead of what's coming from the inside out. And when we're misguided, we don't protect. We don't protect that little flame... The one that lives inside of us - that inherent worth. We don't protect ourselves until, then, our boundaries get all wrapped up in this and it gets really messy relationally. But when we learn how to redirect everything, then suddenly things start falling into place.

Liz Higgins: (16:58)

Definitely. And I know from what you're talking about, they're not having a sense of that flame. Not knowing truly, deeply, who we are through all the messy phases of life. We, we act out or we find ways of protecting and operating from that survival mode. And we have to, because

Rebecca Wong: (17:21)

What that is is, those are versions, younger versions of us. They're our adapted selves, right? They are the wounded child a little bit grown up, maybe like seven to eighteen years old and figuring out, 'okay, this, this world that I live in right now, this, this family that I'm growing up in, these people who are caring for me or not are, or aren't really meeting my needs, right?' Like the earliest job of a child, of an infant that's born in this world, is to figure out, if I call out for help, are you going to respond? Are you going to be there to take care of me? Right? And so all of these kinds of memories live inside of us in a really like an implicit way. We can't call on them because they live in a part of our brain that doesn't even have words.

Rebecca Wong: (18:07)

But then as we get older and we become young children, and then teenagers, we start to adapt to the world. We have, if we have parents that are alcoholics and out of it all the time, then we learn to adjust and maybe to take care of the little siblings. If we get beaten, every time we do something “wrong”, maybe we learn how to be perfect and how to, you know, predict what's going to happen. If we have parents that just don't really notice us, or if we have parents that are always telling us what a great job we're doing, we're going to try to bend and keep making them happy because that's how we survive in these families. And then, when we figure that part out, that often is the template that comes with us, unknowingly, unconsciously. It comes with us into our adult love relationships. And so often what we see in adult relationships is it's not this wise adult self having a relationship with another wise adult self, but we actually have two adapted children in the room in relationship with each other.

Liz Higgins: (19:15)

Do you see that as it happens in your work with couples, can you see, I'm asking... Sometimes I'm sitting there with a couple and I feel like I can almost feel that that's their adaptive child sitting there. That it's not that the person I spoke to on the phone that was working out the details of the session time. It's just a totally different part of them.

Rebecca Wong: (19:43)

Oh, it's, it's the entirety of my work.

Liz Higgins: (19:45)

Yeah. You do the deep work. And that, it's a part of why I was so eager to get you on here to have a conversation because I am really a true believer that if, if people want to learn how to have healthy, epic, fulfilling relationships... And do you know, Esther Perel does a pretty good job of talking about all of the roles and expectations that we've wound up into this ideal partner we're going to have in life, and just how amazing they're going to be for us... Like we have to be able to do the deeper work in ourselves. And I'm wondering if you can maybe talk on that for a minute, like why this work is so important in order to have a successful relationship.

Rebecca Wong: (20:32)

Let me go back to that quote I shared when we first started at the top of the episode about how “Family pathology rolls down from generation to generation, like fire in the woods, and it takes down everything in its path until one person, one person in one generation, has the courage to turn and face the flames. That person brings peace to their ancestors and spares the children that follow.” That's Terry Real's quote. He wrote that in “I Don't Want to Talk About It”, which was one of his first books. Right. That's the reason because if we don't show up and do that deep work, then we pass it down. Right.

Liz Higgins: (21:15)

And is it true that if we don't do that, if we don't face these parts of ourselves, we repeat it? We repeat it, repeat it, repeat it.

Rebecca Wong: (22:02)

I mean, there's no way not to. That's, that's part of, I mean, ‘passing it down’ doesn't only mean to the children in our lives. It also means to every other relationship we come in contact with. Right. Right. Like when I'm at work and I have a flip out because somebody didn't do something the way I wanted them to do. Right. And um, Oh gosh, I grew up in this family. Can I tell you a

story? Sure. I'm not very proud of the story, but it's okay. I'm gonna share it anyway. I grew up in a family where my mother was pretty sorry, Mom was pretty grandiose and would kind of like yell when she didn't get her way, like a little tantrum.

Rebecca Wong: (22:03)

Right. And I remember this time I was in my early twenties and I went to get a salad for lunch from the local salad place. I was working in Manhattan at the time and they didn't get my salad right. And wouldn't you know it, I had a tantrum the way my mom did. And that same tantrum that I had at the salad place was the tantrum that my mother's mother had when my father died. At the funeral parlor - when she laid down on the floor and threw her fist into the ground, like a four year old. We pass these patterns down until we do something about it. Until we recognize them, make the knowledge of that story explicit and decide we're going to do something different. And then it's revolutionary. We can change it almost on a dime when we're ready to.

Liz Higgins: (23:25)

Yeah. I listened to your conversation with Julianne Shore. That's your most recent episode actually, which I highly recommend. But it was, Oh, it was so amazing to hear her talk on how some of these intricate shifts are made in our brain in a matter of seconds when we choose to step in to this work. So huge. I'm having, going to try to explain all the brain science because I can't [inaudible], but I will definitely tune into her work more because it was very enlightening.

Liz Higgins: (23:36)

So something that I was intrigued by, in RLT, from the very beginning (and in Terry's book, "The New Rules of Marriage", which I use and give to so many clients) is how he definitely approached the more traditional gender stereotypes. He can handle with those extremes. When we think of the most victims shamed, just one down person to the most heightened grandiose, blatant narcissistic person. And I know that generally speaking, we tend to associate certain genders with those extremes. Um, but RLT, I mean, it, it does what he calls 'dismantles the patriarchy'. Can you talk a little bit about that? Because I think it's so relevant for our generation to hear about.

Rebecca Wong: (25:04)

Yeah. I think it's really important that maybe we let go of the male/female kind of labels when we're having this conversation, because I think what we're really talking about is power. Yeah. And when we're talking about dismantling the patriarchy, we're talking about speaking truth to power, right? And so the way, the way that we conceptualize this, the way that Terry talks about it is that you can't really have true intimacy in a situation where somebody has power over another. Right. So what is real intimacy?

Rebecca Wong: (25:07)

What do you think it is like really? I just want your listeners to pause and check in with themselves about that first. Sure. Intimacy. If you break down the word, right. I love, and I love how Esther Perel does this, but she's all about IN-TO-ME-I-SEE. IN-TO-ME-I-SEE. So what is intimacy? Intimacy is about knowing yourself and being able to share yourself with somebody else. It's about knowing yourself and not just being able to share yourself, but loving yourself, protecting yourself, being able to speak up for what you need and want, and to be able to accept the same from your partner. To want to know them and to be able to also accept when they say, 'I can't go there now', without it meaning that they don't want to be with you.

Liz Higgins: (26:08)

Right. And I think that, yeah, I have to be, I have to be careful not to generalize everybody because we're all so different.

Liz Higgins: (26:09)

But many, many people are quick to be that reactive. And I think it's been really interesting to see even some of the statistics around divorce rate and such from millennials, like first of all, we're waiting longer to do it. We're more established when we decide to get into a committed relationship or marriage. And the seven year itch just quickly become the three year itch and instant gratification syndrome has done us, no favors. Right? So that instant gratification living in this era where you can get anything you want just by looking it up on your cell phone that you have constantly attached to you.

Rebecca Wong: (27:01)

Right. Um, you see, this is where we're linking back now to that one, up to that grandiosity, to that intoxication. Right? Right. And so much of what we're describing here is a form of acting out.

Rebecca Wong: (27:04)

It's a form of love. Well, it's, it's a form of essentially like, remember the tantrum I just talked about - me, the salad shop, that's an acting out. And we do that relationally kind of all the time. And when we live in our relationships, in that reactive acting out kind of way, and we all act out in different ways, some of us are fighters, right. You, you know, like the basic trauma responses, there's the fighting, there's the flight, right. Kind of the, um, I go behind a wall or I run away or I withdraw, I can be standing right in front of you, but like nothing you're saying is getting through to me anymore. Right. Right. The freeze, like a deer in headlights. And then there's a few others... There's fixing, I need to fix this. I need to make this better. That's my job sometimes. Also called fawning, like pleasing.

Rebecca Wong: (28:01)

And when we find ourselves in one of those responses, chances are we're in an adaptive part of ourself. We're not really showing up as our wisest, most solid, most integrated self. Right. And if we continuously are showing up in relationships and that adaptive part, their relationships are going to eventually run into problems. Unless your partner somehow is really great at staying in their most functional self all the time. But chances are, they're not.

Liz Higgins: (29:03)

Yeah. I think it would have to take a lot of wise, wise functioning mind to stay, put in a relationship with a more adaptive partner. I love what you said earlier, you know, that, that adaptive part, it's not just that we did it. We had to, we had to learn to survive. To, to make it to the other side and the survivor in you.

Rebecca Wong: (29:03)

Right. You know, this is, this is the little one or the little ones that they, they faced so much and probably nobody even acknowledged it.

Rebecca Wong: (29:03)

And if you had to like sit down and talk to them, they might even go, 'yeah, well, you know, somebody else had it worse than I did'.

Liz Higgins: (29:41)

Oh yeah. I'm nodding my head. I've heard so many clients say that. They become dismissive of their own experience. Right.

Rebecca Wong: (29:41)

And so it's not even something that registers. It doesn't even register how hard that might've been and how much you actually had to do to survive. How you had to contort and compromise yourself in order to get to be where you are right now.

Liz Higgins: (29:42)

Would you say that for some, that even becomes the adaptive part of themselves? Even becomes something that they are happy with, that they're proud of... that they cherish for getting them to where they are?

Rebecca Wong: (29:48)

Yeah. You know, um, Terry used to call this wise part, the 'functioning adult'. Right. Right. And he's shifting that now. He's calling it this 'wise self'. And that's exactly why, because for many of us, those adaptive parts, those survivors are actually incredibly functional.

Liz Higgins: (30:06)

Right. They served a purpose.

Rebecca Wong: (30:09)

And they've, they've been managing they're really, really good at managing.

Liz Higgins: (30:12)

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. So how does the person get to a place... Or what does it take? What have you seen that it takes for somebody to get to a place of awareness on, 'Oh, okay. Maybe this adaptive self hasn't been, you know, as wise as I thought maybe' or whatever.

Rebecca Wong: (30:34)

Yeah. It's a bit of a reckoning. It's a bit of like a waking up, right? We in Relational Life work, um, when therapists are trained in this work, there's a phase that they're actually trained in. It's all about waking up. The waking up is, is where we're kind of speaking truth to it, where we're joining with our clients. And we're saying like, 'This is what I'm seeing. This is how I see it. And you're such a good human, you have so much inherent worth. And this really hard thing happened to you. And this is how you dealt with it. And now that's playing out here in your relationship. Can you see it? How's that working for you?' So it's not to judge it. It's not any more fuel to the buyer. It's to notice it, recognize it, give space to it. Yeah. We call it an observation. Right? We want to be really gentle in that observation. That the thing is when we go either one up or one down, when we go into the grandiosity or the shame that I talked about earlier, we're going into this on both sides. We're going into an energy of contempt. I have contempt for you. You're not enough. You don't matter. I have contempt for me. I'm not enough. I don't matter. Same words, different direction, but judgment is a form of contempt.

Rebecca Wong: (31:50)

Whether I'm judging somebody else from judging myself, interestingly, you know what else is a form of contempt? What perfection? Because if I need to be perfect, then I'm sending you a

message that you also need to be perfect, or I'm going to judge you. And I can't tolerate myself if I'm not perfect. And I have a really long way to fall if I don't achieve that perfection. So the opposite of judgment is curiosity. And that's what we're asking for. That's what we ask our clients to do. We ask them to come into this shifting from a place of judgment, to a place of curiosity, from a place of contempt, to a place of compassion.

Liz Higgins: (32:35)

Yeah. That's amazing. That's amazing. And I hope I'm not veering too off the path here, but maybe you can help me out. I'm thinking about how, in some ways, when it's come to, when it comes to relationships and finding a partner, finding a person, and just how different that, that playing field is today, and how fixated we've become in our generation of thinking that we can find the right partner. Seeking the right partner. What would you say about that? Like, does that make a connection to an adaptive part of myself to be totally, yeah, to be so fervently trying to find somebody that checks all the boxes and can be everything that I need and swiping has made it so incredibly simple to just...

Rebecca Wong: (33:27)

Definitely the adaptive part. And I have a few things... I'm going to add one more Terry quote in here before I move on. And that's Terry would say, you know, that you're in a real relationship the day that you look at this person and realize they are exquisitely designed to stick that burning spear right into your eyeball. That's the person that's going to throw you right back into the soup that you thought you were going to avoid. And that's the good news because that is where the healing lies. Yeah. Right. So it is exactly that in a immature relationship, right. And we use mature and immature here to talk about the parts that have really evolved and developed, right? The adaptive part, they're less mature. The wise parts are more mature. So in a more immature relationship, we have this vision of what a relationship is supposed to be, and it's supposed to be easy. And if I find the perfect partner, then they'll do this for me and they'll do that for me. And they'll kind of read my mind and I won't have to tell them that this is what I need when I need it. And in a more mature relationship, we look at our partner and we go, well, you're not what I thought you were going to be, but you know what? I love you anyway. I wouldn't want to do this life without you.

Liz Higgins: (34:44)

That's a beautiful shift between two perspectives. Yeah. That's amazing. Yeah. You know, one of the things that I am looking forward to doing is the relationship boot camp that you are putting on in a few weeks. It's, I know it encapsulates a lot of the RLT.

Rebecca Wong: (35:15)

We teach people how to live relationally. Um, I'm going to be co-facilitating this with two colleagues, Victoria Isa and Julianne Teller-Shore. And we are so excited because, what we get to do, is lead individuals and couples through a whole two full days, two full days. This is happening online, but we're leading them through two full days of learning, both didactic and

Rebecca Wong: (35:38)

Experiential. And it's all about all these skills. Learning about how to hold yourself in healthier self-esteem. Learning about where to place yourself, um, like where you have seen yourself, awaking these parts of you up, learning about your adaptive child and then learning how to put it all together and live with better relational skills. And actually doing the work in these two days.

Liz Higgins: (36:32)

And I love that, I really appreciate that it's, these are called "skills" because they are. And I think it's helpful, helpful for listeners to hear this because we've been talking about some relatively deep work here and some deep themes that like... Really transformative stuff here. And maybe it feels kind of transient, or ambiguous, or hard to grasp for listeners. It's like, Oh my God. You know, like going to therapy and digging up all my stuff and yada yada, I mean, yeah, that's, it is a piece of it.

Liz Higgins: (36:32)

But like with this bootcamp, for example, it's really tangible, practical tools that you utilize in your relationship, is that correct?

Rebecca Wong: (37:25)

It's really, really tangible, practical tools that are built upon a foundation of a depth of understanding of why things weren't working. Right. We're talking to all the different parts of your brain, right? So we're talking to the parts that just associate with sensations and movement. We're talking to the parts that just look at metaphors and emotions. And we're also talking to the parts that use language to relate and to contextualize things. So we're, we're connecting all of those different parts and integrating it in these two days.

Liz Higgins: (37:25)

Oh my gosh, I'll be doing a before and after podcast with my husband, we're planning on it just to kind of talk through some things before and then to come back together after, and process what it was like.

Rebecca Wong: (37:25)

And I got so excited for that, that just gave me chills to hear.

Liz Higgins: (38:34)

Yeah, we're going to do that. And I'm pumped because I think it will be really neat for listeners to hear what it's like for a couple through this process, in this chair, the aftermath of it. Oh, that's so delicious. Yeah. I'm really excited. But I want to ask you, you know, I work with a lot of millennial clients and they're at very different phases a lot of times. Some millennials right now are still very, very single and figuring that out and exploring relationships. Others are in a committed relationship. Others are into their second or third marriage already. So there's a lot of wide scope of where people are. And I'm wondering with this work you're talking about with, um, Relational Life Therapy, with a relationship bootcamp... I mean, is there a right - I don't like that word, but - time to do the work?

Rebecca Wong: (38:34)

Yeah. Yeah. There is - it's right now. I think, I think that the point in which you do the work is the point in which the work shows up for you and says, 'Hey, have you ever heard about me? Like, I'm something you might want to check out'. There's no right place in our life to do it.

Rebecca Wong: (38:36)

There's just the time where it finds you and it gets your interest peaked. And it sounds like something that maybe could help you. That's the right time.

Liz Higgins: (38:45)

I love that. I think that's great because there doesn't have to be this crisis. Things don't have to be in shambles. They may be. And that may be the point in time when the calling happens, but you can start it now. You can do it now. And yeah.

Rebecca Wong: (39:03)

Yeah. You don't have to wait to be in relationship. You don't have to wait to be on the brink of a divorce. You don't have to wait to be having kids. You don't have to be, like... You can do this work on your own, for yourself. And you can do this work when you're in relationship together. And you can do this work to try to hold your relationship together or to figure out what to do after it falls apart. All of them.

Liz Higgins: (39:25)

Yeah. I love that. I have a dream that maybe in some form or fashion, this very work is something that's more integrated. I think Terry talks about that too. Right? Like this should be in schools. We should find some way to get this out there. I mean, I have to say, I tell people this all the time - becoming a therapist, it feels like it's the thing that saved my life and my marriage, because my

Rebecca Wong: (39:53)

My twins know what this means, and they talk about mommy before she met Terry and mommy after,

Liz Higgins: (39:57)

Oh my gosh, they do?

Rebecca Wong: (40:01)

You know, like, it's, it's a thing. Like there's, there's this, um, it's changed me. Yeah. And so it's also changed how I parent them and it's changed how I talk to them. And how I deal with sibling rivalry now has changed. And you know, how I esteem them has changed.

Liz Higgins: (40:19)

I mean, I got to ask you a little bit about that. If you, if you don't mind, like, what do you think are maybe some of the greatest shifts you've experienced yourself making in your parenting because of it?

Rebecca Wong: (40:30)

Oh, well, there's a few signs to it. Um, you know, as parents, we tend to sometimes, I don't know, go into our adaptive child and overreact a little when things aren't really going smoothly, right? And so when, when that happens, I don't beat myself up anymore. I remember that I'm human and that I goofed and then I can repair something with them. And this is a new opportunity to come back to the repair process. And that's what builds trust, because I'm going to take responsibility for what I did or said that might've been too much or too powerful. And I'll own that so that they don't have to. And that's really powerful as a parent for, for my child to... For me to show up and say, 'I messed up'.

Liz Higgins: (41:10)

Yeah. It's very strange. But for me, I can almost feel the healing that it gives me to go back and to sit with my little three-year-old and to apologize to her and to tell her, 'I'm sorry, you know,

mommy got upset. I shouldn't have yelled that way. I love you so much. And, I want you to forgive me'. I can just, I feel something in myself that I can tell in that moment - it's more about me than about her. And it's crazy. Now maybe to bring things full circle, do you feel like there's anything you could say that really just sticks out to you about this work with clients, couples of yours that you've worked with?

Rebecca Wong: (41:58)

Yeah. Well, so I think, I think the best parts are really about how it can teach us to stand solidly in ourself while we're in relationship with others so that we don't lose ourselves. Like we were talking about before, when we become parents, when we're in a new job or when we're in a state of stress or when we get swept into new relationship, how do you not lose yourself? How do you stay grounded in who you are? How do you know who you are? How do you love that person? Even when you don't like all the parts of that person, even when you, right. So one of the things RLT teaches us to do - and I really, I really appreciate this - is that we can have a problem with someone's behaviors, even our own, but that doesn't mean that the person is bad. Yeah. It means it's the behaviors that we're not liking. Right. So when I look at my kid, I'm not saying you're a bad kid, because you did this. I'm saying, I don't like that you did this. Really, really different. And so the message that we're, we're transmuting to somebody is one, like, you're still worthy. I just don't like how you're treating me right now.

Liz Higgins: (43:06)

Love that. That's one of the pillars of the winning strategies in relationships is to remember love. And that that's an action. You know, it's an action, it's a verb.

Rebecca Wong: (43:18)

It is. And when I think, when we're talking about remembering love, it goes... For me, it goes deeper. It goes back to that, remembering that we have inherent worth, that we all do, right. That I, I'm inherently worthy. There's nothing I can do that will add to, or subtract from, that worth. You're inherently worthy. And there's nothing you can do that will add to, or subtract from your inherent worth. And that's what I'm remembering when I'm remembering love.

Liz Higgins: (43:43)

And it transforms the way you see your partner, even in some of the worst moments, because when you're holding on to that, it's, you're not.

Rebecca Wong: (43:55)

And, and you know, we talk about a lot of us in the bootcamp, but when, when your partner is at one of their worst moments, or when you're at one of your worst moments, there's really an old historical story playing out there for both of you. Right? And so part of this work is being able to unblend that. Cause when it's blended together, we're not really seeing clearly what's happening right now. And when we unblend it, then we can see the little one that's really hurt, who was triggered when I did this. And I can take responsibility for this thing I did, because it doesn't mean that you think I'm a bad person. It means that you got hurt because this whole other thing came up, reminded you of a time when,

Liz Higgins: (44:36)

Takes you back to an old narrative, that's very much alive.

Rebecca Wong: (44:42)

And, and it creates that opportunity for healing, right? When your partner is burning spear into your eye, that's the moment where you can do the healing work.

Liz Higgins: (44:51)

Right? Yeah. It's almost like for those that really want to know the answer to 'how can I know I'm with the right person?' Well, it's that it won't always be easy. You will feel the growing pains, but they're just that. They're, they're a treadway to the next level, if you take it.

Rebecca Wong: (45:11)

Right. And, and you know, this is to... Suppose that we're not talking about a situation that is like, explicitly abusive and certainly physically abusive. And you know, like we want to, we're talking in the confines of a, uh, non-harmful relationship.

Liz Higgins: (45:27)

Correct. Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing. This is awesome. And I want to know if I can ask you - because you are on here and you know, I'm doing the boot camp with my husband - like, is there anything we can do to prepare for it? What would you suggest like, between now and then, as we are preparing for that time, we're going to spend together?

Rebecca Wong: (45:49)

If you haven't already read "New Rules of Marriage" or "Fierce Intimacy", I would start there. If you have, I might even go through them again. Um,

Liz Higgins: (45:59)

I've read "New Rules of Marriage", like 10 times. Yeah. Okay.

Rebecca Wong: (46:02)

And, and I would, I would say the same to your husband. Yes. Um, I mean, I think, I think the big stuff is make sure that you're getting good sleep, that, um, you know, you maybe prep some food so that you have what you need for snacks and for our breaks for lunch and stuff like that. Like, just really get things ready so that you can really devote yourself to these two days and feel well-supported.

Liz Higgins: (46:26)

Yeah. I think that's great. We oftentimes forget to cover those basics. So I'll be sure to do that. It's going to be so... I'm just looking forward to it. So much of this is like also the most time I think we will have spent together in a focused conversation or learning or whatever around our relationships since far before COVID.

Rebecca Wong: (46:49)

Yeah this is a 12 hour commitment to government, you know, over two days. So there's, there's some deep, deep stuff that's going to be happening and you want to make sure, like, if you have kids, that someone else is going to be watching them. Like you, that you want all of those pieces in place and have yourself well-supported so that you can dive into this 12 hours and really get the most out of it.

Liz Higgins: (47:10)

Oh yeah, absolutely. I wouldn't even try if I didn't have childcare. I learned that lesson back when COVID started, but so... Tell us how people can find you! I know we talked about your podcast, but I'd love for people to know where they can learn about the bootcamp and just you.

Rebecca Wong: (47:26)

Everything of me and my work and my, on the bootcamp, all

Rebecca Wong: (47:30)

Of it lives at connectfulness.com. That's C O N N E C T F U L N E S S.com. Everything is there.

That, uh, there's a Offerings page that has the bootcamp. And, um, there's a Podcast page where you can find all those episodes. And you can search around the rest of the website to learn more about me too.

Liz Higgins: (48:32)

Great. Thank you again for giving us this, this detailed glimpse into the practice you do, and something that I think could really benefit a lot of listeners, Relational Life Therapy. I know y'all will hear me talking about this more from time to time, but I consider Rebecca one of the most knowledgeable on this, and I've learned so much from what I've seen her do. This has been really great. Thanks, Rebecca.

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 e-book "The One Barrier to Commitment All Millennials Face" at millenniallifecounseling.com.

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