

## LL10-Cross Cultural Relationships

Hi I'm Doug Weiss,

and I'm Alvean Lyons and this is love life.

Alvean, we have a topic this week that you and I are perfectly suited to discussing

We're joined this week by Barbara Hamm Lee, our producer.

So another letter from one of our listeners, and we love hearing from our listeners, and this is about cross cultural relationships.

So that could mean, in my mind that could be race, that could be religion, it could be generational. It could be a lot of things, but the fact of the matter is there are two people who come from different perspectives in life who come together. Who are in love with each other, and want to get married. The audience question to you two is: are there certain questions or things that need to be worked out ahead of time so that both of the people are on the same page? One lady wrote, that she wanted to know about how to decide whether or not they should have children, they were in an interracial relationship. She wanted to know, if maybe they shouldn't have kids because of the way today's world is, so things of that nature, or if there's two different religions. Whose religion takes precedence, and which church you go to or synagogue or whatever. So those types of questions.

What do you think?

Well I think certainly the immediate answer is yes. You need to talk about these things and you need to talk about them at length. None of these are simple subjects, and none of them are things that you can decide in twenty minutes of conversation.

Do you think these things are worth getting additional help from outside, like counseling?

I think they can. I think one of the one of the big challenges in any one of these topics whether it's religions or it's another difference, it's not just what the two of you feel, who are at work here, it's your extended families and it's your friends. Because they represent a normative value for each of you in your respective corners, if you will, and they have their own perspectives on it and they're going to bring to bear, consciously or otherwise, their view. And so you're not just negotiating through this with each other, you're then having to go back into your respective cultural difference and navigating there, and that pressure from outside can either be very supportive and helpful or it can cause an implosion by too much pressure.

Absolutely, I would totally agree with his response because I think even if we're talking about, and I love that you choose to use the term cross cultural, because there's a culture of all kinds of things whether the culture is based on racial differences.... which I personally reject the notion of racial differences in that we are all human which is one race as far as I'm concerned, but there are cultures that may be a byproduct of the packaging that we wear and where we grew up. Then you have socioeconomics. I find myself having more in common with people that I share socioeconomics with than I do based on whether or not we share the same skin color, for instance. And then you have generational issues, because, for instance, I have a young adult daughter but because she's so close to me and her aunts, she does not orient like your typical early twenty year old. She actually orients probably about ten years older because of that pull up word and maturation from hanging around so many people that are older. So her peer groups are other people who are either very mature, or people who are actually ten plus years older than her.

So everything has a culture, just in terms of contextually. I think we would do better in our understanding if we talked about it the way that you did. Then it makes me think about the fact that when we,..... because Douglas and I spend so much time talking about relationships coming together to form something new ..... when you look at generational differences sometimes we assume that we're going to have major separation by virtue of age. Now Douglas and I are more than two years apart.

So yeah I mean we should point out that Alvean is about the same age as my daughter.

For very sure, yet our relationship to one another is nothing like that, and is very much a peer relationship you know I have never felt in all the time I've known .....I have never felt any gap there. I think that there are circumstances where that does exist right, and I think that that's where you need to be quite sensitive to the fact that there may be the seed of some disharmony.

You know it's interesting, as I'm thinking sitting here thinking about my cousins who are married and there is seventeen years difference between them. But she's the older one you know and so that's another whole dynamic. So absolutely, because you've got the woman who is older than he is, but they've been married for twenty almost thirty years and they are just absolutely..... and that's a perfect reference to, as Douglas was saying, sort of where we were leaning into, that some of the things that we think will be major differences between us don't necessarily end up being the kinds of differences you anticipate, and some of the things that you think would be major commonalities end up being major sticking points between us.

When you're going into a relationship assume nothing about what it's necessarily going to be, but be prepared to talk about everything and when you already know that in terms of exterior pressure, as Douglas referenced previously, there is a world. Your relationship is not an island unto itself. There's a world that it has to sit inside of, it's a subculture to a culture, so being aware of the impact of what that is going to mean, relative to the whole, the more you talk to each other about those issues the better you are prepared to deal with the exterior pressures that could potentially be the things that would have created the implosion he referenced previously.

I'm struck by the fact that we live in a time where polarization is sadly become more extreme than ever

Absolutely and it's polarization you know..... we could have just as easily said: what do you do in a relationship when you have totally polar political perspective? My goodness, yeah that would be bigger than race. Although I would say to you that the likelihood that a couple would ever get together is slim.

Seriously that's a very good point.

But that's just another example of the kinds of extremisms that get in the way in a relationship. And in the Extremisms, to take the negative part of this argument, it really almost doesn't matter what that's about. Whether it's ace, religion, pick the topic. Economics and social standing. You can find differences if you're looking for them to separate you, and if you allow the people around you who want to cultivate tension around those differences to act in that way, then they're going to divide that relationship ultimately. If you believe this person is someone I care about, and I care about deeply, and I don't want that to happen, then you have the responsibility....not only in your relationship with them, but in your relationship with others, to draw the line in the sand and say look you may have to make a choice because if you aren't tolerant of my choice, then you've made a decision about your relationship with me. And it's not acceptable. I think that we have to take a look at this not in the narrow sense of any one kind of difference between people, but the fact that people are inherently..... look it's hard enough to live with yourself sometimes. Living with another person on a long term basis, in a healthy relationship, takes a lot of..... I won't say the word work, because it's not work, but it is intentionality it is commitment. And those pressures that you talk about from the outside, from within the family or from within society or wherever it comes from.... If you are not a strong unit you're almost doomed before you start, in the sense of...if one of you can be so swayed.

Most people in relationships want to not just have a relationship with the individual that they care about, but also those who care about them, with their family. So, the first time that Peggy introduced me to her sisters she's part of a close knit family, and her sisters are important in her....I have to, well I was a little bit nervous. Absolutely, and so the question in the back of my mind is, will they like me? Not out of the need to be liked but out of the hope that that's going to be another bridge part of our relationship.

Because it's a person you love, you want the people that your person loves to be supportive of your relationship because you don't want the pain of your person feeling torn between the people that they love. So you have a vested interest in wanting to be able to connect.

Well it's not so much that you're concerned about..... I need your affirmation, as if I'm missing something, more

than I want to make sure that my person is not put in a position that he or she feels torn between the two loves that exist in their lives.

So OK, so if you are in that relationship, if you are at that point where people are pulling at you to not make this union.... they don't think it's a good idea for whatever reason... how do you support each other so that you know....? I mean people have had trust funds taken away, I mean they've been cut off from family I mean there been some pretty dire things that have happened yet the nucleus of those couples have been able to kind of weather that, so I guess what I'm asking is: what advice do you have for people who are in the middle of that storm to be able to hold on?

I think that you'll find that where couples have weathered that it's because there's been a constant conversation and dialogue between the two of them about what they're finding, about what they're contending, and they've made a decision that says the bond between you and me is so important that I am willing to endure... if I cannot change the perspective of those people who are unhappy about this... I am willing to accept that, but you have to be really thoughtful about this, because if it becomes a point of resentment down the road then it's going to do exactly what they want it to do.

Yeah, so constant conversation and open dialogue between parties that says they feel this way, this person feels this way, and give your partner the right to hear that, and think about it. Maybe what happens is that you don't get Together... better to find that out now than to go down the road, but if it doesn't?

The thing you want to be sensitive to here is that you're not playing the game that often our kids play with us when we say to them: no you can't go play with Jamie and that just makes them want to play with Jamie that much more.

That kind of reaction response that people often have when they're told not to do something that's an unhealthy way to try to navigate this.

You heard Douglas reference sort of that storm. It takes me to one of my favorite quotes that a ship does not sink because of the water that it sits inside, it sinks because of the water that gets inside of it. So what is happening on the ship of your relationship between you and your partner is always going to be a more important. The portion that your relationship sits inside.

Beautifully said.

How do people get in touch with you? They can write to [alvean@lovelife.digital](mailto:alvean@lovelife.digital), or they can write to Douglas at [doug@lovelife.digital](mailto:doug@lovelife.digital).

We're happy to have been doing this show with our favorite producer, Barbara Hamm Lee, and our favorite recording engineer, Todd Washburn, and we will be back next week with another interesting topic to talk about.

Please write to us, tell us your story, we want to hear.