



The Millennial Life

podcast

with Liz Higgins

Episode 4: Relationship FOMO

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):

Welcome! And thanks for joining me today. I am going to talk with you about relationship FOMO. And I'm going to guess that this topic and title may have pulled you in a little bit. This is my mini clickbait, but the reality is that this is such a common issue in our generation, and we need to talk about it. Simply put, the fear of missing out can seriously drive a person out of their relationship. It can be a healthy, satisfactory relationship too. It doesn't always mean there's something wrong, or inherently happening in the relationship that's unhealthy, or toxic, or anything like that. So it could be a real bummer or a shock to somebody when their partner bounces. Or, if you're the one that's plagued by this experience of relational FOMO, you may be wondering more about that. You may be trying to understand what's going on with you, why this keeps happening...

Liz Higgins (01:39):

We've got majorly caught up in our world today of thinking that the path to our ideal relationship, our longterm committed relationship or marriage, that it's about 'finding' the right person versus 'choosing' the right person. And this is actually a pretty significant difference to acknowledge because things like the choice paradox (which if you're not familiar with the psychology there, I highly recommend doing a little mini research and learning about the psychology of choice and choice paradox). And when we have an overload and a plethora of decisions to make, people become crippled, they freeze up, or they start just choosing, choosing, choosing out of anxiety and constantly freak out that they've made the wrong choice and they will wrap that one up and find something else. So there's really a psychology here too, in terms of the context of our world, the dating culture, the rise of online technological abilities to connect with people... It's thrown us into this majorly anxious state of needing to be sure we find the one that checks off all the marks that we have for what our perfect partner will be and who they are and what they're doing.

Liz Higgins (03:11):

And it steers us away from this idea that we can meet somebody imperfect. We could even meet somebody that's as broken as we are, and we could create an epic healing, fulfilling relationship with them. The path to doing that is through realizing it's a choice. It's a conscious,

consistent choice. So I'm going to dive into a few different themes on this topic of FOMO, and hopefully bring some insight to you and start this conversation that we will continue to have more of throughout this podcast. So from a therapeutic lens, we might look at FOMO, or a person that is portraying this fear of missing out, or they're like living that out and hopping from relationship to relationship or whatever, as somebody that is anxiously attached. They maybe haven't cultivated a healthy sense of differentiation or emotional maturity. Um, there's a reason why this is happening. And y'all this isn't new!

Liz Higgins (04:18):

This is not new or unique to millennials and our generation. What is different, uh, is the compounding effects that drive our generation in a whole new level, like technology, this theme of instant gratification and how we can literally pull up an app and just start skimming through potential people, to meet partners, to have things to do shows, to watch. We've learned to get what we want when we want it. I mean, this is the difference between... Like when I was growing up. If I wanted to rewatch part of a show or a movie, I had to sit there patiently while the VHS rewound. Now? Well, we all know how that goes now. Things today are driven at a pace far beyond one that gives us, or encourages us, to take a moment to stop, investigate, explore, and lean in. It's not as desirable to slow down and explore what's going on inside of us when we could literally just move on.

Liz Higgins (05:29):

So y'all know one of my favorites is Esther Perel. She says so many just on point things about relationships, especially in our modern world. And she talks about how we used to say monogamy was one person for life. And now monogamy is one person at a time. We used to marry and then have sex. And now we have sex as a precursor to marriage. And sex is often a factor as well that lets us know if we're with the right match, the right person. I'm not here to argue on that right now, but without a doubt, if you're having these kinds of intense relational experiences, (whether you call it that or not) and then later on, you're choosing to commit, or as we like to say, "settle down", you may find yourself feeling FOMO at some point. I want to reshape how we look at this because marriage, or longterm commitment, (I kind of use those terms interchangeably here.)

Liz Higgins (06:32):

It's not settling down. Okay. Settling down makes me think of, like, my college self who was out literally every night socializing. I was going to shows,, or events hanging out with friends, going to a party... My life now where I crave getting home at the end of a long day and just snuggling under a blanket with my partner or by myself, to some Netflix. Settling down, it feels it's, it's a true shift. It's relaxing, it's easy. It's chill. Real commitment is not easy or chill. It's, it's work! And we have to understand that we need to look at relationships from a more realistic lens for what they really are. And I'm not trying to push this agenda that if you're not working at it, and if you don't feel uncomfortable and if you don't feel that effort going in, then you're not doing it right. I do believe that a good, healthy relationship -

Liz Higgins (07:34):

It feels good. It feels easy. It feels comfortable a lot of the time. But it's in those moments that we start to peer beyond our relationship - "What am I missing out on? What else is out there? Like could there be something else, might there be someone better, or someone that could do

this or that just a little bit more to my satisfaction?" It's when we start playing that mind game that we are just setting ourselves up to stay in that framework of anxiety rather than cherishing what we have now. And this kind of takes me to another thought that I had about why relationship FOMO happens for some of us. And I think that a lot of people don't know how to value what they have. Like again, the speed of life right now, just it's not congruent with slowing down and resting in a place of cherishing what we have. It's, it's really cool because in a lot of ways, our generation is trying to be progressive about going back to what we know keeps us grounded. Practicing mindfulness, meditation, learning to lean in and pause and focus on our mental health and things that matter and things that help us stay sturdy. But I don't know if that conversation is fully there yet as far as our relationships. We're looking to finding the right person and that's going to help stabilize us more.

Liz Higgins (09:10):

And that's just not how it works.

Liz Higgins (09:11):

The right relationship, the right partner - at a certain point, once you surpass your honeymoon phase and all the good vibes of the very beginning and that chemistry piece - you start to sit with some other very real emotional experiences and some questions. And I think that in some ways, when you get to that point, the, the FOMO in the sense of it happening at all is not the bad thing. It's just when we feed into that, when we allow it to take us away from realizing that that's an opportunity to grow in the relationship we're in right now, like, that's the main difference. So again, um, we don't really know in relationships how to fully pause and cherish and just rest in what we have. And I'm not just talking about like, acknowledging, "Hey, you have nice hair going on today" or "thanks for taking the trash out".

Liz Higgins (10:13):

I mean, that's great. Like, gratitude is an absolutely wonderful, beautiful skill and practice to have in your relationships. But to truly value and realize what you have and to be able to turn to a partner, even in the midst of a challenging time or whatever, and, and being able to like embody and say to them, "thank you for inviting the best of me out and working with me to create a life, a story that we're both excited to be a part of and committing to being a part of that". I mean that right there... That's, that is the meat of a really solid commitment and secure foundation. It all boils down to those bigger questions that I talk about sometimes on this podcast. Like, are you there for me? Will you always be there for me? Am I there for me? These are the bigger questions that we need to be asking.

Liz Higgins (11:18):

I think another reason for relationship FOMO is because we don't really have good boundaries. We don't really have boundaries to protect us from that experience. So it's one thing to kind of be aware that it's happening, but it's another to have the tools and the knowledge of how to navigate it. I mean, there's a million things in my life that I could allow to pull me away from my partner. Busy-ness, my job, my work, naming it as needing to be there for my kids so much that I just don't have anything left to give him. I mean, I open my phone and I'll see, like, a photo on Instagram of somebody living their best life supposedly, or looking ripped and feeling a little FOMO about that. Like, what am I not doing to have myself there and, or I feel vulnerable. And I opened myself up to, to my News Feed and I go snoop around and see what my ex was up to.

Liz Higgins (12:22)

Ooh, that's one that I hear a lot from people. So there's this internal narrative going on when we do those things. And this is like a brain-body thing. We start to feel that longing for that life out there, for that piece of the pie that we are not, we are not nibbling on right now. And I mean, that internal narrative allows me to entice the story. Like with my husband, for example, if he could just be a little different and shift this or that, or open up to me in the exact way that I need when I need that... I mean, there must be someone else out there who could do that. Right? Well, sure. There could be, but then they'd probably be lacking in other areas for me. I know too much to know that that would be the right step for me to take.

Liz Higgins (13:14):

Right? But so we... There's external things that pull at you and if you allow them to, they will, they'll, they'll pull you away. And then there's those internal things like my own insecurities, my own self doubts, the things that I haven't let myself bring to surface and bring to my relationship to face and to talk about and address those things, become the story. Enticing. This idea of there could be something better and what's even worse, right, is that something better could actually be easy to find right now. So if I'm not clear on what I have to cherish or like my own needs and my own desires, then looking outward is an easier thing to do. I think it's very worth talking for a minute about the expectations that we have. We being us millennials. I mean, like not only do we want our significant other to be our top supportive person, but he or she has also got to be our best friend.

Liz Higgins (14:20)

They need to be our lover. They need to be our soundboard. Maybe they'll be our co-parent. I mean, they need to be it all. And if you don't do it for me, well, I can quickly go out and find someone else that will. This is the idea that we have in our brains. And we aren't questioning the model of marriage or commitment, we're questioning the person. So then we look away, it must be you. So let me just remove you from the equation and find the other one. And then I'll know that, you know, they're meeting all the needs that I have. But listen, you're a smart person. I'm sure you know, perfect doesn't exist. And if you're finding yourself ruminating on that over and over and over; that, I've just got to find the person that crosses all the boxes and that treats me perfectly.

Liz Higgins (15:14):

And that looks perfect and that doesn't have any problems and doesn't have any baggage. I just encourage you to take a pause and check in with yourself and revisit, revisit those things and look at your expectations. This also takes me to another thought about FOMO, which is that I think many people actually don't know what they want when we aren't clear on our values. When we are not clear on what we are actually deeply seeking out of a relationship, we tend to take on the values of others. And when we're attracted to others, or we find ourselves in relationship with somebody else, we may find ourselves over-correcting in the sense of allowing what they want or need to supersede our own discovery of what we truly want or need in a relationship. And so some of this you'll discover in a relationship, but a lot of learning and owning what you need and want from life can actually be done on your own.

Liz Higgins (16:20):

So, I've worked with individuals a lot of times that are really trying to refine, "What do I want for my life? Here's maybe the noise of what the world has told me I should do, or my family system or my family's culture, my culture, but what do I really want?" I want to put a little plug in here for my conversation with another therapist, Avrum Nadigel, who's in another episode, um, that I launched recently, where he talks a lot about his experience personally and professionally with commitment phobia. You definitely will want to listen to that one if this stuff is resonating for you or bringing something up for you. The main point here is that relationship FOMO is very worth exploring. It's worth leaning into, it's worth pausing. And when I say pause, you may actually consider like, if this is you or you've found yourself on the receiving end of breakup after breakup, I mean, there's two ends to this dynamic.

Liz Higgins (17:28):

It's a relational experience. I suggest pausing in the sense of, just, make a commitment to yourself, to hold off on pursuing something new, spend some time in yourself, spend some time journaling right on this very topic. Just jot down. Like when I think about relationship FOMO in my life, this is what comes up for me. And I don't even want to give more instruction beyond that because I think the free flow of your intuition and just letting that pen move and letting the words come out might lead you to some realizations or some interesting, some interesting aha points that you may want to take to a coach or a therapist and, and look at a little bit. And if you're in a relationship, do something really vulnerable here. Talk about it, actually put light on this experience and see what inviting some focus to this does for you.

Liz Higgins (18:37):

I think another thing I reflect on and I'll close up on this point is when I, when I talk to clients who are in this head space of kind of being driven by the FOMO, being in a relationship can feel like somewhat of a threat, maybe a threat to their independence or that sense of self that they believe they've cultivated and not wanting to lose that. I mean, the reality is that many millennials are partnering up, at least in those long term commitments and marriages, later in life. So we definitely are a lot of times more established and more figured out. At least we think so, right. But then the totally new horizon of a relationship throws us into some insecurities and "W-w-w-w-wait. I've worked so hard to figure things out up to this point. How do I know this isn't going to be a threat to everything that I've created for myself?"

Liz Higgins (19:36):

And you just have to know that being in a healthy, a healthy relationship is to maintain that separateness. It's to have two free individuals and for your independence and separateness not only to be accepted, but to be encouraged. So step one is really knowing what you value, knowing what your partner values, respecting those, and when the values shift (as they will, because we grow and we change over life)... If they shift, you talk about that, healthy couples talk about vulnerable stuff without judgment. Yeah. If I could bold my words for that, I would, because it's really important to remember.... When there's this precedence in your relationship that you can't talk about the things that your mind wanders off and conjures up, you can't talk about deeper, more raw and emotional experiences that you're having or feeling when you can't bring up concerns, insecurities or things you feel ashamed of.

Liz Higgins (20:51):

That's not a completely safe and secure relationship. I'm just going to say that and it's okay. It doesn't mean it's not salvageable. It doesn't mean you can't turn the ship a little bit. It, you absolutely can, but that's where I put the plug for if you can't seem to figure it out yourself, equip yourselves with support to learn, to do that. That's the power of a therapy experience or a coaching experience to help nudge you in a new direction to try some things you haven't done before. So from there, you are allowed to recognize that you need to take time for yourself. You can have different belief systems from each other. You can have different interests, different turn-ons. I mean, like everything can be different and it's okay. My husband and I come from two different religious backgrounds and, where in a lot of ways that would be a really big deal for me and for the life that I plan to have, that hasn't in and of itself been this major deal breaker or problem area for us.

Liz Higgins (21:59):

And I, I credit that to the fact that we talked about it upfront and we talked about it a lot. And I pushed myself to ask some uncomfortable questions about what he wanted and what I wanted that I knew I didn't want to let go of and what that was going to look like. And, you know, I honestly, I can't speak to what that may look like to people outside of our relationship. But the thing I remain grounded in is that I know where we stand on that within our relationship. And I'm good with where we are and how we're handling it. All right. The main takeaways that I hope you get from this are that we oftentimes do not know how to value what we have. We don't maybe have good boundaries to protect those values or to protect us from pursuing that narrative that could lead us outward to something supposedly bigger, better, whatever. We don't know what we want. We're not solid on our values. And we don't know, or we haven't practiced being in a relationship where the two individual selves are encouraged to grow and develop and be. I hope you all took something away from this conversation today. And I would honestly love to see some feedback or some comments if you enjoyed this conversation. So head over to Apple and post something for me, and please stay in touch as I talk about more topics like this.

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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