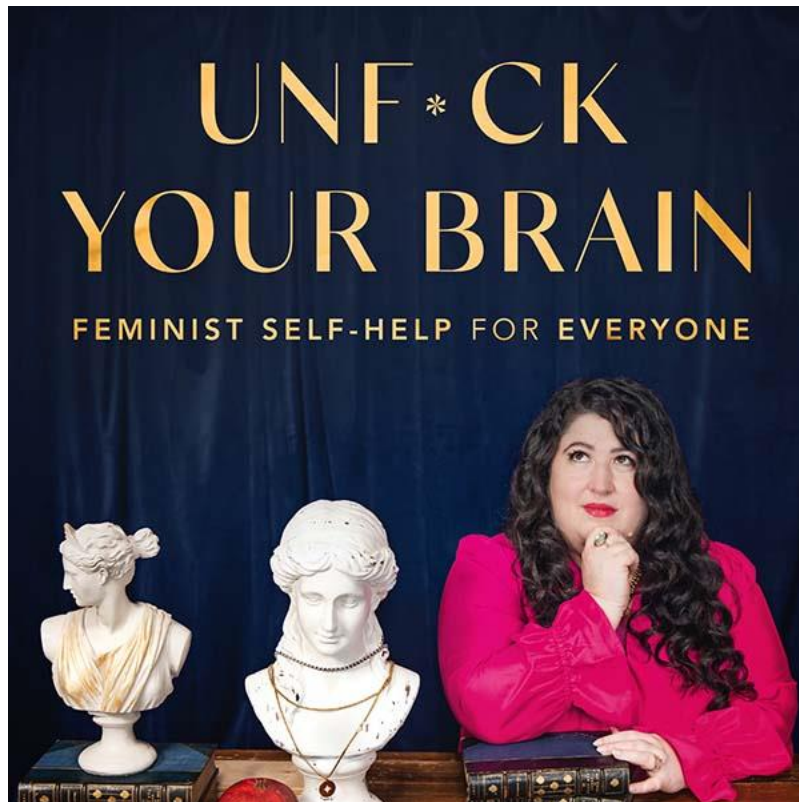


**UFYB 330: When You and Your Partner
Are Moving At Different Speeds:
A Conversation with Dr. Alexandra Solomon**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *UnF*ck Your Brain*, feminist self-help for everyone brought to you by *The School of New Feminist Thought*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Harvard lawyer turned life coach extraordinaire. And I'm here to help you get society's sexist messages out of your brain so you can be confident, feel powerful and live a life you won't regret when you die.

If you want to jumpstart that process, you need to grab my totally free guide to feeling less anxious and more empowered by rewiring your brain. Just text your email to +1347 997 1784 and use code word, brain or go to unfuckyourbrain.com/brain. Now let's get to today's episode.

Today's interview conversation is one of my favorites I've ever done because the topic we're going to be talking about, which is when you and your partner are at kind of different speeds in your relationship. Something that my guest Dr. Solomon, calls a pace discrepancy is a complete, I think we called it a node in the episode. But you could also just call it a complete cluster fuck of social programming, social expectations, socialized anxiety. What women are taught is their worth and purpose and value in the world. Bad pop psychology. It's so good. It's such a rich, rich area.

It reminds me of my life in academia where you would pick kind of one somewhat small thing and then you can just extrapolate everything from it and see a microcosm of the world in it. So it's such a good conversation. And Dr. Solomon is just wise and hilarious and a wonderful person to be in conversation with. I did an episode on her podcast all about the book, that was also amazing. So, excited for you to listen to this.

One of the things we talk about in the episode is the ways in which the anxiety that society teaches women about their relationship status contributes to so much conflict in relationships. Where if you are dealing

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with especially a hetero cis kind of normative relationship where you've got a man and a woman. And they're partnered and they're sort of progressing up some kind of relationship escalator towards monogamy and then cohabitation and then marriage and then children.

If they're on that kind of socially sanctioned journey, there's so much anxiety that women have about whether the relationship is going to work out, whether it's going to escalate to the point that they want it to. About getting married by a certain time, about having kids by a certain time. About what it means about them if they aren't hitting certain milestones or timelines. And all of that anxiety creates a lot of the tension within couples that have the so-called pace discrepancy. I don't mean so-called, it doesn't exist, I just mean a term coined by Dr. Solomon, inside this pace discrepancy.

And obviously it doesn't only come up in that context. People of any gender and any relationship orientation and any sexual orientation can have pace discrepancies. But I do think that one of the reasons we see it come up disproportionately in a certain format is because of all of the socialization and the social conditioning that women get, that they should be focused on finding a husband and having children and getting married and following this very specific path and that if it's not happening on a certain timeline, there's something wrong with them.

Or if their partner isn't ready and willing and excited to move to each stage immediately, there's something wrong with them too. So it's such a potent form of socially programmed anxiety, which is the anxiety that we have because of the way society has taught us to think about ourselves.

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Before we dive into the interview, I want to tell you about another opportunity to kind of dig deeper into some of the issues that we talk about in this podcast, in this episode. One of the things that creates so much anxiety for the faster moving partner in a relationship with a pace discrepancy, when they are a hetero woman or a woman in a hetero partnership, let's say. Whether or not the woman is heterosexual, a woman dating a man who is on that relationship escalator and has a lot of anxiety around the pace discrepancy.

One of the causes of that is obviously the socialization that women get around their worth, their value and the necessity of being in a certain kind of relationship. And that desire makes a lot of women feel really disempowered in dating and in romantic relationships because they feel this urgency that not only, but especially in these hetero partnerships that their partner may not feel.

Their partner, the way men are socialized, may not feel and likely doesn't feel the same level of urgency biologically or socially around progressing through this relationship escalator to marriage and family life. And that kind of disempowerment is symptomatic of the many ways that society teaches women to feel disempowered. To believe that our outcomes, our happiness, our fulfillment, our success are in other people's hands.

And that we are dependent on other people's approval and acceptance and choice of us in order to sort of give us value or validate our worth or allow us to achieve what we want. And I think this is one of the most insidious ways that society fucks with our heads. And so I am really, really committed to teaching women how to take back their power. And I use the word power specifically because lots of people talk about women's empowerment.

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Women are supposed to want to feel empowered, which is just the sort of nice little phrase that somehow sounds like you're going to feel a little better about yourself, but certainly it'll just be confined to you. Men are not taught to feel empowered. Men are taught to feel powerful, they can show up and do things in the world and make things happen. So I want women to claim their power, not just their empowerment, but their power, their power in the world, the power to take up space and make things happen in their own lives that impacts the wider world.

And that is why I am teaching the Take Back Your Power Training. It is a 4 day training where we will get together live every day. I'm going to teach you to take back your power from self-doubt, take back your power from perfectionism. Not letting perfectionism sap your power. Not letting self-doubt sap your power and take back your power from people pleasing. Not letting your worries about everyone else drain your power out of you as well. So I'm going to be teaching each day. I'm going to coach live. I'm going to answer questions.

We're going to have bonus coaching calls for those of you who are already in the Feminist Self Help Society. We'll have bonus coaching calls in the evenings during the training. It's gonna be a really powerful, dare I say it, week that we are gonna spend together. And by the end of it, you are going to feel and think differently about yourself and your kind of capacity and ability to make moves in this world and make things happen for yourself, and that is the true empowerment.

So if you want to join us, there are two easy ways to do that. You can go to unfuckyourbrain.com/power, or you can text your email address to +1 347 997 1784, and the code word is power. That's +1 347 997 1784, and the code word is power, or go to unfuckyourbrain.com/power. I cannot wait to

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dig into this with you and really teach you how to change your brain in just four short days to feel more powerful in your own life and in the world. Let's go.

Kara: Hello my friends. So I am here today with Dr. Alexandra Solomon. And I'm so excited about this that I started ranting about why I'm so excited about it before we even started recording. And I was like, "Oh, I've got to save this." So we're going to have such a good juicy conversation today. I've already spoken to Dr. Solomon on her podcast about the book. So I already know this is going to be great and we're going to be talking about the central node in relationships where bad pop psychology and gender socialization and so many other little threads combine.

So this is going to be amazing if you are a person who's in a relationship with another person of any kind. But I would love for Dr. Solomon, first tell us something about yourself. You're a bestselling author. You're a therapist among many other things. Tell us kind of your brief resumé, but also how did you get sort of interested in and focused on relationships as your area of expertise?

Alexandra: Yeah. Well, it's so lovely to be back with you again. Thank you for having me in your space. Yeah. I've been doing this work for over 20 years. So I'm trained as a licensed clinical psychologist and grew up as a girl who loved, I mean, I loved watching Oprah Winfrey. I would come home from school, watch Oprah all through college. And so I think I've always been fascinated by the world of relationships. I read a ton of romance novels, growing up. I was always sort of reading fictional stories about love and the tragedies of love.

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But when I went to college, I really thought that I needed to become a medical doctor. That was sort of my track was, I'm smart, therefore I must be a medical doctor. And I took a women's studies class in college. And it just blew me wide open. I was like, "I'm home. This is my place. These are my people." I was so captivated by being able to study how the big systems converge in our interior, in the space between us and family systems. So I was like, "What am I going to do with all of this?"

And so this field of psychology, specifically this field of couples therapy and the study of relationships has just been perfect for me and it has kept me really captivated for many, many years. And so I spend some time in academia teaching. I do an undergrad relationship education class at Northwestern called Marriage 101. And then I spend some of my time working as a therapist, working with individuals and primarily couples at all different stages.

And then I spend a lot of time translating all of what we know from therapy offices and research labs and the ivory tower and translating that into tools that people can really use, as similar to you. It's an exciting time to be a translator. And so I do that on my podcasts and in my books and on social media. And so that sort of what you were calling the central node of pop psychology and relationships really is where I like to be and help people.

What I always say is, thicken the narrative. I think we have these very linear thin stories about love and that does us dirty in all kinds of ways. And so my main mission in life is to help people kind of grow their capacity to hold on to the complexities that really our relationships demand that we be able to hold.

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Kara: I love that. Thickening is such a good word. I think of it as a richness is missing or the shading is missing. It's like people are doing an outline in a sharpie and it's just like a stick figure. And you're like, "Okay, but there's so much more there." So I'm really excited to talk about this. So we're going to talk about something specific, but I think that it encapsulates so much of what we're talking about. So you write and teach about something you call pace discrepancies in a relationship and how people navigate those.

And I think just a beautiful example of so many different threads of what we want to talk about. So can we start at the 101, can you define what is a pace discrepancy to people? Because I don't think people know that term, but once they hear it, every human who's been in a relationship pretty much has been on one side or the other of this.

Alexandra: Yes. Well, people don't know that term because I coined the term as a psychologist who likes to do.

Kara: There you go, unless they've read it from you.

Alexandra: That's right. The reason I called it a pace discrepancy is very specific. So what is a pace discrepancy? A pace discrepancy is when partners in a couple are not ready at the same moment for the next stage of their commitment sequence. So it represents a kind of disparity in what I'm ready for and what I'm wanting and what you're ready for and what you're wanting. And what was really, really important for me, in order to open up this topic of conversation was, I wanted to give this thing a relational name.

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It's a pace discrepancy and the very first thing that happens with that is, it's an invitation and in fact a challenge to drop the finger pointing. Because what happens in the space between what I want and what you want is that space becomes really ripe for a massive game of blame/shame. You're not ready for what I want therefore you have an avoidant attachment disorder. You want more than what I have to offer, therefore you're needy, clingy, demanding, anxiously attached. Or why do I want more or am I commitment phobic?

So these labels get going really quickly and people are trying to identify the source of the problem, but the name itself is the first attempt to say, "Let's find a space beyond whose fault this is." And so by calling it a pace discrepancy, that's the gateway to something a little thicker or richer than it's my fault or your fault.

Kara: Right, less stigmatizing. So just kind of flesh out some examples of people this might be. It sounds like one person wants to move in together and the other person doesn't, or one person wants to be exclusive and the other person doesn't. Or, I mean, you talked about it as sort of a commitment path but I can also imagine this happening in less conventional relationship structures of one person wants to open up the relationship and the other person doesn't feel ready.

Or one person wants to go from being okay, we're allowed to have one night stands to, no, I want to have an additional romantic relationship and the other person isn't ready. So just to kind of broaden for everybody listening, it probably, numbers wise comes up more on the escalator. But I think this concept you're talking about of course can apply in whatever direction kind of your relationship is going.

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Alexandra: That's right. I'm glad that you highlighted that because I think that even calling it a commitment sequence. There's a way in which we have to dip in and then stretch. So I think I'll use the term commitment sequence even as I know darn well that when I'm working with a pace discrepancy, a couple with a pace discrepancy, part of it is highlighting this idea that there is a sequence. And where does your sequence come from? What are the cultural ideas? What are the family ideas? Whose voice is that? So you're exactly right.

The moment we start using sequence or elevator, what we're doing is bringing forward that idea that there's a linearity to it. There's a properness to it. And even that needs to be discussed because the thing with sequences, oftentimes we just have so many assumptions that that is the capital T truth or the capital R right way of doing it. So yes, absolutely to everything that you said.

Kara: Yeah. And I love that point, it's one of the opportunities that gets missed in a lot of conventional monogamy is, people don't discuss what different words mean because it's just assumed that it all means the same thing to everybody. Whereas actually, people have totally different definitions of even what does being monogamous mean. Some people think it's fine to flirt. And some people think you're not even supposed to have a friend of a different gender or of whatever gender you're attracted to.

So I'd love to hear some examples of sort of one group of problems, people agree on the sequence, but they're just not at the same stage of it. But then another class of problem is, we're not working on the same sequence framework. My sequence was totally different from yours. Can you give us

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kind of an example of that? I think the first one's easier to imagine. I want to get engaged and I'm not ready.

What do you see come up where people maybe because of their cultural background or their age or their gender socialization or whatever, are actually on different sequences or don't even have agreement on that?

Alexandra: Yeah. And I think you're right. I do think that one is, I mean, I always want to be careful about harder, easier. But at least I think you're right, in the first scenario, people are kind of similarly situated and they're looking, they're looking in the same direction. Where in the second scenario, I think the second scenario can feel scarier because it's harder to find where that foot on solid ground is.

If I'm really clear that I want marriage and you're not clear you want marriage, it can feel like, oh my gosh, do we even want the same thing? And so then the conversation has to be wider and broader. And that's a hard ask for people to kind of work with their anxiety or their self-critical narrative. How did I get myself into this spot that I've gotten this far along with somebody who isn't even sure about marriage? We've got to kind of hold that self-critical part.

We've got to hold that anxious part so that that person can even ask the question of, so if you're not even sure about marriage, what does formalization of commitment look like or what is it about marriage that you aren't sure about? Because so often the one I would call the faster paced partner, so often what the faster paced partner is doing is, it feels so deeply personal. It is that you don't want to marry me. You are rejecting me. You are unsure about me.

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And it's really hard to ask the self-critical part and the anxious part to be quiet enough to even understand for that 'slower paced' partner, what it actually is about marriage that is feeling questionable or sketchy or ill advised.

Kara: Yeah. Can you talk a little about how you see socialization impacting people's desired pace. Because I have to imagine that, maybe I'm wrong, but if you asked me to guess, I would guess that the faster paced partner more usually is a person socialized as a woman who usually has more anxiety about getting to certain commitment stages because of socialization. And I'm curious what you observe in your practice.

Alexandra: Yeah, I definitely have had, when I work with cis hetero couples, I definitely have had it go in both directions. But you're right, I do think that the way patriarchy socializes men and women, it is more likely to be the case that I think when she's more ready than he is. She can start to get really deeply afraid or deeply ambivalent inside of her own head. Part of her is like, "Why do I even want or need this? I'm a feminist, I shouldn't need these things."

Kara: Right, it's the brain gap that I talk about in the book, yeah.

Alexandra: Exactly. And then another part of her is really actually deeply afraid that she is 'wasting time'. And there is that edge, that challenge around biology, the realities of biology or it creates actual urgency for women who are thinking about wanting to be mothers in a biological way or being parents in that biological way. So there are, so, yes, I think there are particular ways that a pace discrepancy can feel that much more tangly when it plays out that way.

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When it's the other way, when he's more urgent than she is. I think there is still some brain gap stuff where for her what she may need to resolve is I've done enough, kind of if it's about marriage, he's more ready for marriage than she is. It oftentimes has to do with her wanting to have x number of experiences before she gets married. And so it's less a rejection of him and more like, but I always wanted to do this and this and this and in my mind, I had done those things.

Kara: Which is also socialization, because there's this, once a woman gets married, it's sort of okay, well, now you're losing independence. And then what if once you have kids, you're going to be the default primary parent. There's socialization around men losing sexual diversity experiences upon monogamous marriage. But for women, I think we're socialized to, and we see it around us as but then I can't just go to Peru for six weeks if I want to. Our options start to feel constrained.

Alexandra: And that's the coolest part then when a couple can start to talk about it as a pace discrepancy. Because she can, once she stops feeling that kind of constriction around, I shouldn't even want these things. So she can say what the things are that she wants. Then he may be in a spot to be like, "Are you kidding me, freaking marry me and then go to Peru." We get to make whatever kind of marriage we want to make, do it.

Kara: Right. I had this with my partner where I was like, "I wanted to go live in Paris for six months." And he was like, "Okay, go live in Paris. I'll visit you when the kids are on vacation." Which may or may not be what I want to do, but the sort of institution of marriage is presented as this homogeneous thing, that means a certain thing. And then people aren't having those conversations it sounds like.

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And I think that's socialization you talked about, for anybody listening to this who is the faster paced partner and is now feeling shame about that. You've been socialized your whole life if you're socialized as a woman to equate getting married with being worthy, being chosen, feeling loved, being safe in life. I mean it's just a huge amount of pressure. So of course, you're agitated about, and I think that phrase you're using, I'd love to hear your thoughts about this.

Ready for marriage is so interesting, because what does it mean to be ready? You may want it because you think it is going to be the relief from insecurity and anxiety and all these other things. But is that actually being 'ready for marriage'? What kind of relationship are you really ready for in that [crosstalk].

Alexandra: That's right. Well, yeah, I think that's exactly, and I think that's part of what can really constrain a couple is if she's the faster paced partner just as you're saying. She's got this battle inside of her head and she did not make up these rules of socialization. She was a good listener. This all got, and we are all socialized. And I spend a lot of time when I'm working with a straight couple and it's playing out this way that we're talking about now, helping him try to even get his head around it.

Because it is an actual, he has to cross over that bridge of his own socialization to be humble and curious, and to decenter himself to try to even understand the messages that she's been internalizing since she was five years old, so you're right. And that shame and that kind of her experience of shame about wanting what she wants then is silencing. And so often what he is carrying is something that he picked up from the culture, which is 'ready to marry' means he's earning x amount of dollars or he's reached x career milestones.

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And she might really be saying, “I actually don’t care, build with me. Let’s marry now and let’s build together.” But there’s a whole thing that has to happen where he has to kind of step out of how he’s been socialized to see himself as a worthy partner apart from those financial milestones or career milestones.

Kara: So there’s sort of those are the socialization patterns in kind of heterosexual monogamous couples who are on a particular relationship escalator. What kind of patterns or what kind of factors do you see in other populations or across other kinds of couples? Do you see similar socialization patterns as well, or how do you see those things play out?

Alexandra: I mean I think there are still socialization patterns. But very often I think just by nature of not having our bodies mapped so perfectly onto cis hetero narratives, there are oftentimes a kind of creativity and ease. I think oftentimes also people who don’t fit into that narrow mold have just done more self-work. So they are more used to teasing apart what’s mine and what’s the culture’s. That muscle is super developed.

And so I think we then in our work have a bit more the wind at our back because there’s already been this capacity to play creatively to understand this is holding a lot of importance to me. Why?

Kara: Because society says I’m supposed to be. And that makes sense, that work’s been done somewhat. You talk about social anchoring as part of what informs the way that people are thinking about and processing pace discrepancies. And we’ve sort of touched on it, but I just wonder, is there any more to say about that phenomenon?

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Alexandra: Yeah. So the social anchoring is an actual phenomenon that happens and psychologists have talked about, that we think that we live on these biological clocks. But we very much, this is the work of Bernice Neugarten, many years ago, that we actually locate ourselves along social clocks. And so much of the social clock is, we look to our left and our right at what our peers and our siblings are doing and the ages they were when they met those milestones.

So it's less about our biology and more about our deep need to belong and our deep fear of not belonging. And then the meaning we attach and it's not, I don't know it's any more comfortable to be ahead of the social clock than it is to be behind the social clock. You know what I mean? I think people who have whatever, children 'very young' or who marry 'very young'. I think they can have some feelings about that too, but certainly there is that social shift that probably everyone listening can relate to, is when you start to go to a lot of weddings.

It makes that question feel a bit more urgent for you, even if you're somebody who doesn't have particularly strong feelings about that milestone. So that's what social anchoring is, where am I viz-a-viz similarly situated folks?

Kara: That's so important though, because I think you mentioned if you are the person with ovaries and a uterus who's going to carry a pregnancy physically, then there's some time bound, right amount of time, if that's possible. And it's easy to sort of take all of your urgency and unexamined stuff and just attach it to that. Because I think it can serve as this, well, yeah, that's why I need to get going. That's why I'm so anxious. That's why understanding that your sense of urgency might be partly biological.

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But also your brain's evaluating a lot of different timelines. Yes, okay, there's a biological one, but it's on that social timeline. And that's why it may be, I think the social timeline thing is so interesting too, because it helps us understand why. In one community, 23 might be old to get married and in another community that you would judge somebody for being 23 and unmarried. And in another community, you'd judge someone for being 23 and married, it would be weird that they got married that young.

And I mean I think a lot of people haven't sat down and just written it out. What are the ages that I think these things are supposed to happen? Why do I think that? What do I think about people who do them a little too early or a little too late or what is the age that in my mind I've attached to? Where beforehand I was like, "It's fine that x hasn't happened. I'm not that age yet." And then you're suddenly that age and then you're freaking out, but none of that has really been chosen on purpose often.

Alexandra: Well, that idea I mean I love where you're inviting your listener to go, which is, you could make a timeline for yourself. And I think sometimes when we make these timelines, they are made in our minds as goals. I want to be x by this age and x by this. So no, do it differently. Just sit down and write out a timeline as purely a thought experiment as you reflecting on your own interior. Just do a kind of stream of consciousness, the ages that you think these things 'should happen'. Not as a goal, not as a declaration, not as a map of your present and future.

But purely as the ability to put it outside of you and then use it as a line of self-inquiry. Where did this come from? What are the feelings that I have about the possibility of meeting this sooner versus later? And I think it's such a more helpful way to approach that. Because when it goes on paper as just my goals and then I hand it to somebody else as this is what I want.

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Kara: [Crosstalk] disaster, yeah.

Alexanda: Yeah, we're not creating it together.

Kara: I often find that people are very surprised, especially when it comes to numbers, amount of money, age, whatever. Your brain picked some number at some point it was, 37, I don't know, that's it. Or \$220,000, that's when I'm going to feel x. It's sort of magical thinking. Your brain is like, I've got to anchor my anxiety to something. So I'm going to pick a thing. And then I'm living my whole life around this. And I really can't explain at all when I stop to think about it, why is it 37 and not 36 or not 38? Or why is it 200,000, not 195, not 203?

So getting that out of your head and looking at it. It'd be interesting to do it at, what did I used to think because I definitely remember being 14 and thinking well, if I'm not married by 25, which is hilarious even at the time. I was barely going to be out of college. That wasn't really normal in my socioeconomic educational world anyway, to be married at 25. So to see how that's changed over time. I mean, there's so many milestones that I look back from here and I was like, "No big deal", if that didn't happen on that schedule that I thought I needed to be on.

Alexandra: But again, just zoom out for a moment. I've been teaching, I mentioned the marriage 101 class. So this spring it'll be the 24th year that I have been teaching it. And so the first lecture is a 10,000 foot view of the world of relationships. Well, 24 years ago, the age of entering a marriage was 22 for women and 24 for men. So in 24 years, which I mean, I'm on the older side now, but still in the grand scheme of things, 24 years is not that long of a time.

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So we've gone from 22 and 24 to 27 and 29. That's a really, really big collective shift here in the US in a very short amount of time. So anybody whose heads are spinning around these shoulds and when should I and attachment to numbers. That's happening because, especially around marriage milestones, it is, we're undergoing significant cultural shifts very, very quickly, so everyone's a little confused. And when things feel ambiguous, what do we do? We reach for a number or something that feels it's sure.

Kara: Yeah. So let's keep on this sort of track of talking about concrete ways to start working with this stuff. So I know you have some suggestions of questions that the faster paced partner can kind of ask themselves or ask their partner. What do you see as effective to sort of open up communication around these pace discrepancies?

Alexandra: Yeah. I mean the big thing, so what happens when there is a pace discrepancy is what oftentimes happens for couples is there's polarization. So the more the faster paced partner is saying things like, "We really should or my friends are or if you love me, you would." Not that they're saying directly, "If you love me, you would." But that kind of, don't you see, it'll be fine. The more they're sort of pulling and I'm doing this pulling gesture with my hand this way.

The more the slower paced partner is going to feel, my hesitation isn't being validated. My concerns aren't being validated. My perspective isn't being seen. So then they kind of dig in and are trying to build the opposite case of why we aren't ready and look at this. And last week we had that fight, don't you remember that fight? And the faster paced one is like, "But we had that fight because I don't feel validated." So then it becomes a polarization.

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And so that pace discrepancy as an attempt to get out of that and say, “The two of us need to sit alongside each other and put the problem in front of us. We have a discrepancy. We aren’t ready for the same thing at the same time.” And my gosh, on what planet do we think that a mark of true love is, I think maybe it comes from the same line of thinking that says the mark of good sex is people who are simultaneously having orgasms. They arrive in the same place at the same time.

Kara: Wait, that’s so good, because I think most people listening to this would agree that simultaneous orgasm is a ridiculous thing to hang good sex on. But few of them would agree that simultaneous pacing is not a good thing to hang it on. But I think that’s so important. What is a thought sort of in the terms of the way I often talk on the podcast. A version of that question would be like, what are you making it mean that you and your partner are not in the same place on this pace?

You have a story about that meaning and what it means about you or them or you guys as a couple or whatever. And you have to get that story out or else you’re just trying to act to counteract the story and convince yourself of the opposite and you don’t even know what the story is.

Alexandra: Exactly. And I think the faster paced person oftentimes has a very hard time understanding that the slower paced partner also has a story and also has pain. It is not easy being the slower paced partner because what you are doing day after day is looking in your partner’s eyes and seeing that you are freaking disappointing to them. You are not giving them the thing they need and that runs counter to what it means to be a partner. I want to give you what you need and I’m fully aware that I am not ready or I have this resistance.

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And so the slower paced partner is not having an easy time and I think that can be easy to miss.

Kara: Yeah. Well, I mean, you see that I think also in couples where one person is sort of the critical taskmaster and the other person is never living up to their expectations. I think the person who's doing the criticizing is really only aware of their suffering. And the actual person who's 'not living up' is aware of both people. So is aware of that kind of carrying that disappointment and that shame of not being able to whatever it is, remember to pick their socks up or whatever the thing is that they're having a hard time doing. So I love that.

I would also imagine, this is just speculation, but the faster paced partner is probably also often someone who's very goal oriented. And they're very used to sort of being, I set a project, I set a goal. I achieve it. Let's go. And why isn't my teammate doing their part of the joint project? They're slowing down the goal. And that's why all of that self-reflection, we've been talking about of, why do you even want this goal? No one's saying you shouldn't want it.

But you want to look at why and sort of tease some of that apart, not only why you want it. But why is it so urgent? Why does it have to happen right now on your timeline?

Alexandra: And what oftentimes I'm really challenging, the faster paced partner to see is, yes, there is a commitment milestone that you haven't met. But let's look at all the other ways in which the two of you are deepening into commitment. Sort of looking at the movie instead of the snapshot, because if all you do is look at this one snapshot of I don't have a ring on my finger, to make easy. It can be really easy then to miss all of

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the really beautiful ways that your slower paced partner is actually becoming a we with you, that the two of you are really building together.

You've done whatever, you're splitting finances in a way. You have a pet together. You're traveling together. You are in therapy together. What are the ways that you are kind of deepening into commitment, even as, even as this very kind of obvious concrete one? You're still not there yet. So I think that's part of it too, is the thing starts to feel static. I don't have this thing I want. It can start to feel static.

Kara: A kind of blindness. There's nobody else on this train car, there's only that one thing I need to get to. We've been talking about sort of these big picture things, we're moving in, getting married, opening up your relationship. But what you're talking about, it seems to me, would be equally maybe you're in early dating and you want to text every day and your partner is like, "I don't really like to text or I don't want to have to text every day. That feels like an obligation to me."

And I mean, I think those pace discrepancies can show up so early, especially when you're dealing with a cis hetero relationship where the woman has that socialization and has a lot of anxiety around dating and getting to. Okay, we've got the first date, then to the second date. Then are we going to become exclusive? I think this can show up in the beginning.

So what I really love about this whole conversation is seeing something that some people might look at and be like, "Oh, man, this is a huge problem. It means we're not compatible." It's a stage four hurricane. It's a stage one. It's a problem, sure, that you need to talk about. But it's a thing that can be bridged as opposed to, it feels like a pace discrepancy is a thing that people think of as zero sum. Either we're doing the thing or we're

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not doing the thing. Either you're going to get on board or you're not as opposed to we're going to build a bridge together.

Alexandra: That's right. It feels diagnostic. It feels like this is a red flag. We're doomed. Just I want to go back for a moment to the psychology of the slower paced partner. Because with everything, when we're talking about the meaning and surfacing the deeper stories. I'm of course always thinking about family of origin wounds and family of origin rules and family of origin patterns that we are going to activate in each other, 100 times out of 100.

And so that slower paced partner very often what they're doing is they're playing out an old family of origin dynamic, which is, I've got two stances. I am separate from you or I am subjugated to you. I either do it my way and I feel my own selfhood, or I do it your way and I am subjugated and I'm at risk of being mistreated by you. And so a lot of the healing for that slower paced partner is around developing a sense of pride in being relational, a sense of pride.

When I stretch so that my partner feels loved by me and safe with me, that stretch is not an abandonment of myself or a subjugation of myself. It is a sign of my own capacity to really be caring and nurturing and collaborating with somebody who's not going to then use it against me. So that's oftentimes a deeper healing for the slower paced partner.

Kara: I'm just thinking about how I'm both those people and no wonder my partner was like, "I'm good. This is like a feral cat. I'm just going to let her come to me when she's ready, put a little dish of milk outside and see what happens."

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Alexandra: The little dish of milk.

Kara: We had a very funny, he decided he needed to reverse psychology me somehow, which was not the best approach. But so he basically was like, "I think I want to, yeah, I think we should live together. So I'm going to tell her that I love living alone so she doesn't feel pressured." And then I of course was like, "What are you talking about? You're always over here. You hate being alone. You're the one who wanted to move in together, what are you doing?"

Alexandra: He's good. He's very clever. He's very clever.

Kara: Yeah, I was like, "Don't be clever." But the reason we got to where we are is we were able to talk and work through those things. We were talking before we started recording about how that what's so great about this conversation is, it feels the total antidote to what you see on most Instagram posts, which are sort of, if somebody doesn't see your worth and want to do what you want immediately, then get rid of them.

And it's always tricky because of course, women at the same time are socialized to settle in relationships they don't want to be in and rationalize away everything. So it's all your own discernment you have to build up over time and there is not a really easy answer. But I think as you're talking about the less fast partner, I'm also just thinking about things that the fast-paced partner might not even thinking about.

I can imagine that certain forms of neurodiversity would make that harder. If you have some demand avoidance, then somebody constantly being like, "I want to get married, I want to get married. What's wrong with you? Why won't you do this?" Is going to set all that off. And so it feels like a really

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interesting question to ask yourself, whichever partner you are, would be, in terms of more concrete things people can work on would be, what is the gift that my partner is giving to me in this relationship with their pace?

If you're the faster paced one, what's the gift of the slower pace here? Or vice versa, if you're the slower paced one, what's the gift that the faster paced one is giving me here?

Alexandra: Totally. I love that. No matter what stage of a relationship or what moment of a relationship you are experiencing a pace discrepancy. A pace discrepancy gives you a chance to work on something that is just an essential relational skill, which is, what is the opportunity here? What is the way in which I can grow as an individual? This is the heart of what I call relational self-awareness. What do I have to learn about myself in this moment with my partner? And it probably is not the first time I've felt this way.

The reason I'm experiencing this in the tender way that I am probably has to do with something from my past. So can this be a chance to care for that younger part of me as I face this challenge and perhaps do it differently, perhaps resource myself differently now than I could have back then? But you're right, I mean to see it as a growth opportunity rather than a crisis. Even just that mindset shift opens up eight new possibilities for the conversation versus if it's a crisis, there's urgency.

And when we're urgent, we really are compromised in our ability to toggle between our perspective and the other's perspective. And this is one that really does demand that toggling. One of the questions that I want people to ask is, what do I need to remember about my partner when we're having

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this conversation? What's the thing that I need to keep in mind about who they are as a person to kind of get out of that tunnel vision?

Kara: I think this also would help people understand each other's socialization better. I think if you're in that cis hetero partnership. That I don't think men really understand that level to which women have been socialized to believe that their entire worth and value depends on getting to the white dress and walking down the aisle. So it feels like this approach of this is just like any other thing in our relationship that we need to resolve and we need to talk about it and share our perspectives would also help.

It helps uncover the socialization that's impacting the way you show up in the relationship in all areas, so that you can come close together. So good. So if people want to read more of your brilliant wisdom or hear more, where can they find you?

Alexandra: So I have a weekly podcast called *Reimagining Love* and we did a whole episode about pace discrepancies a little while ago so they can look for that. And that comes with a worksheet because I am super nerdy. I love making a worksheet.

Kara: You're speaking my listeners' love languages, all the worksheets.

Alexandra: Yes, I love, those are my people. People who love worksheets are my people. So that's a wonderful place to go. I have books, and my newest book is called *Love Every Day*, which are daily conversation starters and little reflections, pieces of wisdom about relationships. My website doctoralexandrasolomon.com has blogs and online courses and all of the things.

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Kara: So good. Do not underestimate the power of having a little book of questions and prompts to ask your partner or ask yourself. My partner and I keep a pack of those in the car and we just pull them when we're driving and ask each other the questions. I think people think that somehow it's like planning for sex. People think that you're just supposed to spontaneously have big, deep discussions and unless you are a coach or a therapist this is not what you do all day.

So it's totally normal and helpful to have some prompts, have some ideas. So good. So go order the book. We'll put all this in the show notes, of course as well. Thank you for coming on and sharing your wisdom with us.

Alexandra: It was wonderful to be with you, thanks so much.

If you're loving what you're learning on the podcast, you have got to come check out *The Feminist Self-Help Society*. It's our newly revamped community and classroom where you get individual help to better apply these concepts to your life along with a library of next level blow your mind coaching tools and concepts that I just can't fit in a podcast episode. It's also where you can hang out, get coached and nerd out about all things thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners just like you and me.

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