

LL54-You, Me and

I'm Doug Weiss, and I'm Alvean Lyons, Welcome to Love Life

Alvean, we've talked about so many different issues that men and women have to navigate in their relationships, that people in general have to navigate whether their relationships are romantic or not. Our topic for today concerns one of the more challenging: What do you do when your relationship is not just between you and another, but between you and another person and another? Now, by this, I want to be clear, I'm not talking about a love triangle in the usual sense, I'm talking about an invisible third person in a relationship. This can take many forms. It could be a former or late spouse, someone from a prior relationship; there are a variety of incarnations. The one thing they have in common is that this third party whether from the past or present is interfering in or in extreme cases, undermining a relationship. How do you get past that?

Alvean:

That's, that's really challenging. Just in terms of the meddling moms for example. I must admit that I think I'm a little bit of a meddling mom. What I mean by that is that I have very strong perspectives as a byproduct of both my professional training and personal experience. I have young adult daughters, and they talk to me very often about their relationships, and navigating these spaces. Unintentionally, I am a part of their relationships because of how close I am to them, to the extent that the other party, whoever they may be dating, may not even be fully aware of the level of influence I'm having on the trajectory of the relationship, because I'm the counsel to my children. I don't know how I might feel if I were on the other end of that, if I were their partner, and believed that it was just the two of us trying to navigate a situation and found out that after we finished our conversation, they were going to go have this conversation with their mom and her perspective was going to influence some decision.

I can say that, fortunately, it has worked out in positive ways thus far. But what would happen if, given how close I am to them, if were jaded and negatively influenced the trajectory of their relationship however unintentionally? Because they trust me, and because they believe in my counsel, I can really affect how things may turn out. There's going to come a point where my opinion must be just my opinion, where they're able to express their autonomy enough to say that my perspective is of value, but at the end of the day, they are going to make the best decision for them and their partner, husband, significant other, but not necessarily mom's decision. They're the ones who have to live inside of the intimacy that exists between them and their significant other, it really is not about me.

Depending upon the circumstances third party involvement could be a good thing, a bad thing or a very tenuous thing, something that kind of exists on the edge. Whichever it may be, autonomy is going to be extremely important for true intimacy to exist and for the health of the primary relationship because a third party factor can add some wild cards affecting how and how a relationship turns out. What do you think?

Doug:

Well, to agree, I think that the challenge for us as parents is to equip our children with a sufficient sense of themselves and the intellectual capacity to discern without placing undue influence on input from anyone, right, including us. We should want them to arrive at their own understanding, to accept input, evaluate and make decisions, but not endorse something because it's what someone has taught them to think. We want them to have that kind of critical viewpoint, the ability to parse out what they're hearing and apply good judgement based on their own life experience, to seek input from a variety of people but arrive at their own conclusions.

But the harder situation to deal with is when there is a lack of closure or resolution stemming from a prior relationship and that relationship or the absence thereof is affecting how you feel or relate to the present, because then you're dealing with a ghost that is capable of haunting every interaction. Adding to the difficulty is our propensity to over romanticize the past.

Alvean:

Right, regardless of what this prior relationship was really like, this phantom from the past now walks on water, even though you guys used to argue when you were together, and he or she's got on your very last nerve, none of those things are remembered. When there's still that lingering connection, you forget all of those negative things, and you focus on the romantic moments that you shared. In those cases, the person that you're with in the present may not seem to measure up to the glorified version of the past and that can be profoundly detrimental to the evolution of your current relationship.

Doug:

I think the most pernicious form this takes is when the former relationship is idealized. There's no objectivity, with the result that everything is going to be perceived through a distorted lens and may even become a source of contention over issues that you are unaware exist. It can be hard to suss out issues like this, they may not manifest until you are far along in your relationship and lacking history you may be unprepared for the intensity of feelings that can suddenly arise. Usually in a new relationship you go through a phase where you ask each other about your respective histories, how you got where you are, your prior relationships and such. But you may only get a superficial understanding. You may not see the telltales that reveal the fact that there's another party to your relationship, or the degree to which that person's behavior, good or bad, is influencing the present.

Alvean:

And you find that you're the partner that's having to cash the check that somebody else wrote. Perhaps there was infidelity or indiscretion. It wasn't you, you didn't do those things but in the midst of conflict you may find that your partner is replaying an argument with their ex about the transgression and while you may not be culpable there's nothing you can do to help gain closure except to try to bring the present into focus. With compassion you can recognize that there was a painful time in your partner's past life, and it may be necessary to take ownership of the moment to ensure that you and your partner are standing in the present, rather than the

past. Neither of you want to live inside of the pain but it is you who must assure your partner that you I will never do to them what their ex may have done.

Doug:

There's plenty of opportunity in such circumstances for misunderstanding, even when there aren't real issues. Let me give you an example. Peggy and I both lost our spouses. That's part of our life stories. Sometimes, especially when we meet new people who don't know our history we have found ourselves telling a part of our life story that includes the fact we lost our spouses. There is nothing especially wrong with it, it's just our history, but if it became a constant refrain, if our past became a fixture in our present it undoubtedly would be an unwelcome intrusion in our relationship.

Many years ago, I was at a social gathering visiting with friends of my wife and her late husband. Her late husband was their common point of connection with several of the couples and they had not seen each other in some time, with the result that the entire evening turned into reminiscences about him and the things that they had all done together as couples. On the face of it I understood their desire to recall happy times from the past. But as the evening wore on I kept waiting for this conversation to come to an end.

As we were driving home, I turned to my wife and said, I understand that it must have been good for you to reconnect with your friends and to reminisce about your time together. I didn't want to throw a wet blanket on it, but I do have to tell you that I was a little uncomfortable by the end of the evening because it really felt as if I wasn't in the room. You could have gone to this without me because the evening was really a celebration of your past. It made me feel as if everything since was of no consequence. I am not assigning blame, I tell this story to point out how easy it is to allow our past to intrude on our present despite our good intentions.

Alvean:

That's a rough situation to be in. I tell people all the time, if anything ever, God forbid in some alternate universe that does not exist, happened to Matthew I should never get remarried. I would be horrible, I mean I just know I would be horrible because I think he walks on water and I know that I would rehearse that in 1000 different ways at every possible moment. Worse yet, all my girlfriends think he walks on water too so if a next guy was even 10% less than Matt, him God help him. So the deck is stacked. I don't know that I would ever be able to marry again and my kids would be the worst too. They're so loyal to their dad and so loyal to the love that we have that I think they would be a reminder every day of the week every minute of the day that no one could be as good as dad no one could fill his shoes.

Doug:

A fellow that I know from church lost his wife a few years ago and he was alone and I would say quite sad. He socialized less and seemed depressed. As fate would have it, he eventually met someone, a perfectly lovely lady. They began a romance, but his kids were apoplectic because in their view this woman was a replacement for mom. And they went beyond passive resistance to do everything in their power to try to derail the relationship. When dad

announced that he was going to get remarried, it was nuclear. Brother and a sister held meetings to come up with plots to foil the relationship.

Alvean:

That would be my kids, picket signs out front. It's just the kids marching. It would be horrible. It would really take divine intervention for my kids to be kind to whoever would come next. I told Matt, we're just going to have to die within a couple of days of each other, let's pull a Notebook. Let's hold hands. Let's wake up with God together. Like that's how we need to do this.

Doug:

When my dad died my mom was alone for a while, though not a terribly long time. She eventually ended up with a fellow that I don't think was a romantic connection but with whom she found companionship. My mom was never someone who was very good at being alone. She needed someone both practically and emotionally.

I didn't particularly care for this fellow. It was not just because he was different, not my dad, I really thought she had done herself a disservice. My brother, on the other hand, not only didn't like this guy, he absolutely hated him, and every time these two were together, it was all out war to the point where my mother invoked me as the as the peacekeeper; a thankless task by the way. All that you can hopefully achieve is to have both of them hate you.

The lesson for me is that if you don't surface latent issues like these as soon as you recognize them, and have frank and open conversation, bring them to the other person's attention, you're never going to resolve them.

Alvean:

Relationships are not meant to be triangles.

Doug:

What a great point to end on. Well, we have a kind of a triangle relationship. It's Alvean and me, Kamaria and Todd and you.

We've enjoyed this conversation today. Enjoyed spending some time with you, and hope that you'll come back next week and listen to another episode. In the meantime, if you have some thoughts about this or any other topic, please feel free to write to us. doug@lovelife.digital or alvean@lovelife.digital

We want to thank Kamaria Mason, our producer, Todd Washburn, our Recording Engineer and the entire Love Life family, including you, our listeners. We'll be back next week with another episode. Until then, have a wonderful week. Bye folks.