

The Tim Smal Show – 4 August 2020 transcript

Marie Thouin, a dating coach, talks about mindful dating and overcoming obstacles on the path to love.

Tim Smal (host): Hi everyone and welcome to the show today. My name is Tim Smal. Thanks for joining me today. My guest on the show today is Marie Thouin. She is a PhD candidate in East-West psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies. She's also the founder of Love InSight, a mindful dating coaching practice, where she helps people of all backgrounds navigate the path of intimate love in a growth-orientated mindset. So Marie, I'm really excited to have a dating coach on the show today – can you tell us more about what that is?

Marie Thouin (guest): Yes, so a dating coach is someone who supports people on their path to love and that can look so many different ways. When I first designed my practice, I thought I was going to mostly get people who are having trouble with online dating – which I do have a lot of clients who need help navigate the online dating scene – but what I found out is that, it also goes deeper than that: it has to do with people's emotional journeys around finding love and cultivating love in their lives to begin with, and ultimately finding a partner. So it basically encompasses many aspects of somebody's journey to having fulfilling romantic relationships – from the emotional to the more logistical, technical aspects of how they go about it.

Tim Smal: So I'm really interested to find out how you decided to start this company. I believe one could say that you have studied love from an academic perspective – would that be accurate?

Marie Thouin: Yes. I've always been really interested in love and when I decided to go for my PhD in Psychology, I had to decide what my focus was going to be for my dissertation and my own research. And I decided to study consensually non-monogamous relationships for the reason that: usually people who are non-monogamous or polyamorous, really approach love from a creative point of view – they don't resort to the default way of relating (which is monogamy), and they, sort of, make their own path. So that's what I've been researching academically and that's also, in general, what I've been reading about, is: how people conceptualize their romantic lives – that is so fascinating to me.

Tim Smal: So some might say that you are a true “love doctor” – would you consider that to be a good representation of your work?

Marie Thouin: I love the title! I can't call myself a doctor just yet – I need to graduate first. But yeah, that's what I aspire to. That's definitely one of the biggest titles that someone can have. And really, love is the thing that, I find, really matters in the world – it's the solution to all of our problems and our social ills, you know. I always felt like finding a path for more love is the core of any legitimate spiritual path as well. So love is where it's at for me.

Tim Smal: And if I think of all the different kinds of people in the world, it must be really interesting to study love from an academic point of view, because it puts you in a really good position to help individuals from all different backgrounds. So how would you start the journey of helping an individual that comes to you with any kind of concern around the pursuit of love?

Marie Thouin: I mean, it has to start with empathy and compassion – it has to start with understanding where their personal blocks might be. So there is a beautiful quote from Rumi, I believe, that says: “Your job is not to seek love – it's to seek where the obstacles to love are and then go beyond them.” And that pretty much summarizes my work as a coach: it's to help people identify where have they shut down their flow of love.

Because we're all born with this huge desire to love each other and to, you know... we have many instincts, but one of them is definitely connection and belonging – we're wired for love. But we do grow up in a society that teaches us that some expressions of love are okay and some of them are not okay... some expressions of our sexuality are okay and some of them are not okay. And we also grow up in a very shaming society, to a certain extent, where when we do things that are not okay, we get told that we're “not good.” So often times these points of pain for people are where it becomes really difficult to live with an open heart and to magnetize a romantic partner. So does that answer your question?

Tim Smal: Definitely. And I'm thinking of some examples of these obstacles, such as: rejection, or frustration, or fear, or doubt... and I can imagine that for some individuals, those obstacles might even stop them from seeking out help or assistance from someone like you?

Marie Thouin: Yes, absolutely. I mean, the path to love and to romantic / sexual love, in general, can be the most exhilarating and the most painful part of somebody's life. And when it becomes painful, it is usually because of those blocks and those wounds that come up in relation to looking for a significant other or relating to them. So those wounds that we have – like rejection, fear of rejection, fear of humiliation, fear of looking stupid, fear of being called ugly or just fear of basically not being loved completely for who we are – comes up very strongly.

And it takes a lot of strong intention, a lot of self-compassion to get to the other side and seek love anyways. There's never going to be a point where life is without pain. We're always going to have to face challenges on our path – that's, kind of, what this reality is about. But how we face those challenges and how much resilience we bring – and can we bring a growth mindset to them?

So there's a big difference when you look at your own points of pain and challenges, and you frame it in a way that you are the victim and you are powerless and you don't know what to do – versus framing those challenges in a growth mindset that says that “I do have some power over my reality and I am willing to keep my heart open. And I'm able to learn tools of emotional resilience when things hurt and I'm basically working actively on my own healing and openness.” So a lot of what I do too is to help people get into that frame of mind, into that growth mindset.

Tim Smal: Once an individual has taken that first step to visit you (or another dating coach) and they've started to develop a growth mindset and started to look at some of the issues that are holding them back – or the obstacles that are holding them back – what would be the next step in the process?

Marie Thouin: So a lot of it would be tool building. So once you've eliminated what the challenges are, then it's time for the more “action-oriented” coaching to begin. And that can look different ways for some people, like – let's say, for example, someone is really shy and for them to approach a person out in the world is super, super painful and difficult and

they're really terrified of rejection. One thing that I would support them in, is to take “baby steps” and to come in those situations with a plan, so that they can overcome the freeze that they might be experiencing.

So basically, when you approach your challenges with a plan that is based on love and support and empowerment, then you can conquer anything – like, you can conquer a mountain if you have a plan that makes sense. And it's going to look very different for every person.

For someone who's shy versus someone who, for example, has a lot of options – is maybe online dating and just cannot decide or cannot determine what person might be a good fit, you know, then I can help teach them: How do you recognize who is a good fit for you? How do you know that from a profile, from a picture, from a small conversation? So there's a lot of skill building as well implied. So it's a combination of having a supportive environment and then having tools and skills to fuel your journey.

Tim Smal: It's really interesting to think about the concept of “shyness”, because it's sometimes very obvious when an individual is more of an extrovert or they're more of an introvert. And I sometimes wonder “Are extroverts less shy and introverts more shy, just by the nature of their personality preference?” Or when we talk about “shyness” in the context of dating, I wonder if shyness is something that is shared as a common experience, regardless of your personality type?

Marie Thouin: Mmmm, that is a really good question. There are people who are more naturally introverted versus extroverted, and one of the best definitions for that general categorization is: people who are extroverted derive energy from their contacts with others, versus people who are introverted – they have to put out more energy, so they have more of a need to recharge being alone. So I think that definition does not apply directly to the romantic path.

I think that when you're talking about dating, someone who's naturally extroverted can become shy all of a sudden, when they are in contact with someone that they're attracted to. So that's an interesting phenomenon. And I would think and suggest – although I don't have any research to back that up – but my experience is that: shyness in the realm of dating and relationships happens because of fear of rejection.

So the person is making themselves small, is contracting, is having a hard time speaking and expressing themselves to this potential partner because they are afraid that they're not going to be loved and accepted. And that is one of the main issues – even if someone doesn't have a very extreme shyness issue, I think that most people can look at their behavior on the dating front and see that they might be “playing small” or not completely expressing who they are, because they want to be accepted.

And that is something also that is a double-edged sword: it's not wrong, it's certainly not wrong to do that – but I'm trying to always encourage people to be authentic and to approach this with an open heart and with pride in who they are, to reinforce that sense of “Oh my gosh, like, I have something to offer. I'm not just looking at somebody else as the provider of love in me as the potential receiver.” That's, I would say, like “the beggar's attitude” like someone who's begging for love, like “Please love me!” versus approaching people from a perspective of “I have so much love to give. I want to share. I have a heart that's full and anyone who would come into my life and be the recipient of my love would be very lucky and very fortunate.” So that's the givers attitude.

Tim Smal: Yeah and it's really interesting to think about the concept of "rejection" – fear of rejection, the perception of being rejected. Because if I think of my own life, I consider myself to be quite a friendly guy, in the sense that I enjoy spending time with people. And I feel like sometimes when I go out into the world and I interact with people, I receive that [friendliness] back from people and sometimes I don't. And sometimes when I don't receive that back from people, it can feel like rejection.

If you are being friendly to someone and they're not friendly back to you – if they have an attitude of "Why are you talking to me?" or "Why are you approaching me?" you can feel rejected. And I suppose if that happens enough times, you start to question yourself and you start to think "Well, maybe I should not be so outgoing or friendly if I'm getting these reactions a lot." And this is just an analogy that I'm using in this context, but I think it must be incredibly challenging for people to overcome that fear of rejection if they've got memories or learned experiences in their own personal lives that prevent them from moving forward and overcoming that – even when it does happen from time to time, because it seems inevitable and unavoidable in this world that we live in.

Marie Thouin: Right. I mean, even people who are otherwise very confident in life, you know, might hold onto a story of "Oh my gosh – I always get rejected by the people that I'm attracted to." And then, you know, like it might be that it just hasn't been the right time, it hasn't been the right match and there's many ways to conceptualize that. But it is one of the main hurdles that people have to overcome to go back out into the dating world with an open heart, is to: rewrite the script so that it's not a script about them being undesirable. Because that's usually how our brains interpret rejection – it's like, there's something wrong with me.

It's really hard work, but it's also feasible. It's definitely feasible, especially with support. I think the support of a coach can be instrumental in that kind of rescripting and moving forward. And I also think that having a strong community and strong friendships and cultivating love in one's life can help somebody, kind of, get out of that narrative.

But I think you described it so well. I mean, it is something that I experienced as well for a big part of my life, was the feeling that: every time I would fall in love with someone – or even have a big crush on someone – they would end up rejecting me. So I had this narrative of being unlucky in love, or just not desirable to some extent. And I had to really make a different decision at some point. I had to make the decision that "I was ready for love, that I deserved it, that I had a lot to offer and that I was going to only let people in to my life that could recognize that and that could appreciate that."

So I basically upped my standard of people that I would date and I made a decision that I was ready and that is really what I wanted. Because there is a weird psychological thing that can happen too when people have been rejected enough times: they might start telling themselves that they don't really want a relationship – that they don't really want to date or that they're not sure what they want. Because then, not getting a relationship doesn't feel like a failure as much, if you've been telling yourself – or maybe even telling the world – that "Oh, I don't really know what I want" then you're not as susceptible to feeling like a failure. But once you really clarify your intention and declare to the universe that "Yes, this is what I want, this is what I have to offer" that can be a humongous shift in energy.

Tim Smal: Yeah, so I guess this leads me to my next question, which is: I wanted to find out more about what the term "mindful dating" means – can you tell me more?

Marie Thoun: Yes. So I have been really involved and interested in spirituality for many years and “mindfulness” for me, is the idea that you always look at things from a certain distance – you look at the big picture. You are present in the moment, but you also are mindful of why you’re doing things, why are you attracted to a certain person and what is the result of that. So you’re taking into consideration more than just your first impulse.

So mindful dating is about really cultivating that awareness of what is going on in my romantic life and how can I align my love life with my growth, and me becoming a better person and someone who’s more empowered and happier and healthier. And to integrate that into your life in a positive way, rather than have this be the place where you are confused and in a cycle of pain or dissatisfaction.

So I also feel like romantic love is the biggest window we have into our motivations as human beings – it’s involving our DNA. You know, like, our DNA tells us to survive, eat and mate. And the mating part is something that has taken such a life of its own – you know, it’s been socialized into certain socially acceptable ways to date. So we have, of course, the biology and the social conditioning part pulling on us at any given point. And then we have the awareness of all that going on and how does it play into our life and our growth as a human being. So to be able to hold all of these parts and move forward with intentionality and awareness is what I would call “mindful dating.”

Tim Smal: It’s really exciting to talk about the ways in which dating and relationships are such fertile grounds for personal growth, so I really appreciate all the information that you’ve shared today – you’ve certainly given me quite a lot to think about.

But in terms of wrapping up the show today, I was hoping you could just tell us a little bit more about why it is important for people to invest in this area of their life. I can imagine that for some people they might be thinking “Well, they’re not necessarily looking for a relationship” they might be happy being single. I suppose there are so many different scenarios of how people are living their lives, in terms of their romantic interests. But could you just tell us a little bit more about why it is important for people to pay attention to this area?

Marie Thoun: Absolutely. I think that in our very secular world where, you know, religion is not that present in most people’s life and spirituality might not be that present... the idea of romantic love is one of the main entry points where people can start really unraveling who they are and really healing their deeper wounds.

I might be repeating myself here, but I think that is such an opportunity for anyone to do – whether or not they feel like they want a relationship, a serious relationship at this point of time or maybe they want to look at their patterns. Maybe someone is dating casually and they are not totally satisfied – there is a little voice in them that says they want more... that’s a really great thing to look at. Someone might choose to be single and that’s totally cool and beautiful... but maybe there is a little voice in them that is looking for something else or to understand themselves better – that is absolutely valid. And it’s important to listen to those voices and to have a safe space where you can express yourself and start investigating yourself.

And really, love is happiness. I just read about a 75-year long study about happiness from Harvard University, and the bottom line was: love is happiness, happiness is love. So if your love life – and I’m using love in a broad sense, not just sexual love, but your love life

in general – is a source of pain for you, there is room for more. You could cultivate happiness through that channel.

Tim Smal: Wonderful. Yeah, that's a really great way to wrap up the show today: love is happiness and happiness is love.

Marie, thank you so much for joining us today on the show – I really appreciate your time. It's been lovely speaking with you. As I say, you've given me lots to think about and I'm sure the listeners appreciate your insights too. Let us know how the listeners are able to get hold of you.

Marie Thouin: Absolutely, thank you. So my website is www.loveinsight-dating.com and that's the best way to get hold of me – just go on my website. You can read my blog, you can look at my services, you can read more about me and then you can book a free introductory session to see if we might be a good fit working together.