



The Millennial Life

podcast

with Liz Higgins

Episode 6: When Genetic Testing Turns Your World Upside Down A Conversation with Cotey Bowman, LPC Associate

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 (00:35):

Hello, hello. Welcome! I want you to picture this scenario for a minute. So, say you're somebody that's just gone through life, kind of having a seemingly normal life experience, right? You grow up, you go through high school, you finish college, you make some friends, you have some fun and you dive into your passions and figure out where you're going in life. You maybe even graduate and land that exciting job you've always wanted, or find that life partner that you've been hoping for. And maybe even get married and settle down and start a family, have some kids... But then, say just for kicks, you decide, "Uh, you know, everybody's doing that genealogy stuff. I'll try it out. Why not?" And you get your results back. And what you see is not anything you could have ever imagined. It's this reality that if this data is accurate here, and if your spit told them correctly, you are not necessarily who you thought you were.

Liz Higgins (01:48):

And maybe one of your parents isn't who you always thought that they were. This is the very experience that my guest today went through himself and now helps others navigate through this is called an NPE or a non-paternity event. And it's become more and more common with the rise of DNA technology and people taking the opportunity to try these tests out. So with an experience like this, as I'm sure you can imagine, there's a whole lot of raw emotion and stuff to process through. So Cotey and I talked through this and he lets us into a little bit of what this very personal experience has been like for him, both from a person that has lived through it, to being a professional now. And what, what navigating this experience is like in the realm of therapy. I hope you enjoy the conversation. And as always, if you like what you hear, leave us a review and leave a comment. Here we go. I'm very excited to be joined here by Cotey Bowman, who is an LPC associate in Dallas - or rather Denton, I should say. And Cotey is working in this very unique, but more common niche area of NPE, which stands for non-paternity event. And I want to dive right in. Cotey, welcome to the podcast! And I'm just so glad you took time today to chat with me.

Cotey Bowman (03:30):

Yeah. Thanks for having me.

Liz Higgins (03:32):

Sure. So first, can you explain, for listeners who may not know, what NPE stands for and what it is? Tell us about that.

Cotey Bowman (03:42):

Yeah. So when you, when you ask what that is, I took a little bit of time to ask some of the community and really what it comes down to is this acronym, NPE, stands for non-paternity event or not parent expected. The groups who are involved in this tend to debate that because it's not always a paternity issue under the umbrella of NPE when it extends out wider. So this is an event in which someone discovers that they are a part of a misattributed parentage, themselves being the unknown child. So an easier understanding is that the believed parent throughout the person's life, isn't actually related to them biologically at all. In this growing community, it's more commonly observed that the miss attributed parentage or non-paternity event involves the father primarily. So that's something we see commonly, but not always. Though, we would say for instance, um, in the "not always" category, when dealing with those who discover they were adopted later in life, or maybe another one would be considered donor conceived.

Liz Higgins (05:51):

Yeah, well, yeah, and even the possible name change there, I think it speaks to how just new and at the present time, this whole experience is. And I was really interested when I met you, when I first saw and learned of you and that you were focusing in on this, because I had not come across anybody, at least not like locally or on any really prominent platform that was working with this niche in the therapy field. And it was interesting to me because I have had multiple clients show up with this very thing going on in their life. And I guess at the end of the day, it's made some sense because the rise of these DNA tests and all of that stuff happening, what was bound to, I guess, happen, but it was really interesting to learn of you. And I'm curious to hear a bit about you and what got you into this specialty and what interests you about this niche?

Cotey Bowman (06:50):

So when, when I started in counseling, my gear was primarily towards couples counseling, um, and it, and it really still is, but I have always been into genealogies and ancestry and whatnot. And one Christmas, I asked for a DNA test after I saw, I believe it was an ancestry, DNA, commercial around, you know, Thanksgiving time promoting for the holidays. And I said, I'll take one of those. That would be something right. Yeah. They marketed around there. Then it takes six to eight weeks to come in. So you have a little bit of time to get through the holidays. But, um, so yeah. It comes in and actually, when I read on the back of it that it would take normally six to eight weeks to process, I actually didn't do anything with it. I didn't do anything with it for about a year. So it sat in my drawer for about one year, and one day I just got up and said, you know, this is just laziness.

Cotey Bowman (07:59):

I'm going to go ahead and spit in this tube and send it in and we'll see what happens. So when it came back, I was looking around and I noticed that I had zero DNA dealing with anything Native American, which was what I was kind of led to believe. Also, Italian was not there. It was everything that was focused on that little Island in Europe, in the Northwest, known as the UK. So everything was pretty much there, primarily; made a whole lot of sense when I look at myself

in a mirror. But they have another neat thing through ancestrydna.com. There's an app that comes with it. So when you look up where you're from, it's connected to a button called DNA story. When you move over to matches, that's when you start to see everyone that your DNA links up to and they break it down from close family, that would be anything such as grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, to first cousins, second cousins, third, fourth.

Cotey Bowman (09:09):

And I mean, it just goes to an extended list. I think by the time I looked at this probably a few weeks ago, I had some distant relatives, numbering close to like 600,000. So, and it changes every year they update it. They, they change your DNA profile a little bit considering where you're from, uh, where you originate because these different consumer DNA kits are reaching into other countries. And as they get more data, so they're able to piece together your story. So your story is changing. I went from just being up in the, in the UK to now being Norwegian, Swedish, and German. So as they continue to grow, and they do updates, so will little bits about you change. Moving back to kinda my story. I did that. I thought it was kind of exciting. I thought everyone who told me I was Italian and Native American, they were just, you know, they were the ones lost.

Cotey Bowman (10:17):

So I was going to go and tell them about that. And when I looked at the close family, I noticed that most of the people on here, they were people I knew. Some of them getting into the second cousins I didn't know, but I figured that that was pretty common. Um, because, though they label it second cousin, it's based on what they would say are centimorgans, that's how they measure your DNA. And within the second cousin range, they're not necessarily your second cousins. They can be something else, but it's, uh, ancestrydna.com has a chart that will kind of tell you that more. Um, for instance, like when you see close family, like I told you, it can range anywhere from parent to aunt to sibling and then you kind of piece that together on your own.

Liz Higgins (11:13):

So you weren't terribly caught off guard by that at this point.

Cotey Bowman (11:15):

Yeah. I, you know, it was kind of interesting because I noticed all the people that were related to me and I was like, "okay, yeah, that makes sense." But I looked at the one who I was closest related, related to, and it never dawned on me for the first day that I had never seen that name in my life. So I don't really know what that's about, but this person is someone that I share the most DNA with. And I just saw that name and didn't think anything of it. So it really wasn't until the next day that I, I kind of started to ask myself questions and I actually texted my dad, who I had grown up believing was my biological father. And kind of asking him some questions about this person. I thought, you know, this might be someone who's lost that we don't know about.

Cotey Bowman (12:09):

You know, I was starting to think reverse my situation. This was this other person's situation and we needed to find them. So I reached out to my father who is, who is (my, my parents are divorced just to mention that)... And immediately I received a call from my stepmother and it was kind of on from then on like in a, in a good way. They were trying to figure out how to bring this up because there had been, since I was young, there had always been question about who I belonged to. And back in 1987, up to 1989, um, during their divorce period, and when they were trying to determine, uh, if I was biologically my father's or not, they used to do it based on a

blood typing. So you had to - in the state of Oklahoma where I was from - you had to actually be 95% match or above, and that would be how they determined paternity. So I think I matched like 96% to, um, the person I thought who was my biological father and the case was shut from there on.

Liz Higgins (13:46):

Wow.

Cotey Bowman (13:46):

But yeah, so as I grew up though, um, I obviously wasn't necessarily looking like him and, um, you know, it would take 31 or 30 years later for me to actually find out through this testing.

Liz Higgins (13:55):

I'm just thinking about, and it's like, I know this happened some time ago for you and you're talking through it so calmly, but at the time when the truth really came out for you around all this, what was that emotional experience like for you?

Cotey Bowman (14:12):

Oh, what a question to ask! Um, it was, it was pretty complicated. Um, I think for me it answered a lot of questions. Just, I think a lot of NPE's would say this as well, that they always grew up knowing something was kind of off, but they didn't know what it was when it came to such things as belonging. And given that's not necessarily everyone's experience. But some of us who have maybe had a, a parental figure who was tipped off early or had some type of thought that, um, I or someone else could be the biological child of another person. It's interesting to talk to those people because we almost all say the same thing that we knew something was wrong, but we didn't understand what it was.

Cotey Bowman (15:04):

So for emotions, I mean, Oh my goodness. Yeah. It's just a, just a flood of different things. I think at first, shock kind of hit. And I was just looking back at everything up to the point of where I was. And I was thinking about my identity, which is something that a lot of people, um, also are, are struggling with. I'd say that's one of the main points in this discovery. And you know, my, my dad who I thought was biologically related, he really stepped up and he actually made a trip down the next day to talk to me about this. And at the time, he probably lived three hours away. He called my wife and said, I'm coming down. And she took off work and came too, and he told me about it and it was, it was terribly hard on him. And I think at the time I was just pretty calm, but I was in shock. Really the flood of emotions didn't hit until maybe that night or the next night.

Cotey Bowman (16:13):

And it was just sadness. Um, and really what started to come in was the loss of experience that I missed out on. Because I immediately with, with technology, I was immediately able to snoop who my biological father was. So I guess we would call that, call that "creep on". Right? So I was immediately able to do that. So I really, what happened is my non biological father came down and he said, "This is who I always expected was, was your paternal match. And the person that you matched up to is his sister. And that would be my aunt, who is the close, close family match. So I started dealing with loss and I think it really hit me because I was looking on Facebook, and I'm seeing that I have three siblings that I, you know, obviously didn't know about - two sisters and a brother. And then I have a, what would be a stepmother as well. And I started just seeing all these different family members that are all connected and I'm going, I grew up in

the same town as most of these people and we even crossed paths, but I didn't know who they were. So, so dealing with loss, I would say, that's what hit me the hardest. Um, and as I'll talk about in a minute, kind of ambiguous loss and basically dealing with the, 'what ifs' and the possibilities of things to come, or what could have been.

Liz Higgins (17:57):

I think what you were talking about earlier with that identity shift, or just that impact of like, "Whoa, kind of who am I?" Like... I've seen that happen with people who have gone through this and now as adults are questioning this whole half of who they thought they were; both from like purely medical, medical history perspective to that deeper emotional connection of like, "who am I really a part of here?" And it just seems like it's such an impactful thing to go through for somebody.

Cotey Bowman (18:35):

Yeah. I think that when I meet with people or I read about other people's experiences, they really tend to be hung up on the identity issue for the longest, longest amount of time.

Liz Higgins (19:56):

Were you?

Cotey Bowman (19:56):

You know, I would say that I was, and it, it kind of slipped to the back of my mind over time. But the reason I think that it did is we, I had an experience that I don't think is as common. My experience was pretty good when I reached out to my biological family. And I think that really aided in kind of the healing, um, realizing where we are and where we're going and developing. I would never, I would never go as far as what some people say and say, "my identity is stripped". I would always say that your identity is there and has made you to who you are or, sorry... That's all a culmination of your experiences to make you who you are now, right? That this experience is an add on. It's also a loss, but it's all building technically onto the foundation you already have. And that's really how I went on with it.

Liz Higgins (19:57):

That's huge. And I just think about, woof, that piece of reaching out to your biological family. I mean, that is just, a big bucket of vulnerability there, and that's wonderful to hear that it was a positive response for you. Um, I'm sure that's not the case for everybody out there. And I don't know. What would you say to those people who maybe don't get a positive response to reaching out?

Cotey Bowman (20:27):

You know, I don't know exactly what I would say. I don't think there is something, I don't think there's something that is generic that I could say, but really what, what I would do with them is work on where their identity is now and processing that loss, that rejection that has come, you know, for some people. And when we process that, a lot of times people, people will say, you know, this is sad, this is hard to discover. It's something I wish I hadn't discovered. But then a lot of times people tend to be thankful for where they are or what they have. That's obviously that's not everyone's situation. Either. Some people had a bad, they had a bad experience growing up, with the family they did have, and they have a rejection experience as well when they make a discovery. And that really takes a lot of time and work and processing.

Cotey Bowman (21:27):

But yeah, I think, I mean, obviously being an NPE, I can, I can empathize with them. Um, especially that scare of reaching out. Like I had, I had a therapist of my own, and before I ever reached out, my therapist and I, we, we basically did role play. Best scenario, worst scenario. And we kind of worked on what the thoughts would be that we told ourselves if it was a bad case, you know, it was a rejection. I think I worked so hard on that, that when I kind of received an acceptance, I didn't know what to do with myself. But I was very confused cause I was expecting rejection based on so many of the stories that I've read and they, they are, they're heartbreaking there, there's just, there's stories of rejection. There's, there's unsolved stories where someone will find that they have a different family member that's kind of close, but people have passed away, or their biological parent has passed away and that the case goes cold, you know?

Liz Higgins (22:44):

Oh yeah, yeah. And an unfinished story basically. Well, and you said something earlier that I think is so, so huge for us to go back to, and you mentioned that term "ambiguous loss" and you and I know that that is kind of enveloped in that experience of grief, which probably comes up a lot for somebody that's gone through an NPE. So tell us a little bit about that. Like what is that?

Cotey Bowman (23:10):

Yeah. So I think, I think kind of putting it in its simplest terms, um, most will say that it's a loss that occurs without closure or any type of clear understanding.

Liz Higgins (23:22):

Just what you were describing. Yeah.

Cotey Bowman (23:24):

Yeah. And, and most people, you know, I really think that most NPE's all together, they have that same issue going on. Even if they have a good situation that occurs, they're dealing with certain things that they can't get closure on, such as in their formative years, right? One, one thing that I'm struggling with right now, and researching, is attachment. And you just realize that, though people are biological and you're meeting with them and you're having discussion and your bonding, attachment does not happen overnight. And I think that's one of the hardest things is, is that, but yeah. So in a good case scenario, you're still dealing with issues from the past of what could have been. Um, worst case scenario, you're not only dealing with what could have been, you're dealing with what is and what will be. And all of it looks kind of bleak in some ways. There, there's a rejection and there's a 'never was'. For a better, better case scenario, there's a 'never was', and 'there is', and possibly a future of what can be with these people. So I think...

Liz Higgins (24:40):

Yeah, but, at the core of that it sounds like a lot of unknowns.

Cotey Bowman (24:43):

Unknowns. Yeah. That's, that's really, the biggest thing is there's so much unknown.

Liz Higgins (24:58):

How could you describe what grief is like?

Cotey Bowman (25:03):

The grief that I notice with others and, kind of with myself as well, you're going to have the emotional symptoms and you're also going to have physical symptoms. Yeah. So those, those two are going to go kind of hand in hand. But a lot of people, I think on the emotional side of it, they have this kind of like over-preoccupation with loss. They tend, tend to have bitterness in the grief. I almost hear of no ability for them to show joy. Some of them won't even be able to experience it in the little things, daily, with their lives that exist, if there is anything. And, um, you know, such as having their own family. Sometimes people have a hard time looking at what is. Increased irritability. I'd say a lot of people feel kind of numb. That's dealing with the emotional symptoms. I would say out of mine, I, I definitely at one point or time in my journey kind of experienced most of those. And then, you know, um, a deep sadness that normally leads to moments where people say, you know, I just went in a room and I just shed tears for hours.

Liz Higgins (26:19):

Yeah. So really that overflow of the emotions that, you know, it's like, you're saying you can maybe bottle it up for a certain amount of time, but it comes out. It overcomes you. And maybe for some people, they just don't even experience the joy in the now - it's really put the blinders on.

Cotey Bowman (26:40):

Yeah, it does. And, I think, kind of the physical things, one thing I was going to mention, I noticed a lot of people have fatigue, which I think is pretty common with grief, but they'll just be like, you know, "I can't, I don't even feel like I can do anything" and they tend to rest that on this NPE status, you know. Like you said, they kind of have the blinders on. They're missing some of the things that are good and joyful in their life. And it's, I think has to do a lot with kind of a preoccupation of the loss. And I'm not saying that's not significant. It is. But that's where, that's where I definitely see bringing a therapist into the mix is helpful. Having someone who can kind of bring this awareness about how to help you see things maybe a little clearer than you wouldn't be when you're in the middle of all of this, right?

Liz Higgins (27:36):

Right. Well, and I think that's what just adds this layer of amazingness, honestly, to you. Because I've heard that very thing from clients that I was already working with that maybe came in and had literally just gone through this experience and this, this discovery, and then like the subsequent sessions were really this, this shock and realization that they didn't feel like they could necessarily go to anybody to talk about this. This wasn't the same thing as like parents getting divorced or, you know, I found out my mom cheated one time on my dad long ago, or something like that. Like, this is no, you are the byproduct of something that you have not known about your entire life. And it was something that seemed to make them maybe feel more isolated and unable to go just talk to anybody about it. Maybe there's even like an aspect of shame for some people that, "what does this mean about me and my family and what will this look like" or whatever. So the fact that you, and potentially other therapists out there, have walked through this and know how to help people that are going through this, I think is just so huge. And again, one of the reasons why I was so excited to have you talk about this, because I think it overall, this seems like it's a really, it could potentially be a really lonely experience.

Cotey Bowman (29:05):

Yeah. I think, I think it's pretty lonely, it seems like, for many people. Um, you know, my experience when I was first dealing with this and say, I would tell a family member or one of my wife's family members, or some friends that were close to us... Nobody is exactly ready, uh, when they hear that. It's pretty new and it sounds like something from a movie. So people kinda are like, "Oh my goodness. Okay." And you know, I think most of the NPE people, they, they reach out like that hoping to gain understanding. And really that's, that's asking a lot because there's not a ton of understanding. It's, it's pretty new. Now you have people who can relate to you in pain, right? But that certain issue is hard to understand for those who have never experienced it or are just now hearing about it. And I noticed that a lot of people, when it comes to therapy, they'll say the same things.

Cotey Bowman (30:11):

"I tried someone, it wasn't good, they didn't get me." And sometimes I, I'm concerned that, you know, we, we feel like we have to have a therapist completely understand us, right? When that's not necessarily my belief in the therapeutic process. It's, it's that working alliance together. Um, but NPE's tend to really want to see somebody who has that experience. And there's not a whole lot of them. And, and, you know, you're dealing with state boundaries as well, (as you know), and sometimes you cannot, uh, the licensure is not reciprocated. There is no ability to counsel somebody in this other state. So I will, I will oftentimes reach out to people and try to guide them towards someone who has a lot of experience in, um, adoption counseling or late adoption discovery type of stuff. They, they tend to be people who get it a little bit more and some of their techniques and their, um, therapies are, are more relatable and work better with NPE's (or at least I find.)

Liz Higgins (31:26):

Yeah. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense.

Cotey Bowman (32:57):

I did want to mention one thing. You asked about the frequency, um, on the questions about, uh, about NPE discoveries. I got frustrated researching it. I'm, I'm out there and, I don't know what I was expecting to find, but there's almost absolutely nothing. But, here's what I wanted to mention to people who were saying, "well, I wonder how common this is for someone who does a consumer DNA test." So, everything I read - and there were a few kind of peer-reviewed journal articles that seem to estimate as low as 1.9% of all people who have done one of these tests. And then you see some really not, um, probably not reviewed really, maybe shadier percentages like 30% - And to kind of put this in, in a figure for people... What they do know is, as of February, 2020, there were 26 million people who have taken a consumer DNA test. So if you want to go with the 30%, which I don't think it is, that would be 7.8 million people find out that they are an NPE. What I think it's probably closer to, is that 1.9%, and that would be 494,000. So close to 500,000.

Liz Higgins (32:59):

Which is still a lot of people when you think about it. But, and, and I guess the whole difference being that like, man, just a few decades ago, we didn't have this kind of technology. Like you just didn't know this stuff.

Cotey Bowman (33:13):

Yeah. These NPE or what it... there's actually documents and kind of research going back. And they would, they would have said more like MPE for mis-attributed parentage. I mean, it's

obviously always been there. Um, it's just now DNA has made it where you can't hide anymore. The secrets come out.

Liz Higgins (33:38):

Exactly. Right. Well, that makes so much sense. And thanks for sharing those insights, because maybe that will give listeners a little bit of a perspective on the frequency. And I just have a feeling that fortunately, unfortunately, I don't know. I, I think this is fortunate though, that your business will only get bigger because people hopefully will, um, do what you did and bring... Allow a therapist to help them walk through this experience. And just hearing that you were an adult, you were married when you learned of this. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions on that piece. Like, how did that impact you in your marriage relationship? And what would you say to somebody listening that is maybe in a relationship with somebody and has gone through this experience?

Cotey Bowman (34:29):

Yeah. That's... Oh my goodness. That's so hard. So my, my wife is a therapist as well. So I think in some ways...

Liz Higgins (34:39):

Therapists get together all the time.

Cotey Bowman (34:41):

Oh my goodness. You know, it, she really, really helped me a lot. And I think that I kind of got lucky in that sense of having someone who was pretty much trained to know the right things to say... But yeah, I think for us, it really, it really helped us in our relationship growing - especially during the part where, you know, I just broke down in the sad and she was there for me. And really from what I've heard of some other accounts or people in, in session with me, the best thing that can really happen is just being there. And, you know, we understand, or at least an NPE person should understand, no one really has the right words for this. Not at, you know, there's nothing to say at the beginning. Um, be there, kind of show love and support in that way. My wife is obviously a therapist,

Cotey Bowman (35:45):

So she did know some of the things to say, I guess, but... To snap me out of it. But, um, yeah, I, I think that also not just being there, knowing when the right time is to talk about help, and getting it, because so many of the people that I, I counsel or in my own experience, um, my wife had to speak to me one day about, you know, "I notice you're not accepting this and it's just carrying on and on and on." And not, you know, maybe half of her, a small part of her was saying, "Oh, I'd like this to end so we can get some joy going on here." But I think, I think really a spouse who brings that up, or, you know, someone who is, uh, in a relationship, even if they're not married yet... One of the hardest things to do is tell the other person that you think that they might need help from someone that's not them. And I think that's a very loving thing to do.

Liz Higgins (36:49):

Yeah. Well, that's very huge because I would imagine, and I'm just kind of thinking in my head right now, if that were my spouse, if he came to me with this, I think I would probably jump into my good old, over functioner role and just be like, what can I do? How can I make it better? Like, I want to be the source of your support and your healing and I'm a therapist. So I know all the things I can say, but that sounds even more important just to know the moment to step back and realize that's not your responsibility. And, you know, you can support and you will support

your partner, but it could be everything for them to have this added space to process through. And the other thing that you mentioned a word in there, um, your wife pointed out that maybe you weren't in a place of acceptance. So I'm wondering, Cotey, if you think getting to a place of acceptance, is that like part of the work, part of the journey, that a person needs to find a way to, to being in a place of acceptance before they can really move forward and thrive in their life again?

Cotey Bowman (37:56):

Yeah, I do. Um, so my wife looked at me one night and she asked me basically how familiar I was with DBT, you know, the, the therapeutic orientation. And, and I was like, you know, "uh, studied it in school obviously, but I'm not too familiar with it." And she brought up acceptance from that perspective and even more-so, what is called radical acceptance. And you sit there and you're like, "okay, what does this mean?" I mean, it basically means what it is saying - you are choosing on this day, and at this moment when these thoughts are coming, to radically accept the situation for what it is. And I, I mean, there's really no Hocus Pocus behind it. It is constantly challenging your thoughts when they come dealing with loss and the what ifs and, um, you know, dealing with the unknowns. Well, you're right. There is loss, there is unknowns, but you, at some point have to accept what that is, and that can look different for everybody.

Cotey Bowman (39:08):

You know, that that may mean that they finally need to grieve it and let out some anger, let out some crying. It could mean that in that acceptance, they finally say, "I need to see somebody about this. I need to work on this." And you know, another part of radical acceptance with that as well is realizing you're not the one who is at fault, like this is not on you. This is bad that it's happened to you, but this is not because of you. Like, for whatever reason you have this status. Um, some people have it because it, you know, someone didn't want them, you know... Dealing with some of the, the issues that pertain to late discovery adoption sometimes. It is not, they were not unwanted, it's dealing with somebody else's issue.

Liz Higgins (39:58):

No, that's huge to hear, because I, I'm, I would imagine when this event first happens, and the discovery happens, that the shock is there and the tunnel vision is there. And when we feel out of control in life, what we typically do is point things inward and self-blame, or just try to find something that we can say that is definitively the reason why this happened to us. Oftentimes pulling it back to ourselves - "well I wasn't good enough, or I was unlovable" and hitting on all that deeper shame stuff. And you're saying, you know, there's other ways to look at it. I mean, the fact is, that may not be the reason why. It may not be you inherently, but the context of their situation at that time. And it doesn't make the pain any less difficult, I would imagine. But, but I can see how that would be a part that would help people get to that place of radical acceptance about what's happened.

Cotey Bowman (41:00):

Yeah. And I think some people, when they hear that, um, depending on where they're at in this, in this process, they might say, "Oh, that just doesn't sound very loving to hear." And I think it can be loving. I think accepting can be loving. People don't want you to sit in the depths of, um, sadness and not be able to get out or dig even deeper. When my wife told me this and we spoke about it, you know, at first hearing that acceptance kind of stung, but I realized that she wanted what was best for me. And she wanted to be a part of that. So I do challenge people. You know, if a partner does start to notice after a while that you know, "this person is not, uh,

my, my wife, my husband, um, my boyfriend, girlfriend, however, fiancé, is not getting better, what do I need to do?"

Cotey Bowman (41:59):

Well, you can ask them about how they're dealing with accepting all of this. And if they think it might be good for them to talk to a professional. And kind of go from there. I just, I know we're coming up to an end, but if anyone is listening to this, some people will say I relate, some will say I don't relate to some of this. The experiences are so varied. There are some core things dealing with identity and grief, but because everyone finds out and has a different experience, they have some issues. Some people are able to accept it immediately. They're, they're like, "you know what? These people were scum and they didn't want me, you know, whatever." So on the outside, they, they, they externalize that they are not, uh, or they're externalizing that they've accepted it. Though... They may not have inside. Right? So when we have, when we have 50 minutes or so to talk about it, obviously there are so many different variations of how this works in an NPE's experience that I hope, hope the listeners realize this is not a 'One Size Fits All' explanation by any means.

Liz Higgins (43:14):

Yeah. Even for me, I can just tell there's so much to unpack. And I appreciate, I really appreciate that you're obviously aware and sensitive to the fact that there are tons of different ways to walk through this experience and to feel about it and to act about it. And that's probably something that makes you very qualified to help people through it. And I know when we first met, you had mentioned a resource too, because something I was hoping you could share for listeners is like, if they're feeling alone and don't know where to go, to have a sense of community or support. What are some resources for people that you can tell us about?

Cotey Bowman (43:56):

I created a website primarily because there were people who were seeking in NPE-competent counselors, and they couldn't find them in their state. There was nothing really organized. Um, and there's not a whole lot of them anyways. So I created a website called in npecounseling.org, and really, the site is still pretty much developing. Its name, or the group's name, is NPE Counseling Collective. And really what it's seeking to provide is, uh, to be a source of a NPE therapist directory, and also to give mental health education on the topic. So, if they go to that site and they're looking for, per se, someone who is a therapist, licensed, and they have an NPE experience, or they have worked with NPE's - we've been adding weekly. There's really, I think about, oh, I think there are seven or eight right now. And we're about to add two more based on different states.

Cotey Bowman (45:02):

But on that website, people can go to Info, go to the Info tab. That'll tell them what is a NPE. And if you scroll below that there are resources. So, at the resources, that's when you really kind of, um, this is kind of a gateway to some of the groups. So at the very bottom, there is a NPE Counseling Collective private Facebook group that I started, that they can click that, it will take them to Facebook, um, they'll have to answer a few questions to kind of describe their role as an NPE... But there's also an NPE-only "After the Discovery" page. Now this is a group that has a lot of people in it who talk about all kinds of things. They focus on their experience, and discovering, and the processes that they are currently in.

Liz Higgins (46:03): Awesome!

Cotey Bowman (46:03):

So there, yeah, there's two private Facebook pages. But then I have some different links to different websites that kind of focus on NPE related subjects.

Liz Higgins (46:04):

Yeah. And I'll be sure to put a link to the, your website that you're talking about and this, uh, these support groups and stuff in the show notes, because I would imagine people that are in this spot want to feel connected and at least have that ability to go read some of this stuff that you've posted from the clinical and emotional psychoeducational perspective, but also the fact that you've been through it. You really know how to speak to this stuff. So that's awesome.

Cotey Bowman (46:31): Yeah. Thank you.

Liz Higgins (46:33):

Oh my gosh. Well, thank you so much for having this conversation. I personally feel like I've learned a lot about what this experience could be like for somebody. And I just encourage anybody listening, if you've been through this, or are going through it now, obviously hearing from Cotey, there's no reason to go it alone. There's people that understand. There's therapists that are trained clinically to help guide you through the emotional waves of this whole thing. And a side note, I guess, to pitch you a little bit too, is that you are in Texas, right? So I know with the pandemic and everything, um, a lot of us have shifted to using telehealth and video sessions. And so do you, are you able to provide that to clients that are in the state of Texas?

Cotey Bowman (47:19):

Yeah. Primarily, most of the people I see who are NPE's, it's pretty much always done through telehealth means. Um, just because as you know, Texas is huge and most of the people aren't around my area.

Liz Higgins (47:35):

Right. Which is so funny because I have, well, I haven't gone far from where I grew up, but you're in Denton. I met my husband in Denton and I went to UNT out there. So I always have a soft spot in my heart for Denton, Texas. But people that aren't from Texas are probably like "Denton?"

Cotey Bowman (47:49):

"Where's Denton?" North of Dallas. That's all they need to know.

Liz Higgins (47:53):

We'll just say Dallas. Well, thank you again, Cotey. I so appreciate this. And to everybody listening, if you want to find out more about Cotey and his services and the NPE Counseling Collective, just check out the links in the show notes.

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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