

Announcer: None of the voices in this series are ongoing patients of Esther Perel. Each episode of Where Should We Begin is a one-time counseling session. For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality names and some identifiable characteristics have been removed. But their voices and their stories are real.

Woman 1: We can't publicly say we're a couple. We haven't intertwined, integrated our lives. 98% of the people in her life know of me as her friend.

Esther: For three-and-a-half years the two women have had a secret relationship. One is out, one is not.

Woman 2: I feel like we come from two different worlds. She lived with people, and marriage even. I've never lived with anyone.

Esther: One has constantly wanted more, more openness, more living together, more of essential future. And the other has been more withholding and more protective. It is not really clear of what.

Woman 1: I think it's two-fold. I think one, she just has a problem with commitment, and I also think it's because I'm a woman.

Woman 2: I had a child, and I had chosen to raise my child without any competing agendas. That meant a relationship.

Esther: They're stuck, and they've asked my help to get out of the rut, and also to see and to know if this relationship is worth fighting for.

Woman 1: I feel the love, but we can't stay there in the way I'm used to. We just can't stay here. So, what's to come for us?

Esther (Start S...: If the relationship was public, if you were a couple in the world, if the people that are close to you knew that you are together.

Woman 1: Her people.

Esther: No, I'm talking about if your people knew that you are together, then you're not moving in would mean something very different. Correct?

Woman 1: Ya. Some of the struggles I'm dealing with is not only because I'm a woman, but they have been emphasized and prolonged, and greatly because I'm a woman.

Woman 1: She's always, to me, had a weekend boyfriend, or if he does something wrong she breaks up with him for no reason and she's never going deep. Now she has gone deep with me, and I think it's just, she's afraid of it because her first priority is always just to keep herself safe. She'd rather be safe than happy.

Esther: And your first priority?

Woman 1: Is to be happy, even if that means I'm going to be hurt at some point.

Woman 2: If I'm with you, I'm with you. That's a commitment to me. I don't sway-

Woman 1: Not like that. You're not committed in that person getting to know them on a deeper level growing with them like deeply committed to them. And open your heart.

Woman 2: I feel like that's your definition, and you try to put me in the box of your definition of what moving forward looks like, or what commitment looks like, or how it's supposed to look, whether it's moving in, or commit. Because I do feel like you have been able to pull back some layers. Those other individuals were not able to. And you did. You have.

Woman 1: That's my point, that's what I'm saying.

Woman 2: It wasn't because I didn't want to, or I was scared to be committed, they did not require that of me.

Woman 1: Well, all I'm saying is it seems like it's really superficial. Like your relationships are-

Woman 2: Why were they superficial?

Woman 1: Because they weren't deep, you didn't go deep.

Woman 2: But that's because maybe that wasn't the person I was supposed to go deep with. Because I was choosing to, raise my son, and I didn't want those competing pulls.

Esther: If I wait a little longer, we'd probably get the synopsis of the conversation that runs between the two of you like a loop. Right?

Esther: She has never gone deep. Implication, implication. She can't commit. And you pretty much see why you're locked. Some of it has to do with gender, some of it has to do with intimacy, some of it has to do with history. They all intersect with each other. But the bigger piece is how you have set ideas about each other and you don't move from them. You have decided that she has never been close to anybody before. And you've decided that the kind of closeness that she wants with you is going to suffocate you.

Woman 2: That's on the head. For me. That word suffocate, because I've said that before.

Woman 1: Yeah.

Esther: And you're really right when you say some of these things have nothing to do with the fact that I'm a woman, but it does have to do with who you are. Every

time you want to be closer a part of her wants to come close, and another part of her wants to hold back.

Esther: You say that that's because she has never really known closeness. But from where she moves, as I'm watching her body move, she wants to hold back because the kind of closeness that you want to invite her in, is more than she's comfortable with, or wants. Regardless of what she's had or not had. It's not a response to her history, as much as it's a response to you.

Esther: You tap into her biggest fear. What is she telling you all the time? I wanted to make sure that I am available for my kid. So when you ask for the kind of closeness that you want, which is totally legit, it's almost like you are pressing the panic button, without knowing that you do, and without meaning to, that you press the panic button.

Esther: And you, also press her panic button, because every time you don't say, "This is more than I want," you make her feel like you're never going to come. Which is not necessarily true either, because obviously, you've been there. So, you kind of hold back with the words, but the body and the actions translate differently. Then, when she experiences you as really not coming, then she will do what she has done at other times, which is she finds somebody else, since she's always been in relationships.

Esther: Then, you can say, "Well, that pushes my button to go back behind my wall. See there was a good reason for me not to open up more."

Woman 1: I tell her all the time, "Listen," I'm with her because I like her independence. Three-and-a-half years ago that was a reasonable story. "I need to be there for my child, he's still in high school. We have these last years. He's going to be going to college." And I'd step back. What's your story now? He has his own life. Now you have to find the next chapter of your life. Will you become an empty-nester, instead of transitioning with me, the person that you've been with all this time? You decide that you're going to move back in with your mom. In my mind, that's not a normal transition.

Woman 1: So, for three-and-a-half years, she makes me feel like I'm crazy for wanting to know what any normal person would have known. What are we doing? Where are we going with this? Because right now, it feels like you're still trying to figure out whether you want to pursue being with a man, but I also tell her, "If you want to be with a man, why are you with me? Because you're wasting precious years on finding whoever you think you're going to be with."

Esther: As I've just listened to you, this is panic-button talk. I'm not saying this is real, but this is the language. You're moving away from me, rather than toward me. No sentence is neutral. Everything is heightened with a lot of assumptions that are thrown into... So, every sentence is loaded.

Esther: So, what happens then?

Woman 2: Yes, my child did go off to college, and that was very devastating for me. We're super close, and I really, really struggle with that more than I thought I was going to. I didn't like to use the word, "leaving" or "loss", but that's what I felt like. [get it together.].

Esther: What was that?

Woman 2: I'm trying to not cry when I talk about...

Esther: No, you know in this room, if something is funny we laugh, and if something is sad we cry.

Woman 2: So, my plan has always been when my child leaves, I'm leaving my state too, because I don't want to be there any more. Moving back with my mom was to save money so that I can leave.

Esther Commenta...: So, as I listened to her, I listened for the words, I listened for the tone and the affect, and I watched her body. And I see the transition very, very quickly between her attempt at being very composed and then, as she speaks about her son leaving home, and the grief that she felt, she's overcome with emotion, which she then tries to slap down with this kind of nervous laughter. Just to say, "I wasn't going to, I didn't want to cry." And you see the disconnect, and you see the intense attempts from her to maintain. In a way, she's the gate and her partner is the flood.

Esther: When you talk with her about leaving, it's very hard for her, because it's not just leaving the state, it's leaving her. Or would you leave together?

Woman 1: Well, I've asked her that, that is also rejected. She won't commit to that either. She won't commit to anything but, "I'm with you today." When I first met her, the way I kind of... She'll probably call it manipulation, but the way I told her not to worry about if you're with a woman or not is the difference between... Live in the moment. Just live in the moment, just live in the moment [crosstalk 00:11:56],

Esther: And she took you by your word?

Woman 1: And she took me by my word, and now she can only focus on today. "Today I'm with you." So it just back-fired.

Esther: But, it's an interesting paradox, right? You come with a vision for the future. You come with skills that allow her to disentangle. That's what she needs. She brings you also a way of experiencing a form of separateness. And on some level, that's what you need.

Woman 1: Yup.

Esther: What drew you to each other is quite clear.

Esther: So many of their interactions involve one woman wanting more, and one woman wanting less. One being the pursuer, one being more of the distancer, or the person who withholds. And, of course, as is often the case, each one is actually exacerbating the behavior of the other. Every time one speaks about needing more distance, it frightens the other who then comes back with wanting more. And every time she comes wanting more, she ends up being more suffocating in the way that they're using that word, which makes the other one take a step back. This is the loop where one person triggers the vulnerability of the other. Each one actually intensifies in the other the very behavior that they don't want. Pursuer, distancer. A classic couples dance.

Esther: Let me ask you something, just to step back a second. Give me a bit of a context of your life. Family background, social background. What's the context?

Woman 2: So, close-knit family as far as mom, dad, and brothers. Lost my dad in 2012. I was very devastated. Church, church, church. For sure, you don't come home with the same sex.

Esther: What do you think your dad would say if he saw the two of you?

Woman 2: If you like it, I love it. He's open to just happiness. Just to be happy.

Esther: And do you hear him often?

Woman 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I do.

Esther: And what does mom say.

Woman 2: Don't confuse loneliness with feelings or vulnerability.

Woman 1: I guess that's because she tried to tell her mom, and her mom just was in denial about it.

Woman 2: Yeah. Like, "Oh, you're just lonely because you haven't had a boyfriend in a long time." Or "You're just vulnerable right now, so that attention feels good." That type of stuff.

Esther: And who else in the family has an important opinion?

Woman 2: Child.

Esther: What does child say?

Woman 2: Child doesn't know.

Woman 1: I think her child does know, but out of respect, just like, "Well, if you're not saying anything..." In my mind, there's no way people can't know.

Woman 2: That's not my world. So why would they think otherwise? It's not... Like when we use certain words, she questions me. Like when I say, "My girlfriend," she's like, "What do you mean your girlfriend?" I'm like, "My girlfriend." As a straight woman that's what she is, she's my girlfriend. But it means something else. So, that's not my world, so why would they think that?

Woman 1: Then, my response is, "Well, when's the last time you had a girlfriend that you're spending the night with, that you're acting like?"

Woman 2: No, I'm acting like I spend the night. You have a big house. So I'm staying in one of her rooms.

Esther: The interesting thing is that both of you are completely plausible. In the world of out, this seems completely weird. In the weird of not-out, the power of denial is also immense. You would think that this is obviously, but it's not. Both of these things co-exist.

Esther: But, I also think, and you tell me if this makes sense to you, because, far from me to impose a whole other reality. But, the division that you create between I'm a straight woman, and I'm a gay woman, I'm not sure, in your situation, is as helpful. Because you polarize. You can be a woman. Period. A woman. And as a woman you have a fluidity to your attractions. It often accompanies the desire, the attraction, or the willingness to engage sexually, even if it is not your primary frame of reference, because of the connection that you have with her.

Esther: The intimacy, the emotional closeness is what leads to the sexual engagement with that person. If one asks you what are you originally attracted to, you probably would say, "Men." But if one asks you, in this instance, you said, "Because of the feelings I have for this girlfriend, my girlfriend, I actually find myself in an intimate, sexual relationship with her." What?

Woman 1: Because I told her that from the beginning, that, "I'm attracted to you as a person," and she just could not comprehend.

Esther: But, it actually is. It is completely a model. It's different for you, because for you, there is a complete unity between person and gender.

Esther: But that's where you differ. That's, in my mind, okay. But, at the same time, that doesn't mean that it makes you more at ease with what you think your community and your people, supposedly, will think, because that's not how they would think. In a way they think much more the way that you do, there's straight people, there's gay people.

Woman 1: Right. We've talked about that, and she actually, finally, because she won't, "I like you." You're not a lesbian, you're not bi-sexual. So she actually, in the last six months, maybe, I used the term fluidity, and she was like, "Okay, maybe that's it." Even though I'll never, ever [crosstalk 00:18:54].

Esther: Really, so we landed in the same spot.

Woman 1: Yeah, so she said, "Fine, I-"

Woman 2: I accept that.

Woman 1: I accept that. But she still struggles with saying that she enjoys having sex with me. Like, "No I don't. I'm not attracted to you. I don't enjoy having sex with you." I'm like, "Well, you're faking really good then." Like she won't give me that.

Esther: Why is that difficult for you to say? Because you put her constantly in a position of herding to squeeze things out of you, and she hates it. And I don't blame her. But, from the place of fluidity, why is it difficult to say, "I enjoy myself with you. I like it. To my great surprise, actually."

Woman 2: I recently said I do enjoy it. I do.

Esther: I do. come to think of it! Who knew? Very convincing.

Woman 2: I think because she puts them in the same sentence, where she says, "Are you attracted to me?" And I don't feel physically attracted to her, like body-wise. I don't feel like if you're walking past a room butt-naked, I'm not like, "Whoo!" That doesn't do anything for me. When we're being intimate, I'm feeling that connection with you. So, yes, I enjoy that.

Woman 2: And I've also told you, you have, again, peeled back layers and helped me understand my body. Remember, you told me I'm so green. She's more sexual fluid. She's just... the things that-

Esther: She's right.

Woman 2: She knows a lot. More than I do. I can be honest, I didn't know that there was different ways to cum. She teaches me in that area, and-

Esther: Let me ask you something. Do you tell her, "You're a wonderful lover"?

Woman 2: No.

Woman 1: No.

Esther: Maybe you should.

Woman 2: Yeah. You're a wonderful lover.

Esther: Because you don't voluntarily say things like that to her, she's constantly fishing for it. When she's fishing for it, you're going to this, "I'm going to be truthful." When you become truthful, you often become hurtful.

Woman 1: You know, one thing she prides herself on is, "I never lie to you." I'm thinking, "Yes, but you hurt me every day by telling me you don't want to be with a woman. You're not physically attracted to me." You like the connection, but you don't enjoy having sex with me. You only like the way it makes you feel, but you don't necessarily like-

Esther: The person who's making you feel so good.

Woman 1: Exactly. She's never lied to me. She's 100% truthful, but she's also very hurtful.

Esther: But she's not 100% truthful. She only gives you half the story. She gives you the nay-story. She tells you everything she doesn't feel. That's why I said, "Do you ever tell her that she's a wonderful lover?" A lover is how she makes you feel. It's the places she takes you. You know, sex isn't just something you do, it's a place you go. And you're going to places what you call "peeling of layers", that you've never gone before. And that feels wonderful. That needs to be said sometimes, unequivocally, without the whole explanation.

Esther: So, I'm going to ask it to you like this: why are you so withholding?

Woman 2: I think it's... No, not I think. Self-preservation. I think I hold back because I don't want to be... I feel like I don't want to be hurt. I feel like I...

Esther: Who hurt you?

Woman 2: My child's father. I love hard. I love really hard. When you have me, you have me, I'm very loyal.

Esther: You loved hard, and he broke your heart?

Woman 2: Yeah. I tolerated some stuff that I said I would never tolerate again, meaning different partners, that I knew. I never seen anything, but I knew he was doing something. Then I tried to chalk it up as, "Oh, we were kids." 17, 23. My dad told me, "Don't make every other man pay for his mistakes." Yeah, I didn't let other people get close enough to do anything else.

Woman 2: As soon as I felt like, "Yeah, this isn't going to work," I just let them go.

Esther: I wondered if there was more than questions about her sexual attractions, or about the ambivalence about her orientation. And if there was also a part of her

that had experienced something, that made her stay so closed. And she told us. And she told it also to her girlfriend. At that moment, the session began to turn.

Esther: Where is your family?

Woman 1: They're back home. My mom passed about a year-and-a-half ago. But, my dad's still there. Grew up opposite of her family, where my mom and dad was always just like, "Hey, do what ever you're doing. If you're happy, that's fine." They never interfered, never thought they had an opinion about how I live my life, or who I... They just wanted to make sure I wasn't hurting anybody, nobody was hurting me, and I was happy. There's never a coming out story for me, or anything. Because it wasn't... Who cares. It wasn't a big deal.

Woman 1: So, it's hard for me to wrap my mind around why somebody thinks they have opinion about how you choose to live your life. She has friends that are homophobic, and that's just like... especially all the other layers of oppression that we deal with on a daily basis. I don't understand, and I never experienced that in my own family.

Woman 1: And she's not that type of person. She's the kind of person that'd be like, "I don't care what people think. When I make my decision, I make my decision." Except for with this. She's very independent. So it's out of character for her.

Esther: But, some of the things you wonder, is it homophobia, and some of the things you wonder, is it fear of being hurt? And therefore reluctance to get closer? Anybody in my place would be going through the same thing. Is that correct? You go back and forth?

Woman 1: Yeah. I mean, sometimes I think it's she will say, she's ashamed of our relationship. She's embarrassed of it. She wants a relationship that she can live out loud. She wants this trophy boyfriend she can take to couples' party. She doesn't know how I'm going to fit into her life.

Woman 2: She's putting a lot of weight on just my friends. And it's not just my friends-

Woman 1: Your family.

Woman 2: And family. I walked away. In May I walked away because she stepped out, so I walked away. We deal with that in our space now. I don't want her to touch me. I don't trust her. I felt like, at least for those three years that even though I wasn't out, or you-still knew, I was committed to you. Against my struggles with religion, and preference, friends. I was still fighting for us. I was still here. And it felt like she gave up, and then she stepped out.

Woman 2: I still felt like I was trying to show her that I was here, that I was climbing.

Esther: Like what?

Woman 2: Like physically things I would not do. I don't. She wanted to tell her best friend, and I was okay with that. I was trying to just give her things that she said she needed. That I felt okay with doing.

Esther: When you speak the way you just did, you're very aware of all the efforts that you are making. I suggest her friends have begun to behave sexually with her in ways I've never behaved before. I... But the emphasis is on all the stretching and the efforts that you made.

Esther: When I think about you, I think that it's one thing when people have secrets, like you have secrets. But, for her, she is the secret. When you are someone's secret it's humiliating. Sometimes, I'm wondering if you're so busy with your side of the experience, that you don't necessarily see how hard it is for her to be hidden. Especially as a woman, as a black woman, as a lesbian woman, as a... hidden.

Esther: The focus is on how hard it is for you. Vis a vis your community, your family, your church. But she also has, she may not have church, but she has a family, and a community, and a large world around that looks at her every day.

Woman 1: I mean, it's true. I do face that, being a woman, being black, being a lesbian. I can take it from the rest of the world, because I'm immune to it, I don't know those people, it's more on a [inaudible 00:30:56] level. But now it's really up-close and personal level of rejection. I feel like I'm being overly dramatic when I'm like, "I got to face rejection every single day." It's hard to wake up and be rejected every single day by the person you want to be with the most. I've never wanted to be with anybody as much as I want to be with her. Never. I never wanted to be faithful to anybody except for her.

Woman 1: So, I feel like it's-

Esther: And how do you understand what, the strain that happened?

Woman 1: I resorted to what I know. It's my coping mechanism. I don't need to have a real, real structured relationship, but it needs to be well-defined. When something's not well-defined, people will step out of bounds because there's no boundaries. So, I said, "Can we be together?" And she's like, "No." "Can we be together?" "No." Even though she's acting like we're together.

Woman 1: So, I just got sick of it. So I told her, "I'm done. You're never going to understand what I'm going through. I'm done with you."

Woman 1: Then, of course, because the way we have done things when we say, "We're done," we not really done, so then when I started having sex with somebody else, then she calls it me cheating on her. So, now that's her reason for not wanting to be with me. But, what about the first three years? What was your reason then?

Esther: I totally hear you. And I also hear that each of you often get locked into the place of you don't understand. Then we go right back to, "Mine's worse."

Esther: To me, you have this investment into creating this choreography here of, "You don't get me." Each of you talks about the sacrifices that you make. The stretches that you make. And you leave out the other person. Of course, then the other person says, "You don't understand me."

Esther: What if you started the sentence, not with talking about you, but with talking about your acknowledgement of the other? I promise you, something interesting will happen.

Woman 1: For me, how can I do what needs to be done? That's like you moving across the state for a job that says, "You still got it. We don't know if you got the job or not yet. But we need you to move here, relocate your life, change everything, and then, on your first day of work, we might tell you if you have the job or not." No one's going to do that. She hasn't even given me the job yet.

Esther: Yes, but you can spend your time asking that question, or waiting for her, but you can also ask yourself, "What about me made me cross the state without knowing if I had a job? But that's what I've done." And not in the blaming fashion. Just simply, "For some reason, I've been waiting to do this. This is not what I've typically done. I've never done this with anybody else."

Esther: There's so many interesting things here about me that are completely, what you consider out of character. For both of you. So, that's interesting. You each are acting out of script. That will open up new possibilities. Rather than "she has not," it's "What can I learn about me in this relationship?"

Woman 1: Yeah. Yeah. Because I told you everybody else. Even I meet them, I don't have to earn anything, I don't have to fight for anything, I don't have to be patient for anything. That's what this is, I think.

Woman 1: I needed you to know if I didn't always want it, but it has made me sit back and be patient, and think about some things. And I tell you that. That's why I don't understand why you think-

Esther: Stay where you were. You were good.

Woman 1: I tell you all the time that you are what I want.

Esther: Why did I need to learn patience? Why did I need to learn that the things that are just given to me like that may not be-

Woman 1: Whoa, because I don't tend to throw it away so easy. Because I really had to work at it. Relationships just weren't things I had to work at. They were just

there, they were easy. And if it wasn't easy, I just checked out, got another one, had multiple ones.

Woman 1: So, I think with you, it's just been teach me to sit down, look at things differently. Like I always say, "No, I won't cheat on you. You're not going to take me back if I cheat on you."

Esther: This is a turning point. Until now, it was all about, "I've had much experience, I've been with many women. You know nothing about relationships, you just avoid intimacy." It's a one-up, one-down position. At this moment, it finally is clear that maybe you've had many relationships, but they were not that great. In fact, I toss them out like tissues. You are actually teaching me to be patient. To hang in there. To not just huff and puff and be frustrated and quit.

Esther: Now we have a more equal relationship. When each person starts to look inside, and gains insight, the story changes.

Woman 1: I would rather have somebody who was willing to hold me accountable. Be willing to help me see that there's just more to life than what I was doing, and I appreciate that about you. I still wish you'd take me back, but I still appreciate that about you.

Woman 1: I feel like I never felt hurt about cheating on anybody, ever. And I felt really, really hurt about what I did. It was like my heart was hurting. I felt sick. I never felt sick. I never felt physically sick over any woman ever. But still it was wrong. It's still something I never should have done. But, I know that in my heart it didn't feel like the other hundreds of times it has happened.

Esther: Hundreds? You're a pro.

Woman 2: I've had girlfriends. Sister girls, that have hurt me once, and our relationship has never been the same. I don't go back to get hurt again. I just don't.

Esther: So, she's never felt bad when she cheated, and you've never gone back when someone hurt you, and each of you is doing something new. She did the good old thing, but felt terrible about it, and you are sitting right next to her, right now on this couch. So, both of you are doing things that are not in the old script.

Woman 2: Yes. Even though you totally changed my outlook on things, and you've stretched me places that I never knew I even had, I didn't even know that I could feel what I feel for anybody. You showed me what a partner is. You've helped me to feel comfortable with myself. You've taught me how to love, and want to love.

Woman 1: So why didn't you want more of that, though? Why is that something to be ashamed of?

Woman 2: It's scary.

Esther: Can I suggest something? We have different parts inside of us. We have one part that says exactly this. "I should go to the place where I feel a depth and an authenticity of love that I have never known before." Then there's another part that says, "This is sinful. You will burn in hell. you are going to be scorned and rejected by all." What would be another one?

Woman 2: You're going to get bored.

Esther: You only want me because you can't have me?

Woman 1: I've told her that after the chase is over.

Esther: So, this is the voice that says "follow your heart" and this is the voice that says, "how dare you do such shameful things." This is the voice that says, "Anyway you only find me so desirable because you can't have me, and the day the chase is over, you will be bored and you won't be interested." Are there other voices? Let's make a chorus.

Woman 2: My child will reject me?

Esther: "My child will reject me." Any more?

Woman 2: My mom.

Esther: Don't confuse loneliness with love? But then we need one for your dad who says, "Do what makes you happy?" Should we put him on her side or on the other side.

Woman 2: On the other side.

Esther: On the other side. Anybody else?

Esther: I have lots of little sculptures. I have five more for the inner voices.

Woman 2: Did we already say God?

Esther: No, we haven't said God. I mean we've said the voice of shame, but is the voice of shame God?

Woman 2: I think, and we talked about this too, where we overlook some sins, but, this one is like, we raise this one so high.

Woman 1: So that's the worst then.

Esther: It doesn't have to be people. What I'm saying is you have different voices inside of you, different parts of you. And what you think is a contradiction is actually a chorus of voices that sometimes fit nicely together, and sometimes not. Do you want to make your little choruses too? You must have one too.

Woman 1: Yeah.

Esther: We're going to put yours here. What's this one?

Woman 1: What makes you stay with somebody who doesn't know if they want to be with you.

Esther: Why do you want to be with somebody who's continually ambivalent about you.

Woman 1: She clearly wants to be with you because she shows you love every day, so just stop obsessing over her not committing completely to you.

Esther: That's this one, answers directly this on. I would even add another sentence. And since when did you become such a master of commitment?

Woman 1: Right.

Esther: Where does that elegance come from? You present yourself like you are coming out of the commitment school. When in fact, your resume, your relationship resume leaves somewhat to be desired when it comes to commitment.

Esther: So, these two are having quite a chat with each other. All right, another one?

Woman 1: Yeah. This relationship is too hard, and is it really all worth it?

Esther: Yeah. It shouldn't have to be so much work.

Esther: Can you believe that's the conversations you're having? It's all of these talking at the same time. When you have your conversations, you have to highlight, this is that part of me talking now, rather than this is me.

Esther: The very things that you're each complaining about in the other, is actually why you're here. That has nothing to do with gay, straight, or anything. That's couples.

Esther: When they came in they were stuck. Deadly serious without an ounce of movement or humor. Caught in a loop in which each person was pointing finger at the other. Where they are now is owning things, able to bring the light on them. And, as we have created with the sculptures the multiple voices inside of them, we also have brought complexity to the fact that there are all kinds of contradictory feelings here who are trying to sort themselves out.

Announcer: Esther Perel is the author of *Mating in Captivity* and *The State of Affairs*, and also the host of the podcast *How's Work*. To apply with your partner for a session for the podcast, or for show notes on each episode, go to whereshouldwebegin.estherperel.com.

Announcer: *Where Should We Begin* with Esther Perel is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions. Our production staff includes Eric Nuzum, Eva Wolchover, Destry Sibley, Hiwote Getaneh and Olivia Natt. Recorded by Noriko Okabe, Kristin Mueller is our engineer. Original music and additional production by Paul Schneider. And the executive producers of *Where Should We Begin* are Esther Perel and Jesse Baker. We would also like to thank Nazanin Rafsanjani, Courtney Hamilton, Lisa Schnall, Nick Oxenhorn, Dr. Guy Winch and Jack Saul.