

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. This next session, briefly describes an instance of domestic violence, and may not be appropriate for all listeners. Please take care while listening.

Man 1: I am pretty outgoing, and I can be a little loud sometimes. He's much more reserved than I am.

Man 2: The first time that he got in my radar, I was really annoyed, because he wouldn't be quiet.

Esther Perel: They're two men in their late 20s. They both grew up in the Dominican Republic, and came together as adults to the United States.

Man 1: We had a very similar upbringing, which was, I think, one of the reasons why, when we first met, we connected so well.

Esther Perel: They grew up with very little. They grew up with violence, with neglect.

Man 2: We had nothing, literally nothing. So, now, everything that we have, we've built it up ourselves.

Esther Perel: And they've built a beautiful home together. A stable relationship. And each of them have quite thriving careers.

Man 1: We have dated more seriously. But, very few people. Maybe two, or three, that we've really dated and spent time with them. And those experiences were fun, but ultimately, we decided it wasn't working for the both of us.

Esther Perel: Sexually, they play with others. They play safe and they play well. But, they struggle with a different kind of intimacy.

Man 1: From the beginning of the relationship, we've struggled a lot with friendships. I wouldn't say he's a loner, but he's a very shy, reserved person. And so, he has a really hard time opening up to friends, and having a bond with people. Whereas for me, I sought out friendships and I sought a lot from my friendships.

Man 2: I wish that somehow, someone could help to be a little bit less controlling. I would like to be a little bit more relaxed.

Esther Perel: They held on to each other for dear life. And after 10 years, the togetherness has been secured. Can there be room for the separateness?

Man 1 Start Ses...: We both come from families that are quite dysfunctional. And in many ways, we are our parents, parents.

Esther Perel: Tell me more. Give me a bit of the background.

Man 1: Where do we start? My dad is in the DR and my mom lives in Florida. My dad is a very smart man, who is very manipulative, and very... he's always been in a financial place that's not healthy. But, he also refuses to do anything about it. And he just relies on me a lot financially. And that puts a strain on our relationship.

Esther Perel: Who did you grow up with?

Man 1: My dad.

Esther Perel: You grew up with your dad in DR?

Man 1: In the DR. Yeah. My parents split when I was 12. My mom is a victim of domestic violence, and we witnessed it.

Esther Perel: With him?

Man 1: Yeah. She packed up everything and she left. And she wanted us to come with her. But, my dad twisted things, to make it seem like my mom was the villain. So, we grew up thinking that she abandoned us and that she didn't want us. And then with time, as an adult, things made a lot more sense. And I just have a hard time letting go the fact that he just played the victim so well. That made me believe that he was the victim in that, when objectively, my mom was in many ways, a victim to many things. To this day...

Esther Perel: You hold him responsible for severing your relationship with your mom...

Man 1: Yes.

Esther Perel: For that many years?

Man 1: Yes.

Esther Perel: She would reach out and he would block?

Man 1: A hundred percent. Yeah.

Esther Perel: And then, you thought she was not trying to find you?

Man 1: Correct. And so, it was... After all that, it's really difficult for me to just have a good relationship with my dad, even if I tried. And I just have a hard time.

Esther Perel: You just remembered this right now, right?

Man 1: I'm sorry?

Esther Perel: You just saw something now.

Man 1: Just... it's just a lot.

Esther Perel: But, you just saw something.

Man 1: Yeah.

Esther Perel: What did you see?

Man 1: Just like, going into my parents bedroom, and my dad strangling my mom, basically. Having to see that, and obviously freaking out. But, not really being able to do anything about it. It was just hard. And so, now...

Esther Perel: Stay with this one sec.

Man 1: At some point, he kind of let her go and settled down because my brother and I had walked in, we were crying obviously. We were saying, "Stop. What's going on?" And she ran to the corner of her room. And we were standing at the door. And then, he stepped into the bathroom. And in the door of the bathroom, he grabbed a Bible. He had read a verse from the bible, and he was trying to find a justification for what he was doing. That's when I was like, wow, that's just insanity. Even as a child, I mean, I was like 12, I can still remember thinking, this makes no sense. I just have a hard time understanding how I even then stayed, even though I was able to rationalize that, I still stayed with him. So, yeah. It's just... it's hard to move past that with him.

Esther Perel: Just breathe two seconds. You're a talker. But, just let it sit...

Man 2: Yeah. He's a talker.

Esther Perel: For a sec. This is way too much to carry, for any 12 year old, who then has to hold the hand of his little brother. When did you come out to your father?

Man 1: I never officially came out. He would constantly bring it up. As in, he would go on these random rants. He would come into my room, and just yell, and make all these insults and comments about it. But, he wouldn't just come out and say, "Hey, are you gay? What's going on?"

Esther Perel: Dimelo en español, porque lo oyes en español. [Tell me in Spanish, because you heard it in Spanish.]

Man 1: El - eran insultos muy tipicos a Dominicana, pero eran definitivamente la insultos. No eran simplemente, a eres gay, eres homosexual. Eran definitivamente las palabras queran mucho machar y mucho mas denigrante y era constante. Entonces, yo nunco le digo, Papi, soy gay. [His insults were very typical for Dominicans, but they were definitely insults. It was never just, oh

you're gay, or homosexual. They were definitely words that hurt a lot, were much more demeaning, and it was constant. So, I never said, Dad -- I'm gay.]

Esther Perel [C...: While he lives with a sense of himself, as a happy, upbeat, optimistic person, it doesn't take much to realize that right underneath the surface, lives a lifetime of abuse, of manipulations, of putdowns, and violence. And so, as he talks about his background, he squints with his eyes and he takes one squint just to know that he just chased away an image. And so, I go for the image. What did you just see? And then, I feel that he's not just seeing things, but he's hearing things. Speak to me in Spanish, because that's the language that you heard it in. And even, if I didn't speak Spanish, I would still ask him to speak in his mother tongue. Because that's the language in which the wounds were seared into his skin.

Man 1: It's weird how I don't like him, I don't get along with him. But, I still, he's my dad, I want to please him.

Esther Perel: How do you make sense of that? I mean, it's a question that I think we often have, right? How is it that as children, we want the love of parents, even when they did not know how to love us properly? Why do we feel such a sense of duty and obligation to people who may have been cruel to us, from whom we still want to love? And I'm assuming this is not just a question to you alone, you have a similar...

Man 2: Experience with my family.

Esther Perel: Yeah.

Man 2: Yeah.

Esther Perel: I mean, you have your own version, right?

Man 2: I've actually never had a problem of seeking people that like me back. So, I have lost aunts, uncles, cousins, friends. Because I find that if you truly care about someone, you're not going to treat them in a manipulative way.

Esther Perel: Mm-hmm (affirmative). In a manipulative way.

Man 2: Manipulative. Yeah. It's a hard word. So, I've never had that problem. So, my relationship with my mom, growing up, it wasn't the greatest. Especially, because she had quit her job. And she had this idea, that she would never again have a boss. So, she would try to get income in really random ways, that never really worked. So, money was an issue. And I felt a little bit resent, because I feel that I wasn't able to live my childhood to its fullest.

Esther Perel: What do you mean?

Man 2: I felt that I had this double life. Because I had my household life, which was with my mom, which was in really precarious conditions. And then, I had my school life, which I was lucky enough that my father, which I don't really have a relationship with. He covered all of the school expenses. So, I was able to go to a really nice school in the DR. I was really focused on my studies. Because I look back now, and I feel that that was my scape goat, just to study. I'm able to live this life, because I put so much effort in the past. And now, I'm past that. That whole... I don't even remember my life in the DR anymore, after I moved to New York. Or I try not to remember. But, yeah. So, that was my growing up. And then...

Esther Perel: You know what's so funny? And it's not funny at all. Is that you've just said, "I tried not to remember." And then, you laugh. When people describe really painful situations, but they're doing it with infusion of laughter, to make it palatable. I, the listener, start to feel the stuff that you're pushing aside. I'm thinking, these two kids, because they were kids, had to navigate a shit load. Period. And it's not about making it, it was nothing. It's not about making it, there is no worse. It is what it is. They learned codes. They learned to move from one neighborhood to another. From one social class to another. From one parent to another. They learned the map. And all these experiences, probably are part of your resources today, that allow you to do what you do, as well as you do it. Because we learn, and we develop our resources, also in the most painful of our experiences. It may have been good now that you see how studious you were. But, at the time, it may have been very lonely.

Man 2: Yes.

Esther Perel: You learned to be responsible for your dad. But, you deal with a big gap, where you just feel like there was such a hole. And I missed my mom, and I missed her. Period.

Esther Commenta...: Both of them were what we call parentified children. Children who became the parents of their own parents. Both of them were thrown an enormous amount of responsibility, way before they were ready to assume it. And both of them, grabbed on to each other for dear life.

Esther Perel: What you have, is that for a while, you learned to grow up together. And you learned to become families for each other in the full sense of the word. And the people with whom you're going to go from eating junk, or eating nothing, to eating well, to having your first paycheck together, to moving in together, to moving to the U.S. together. That whole thing. And now, comes a phase where it is, can we still be together, and equally strong together, but have a little bit more differentiation between us? And this issue of how this I, is going to emerge in the context of a strong we, is I think where you are at developmentally.

Man 1: I think we've sort of recently been trying to work through it. So, just for instance, if you want to stay home on Saturday afternoon. But, I've been

working a lot this week and I want to see some friends. I'll say, "I'm going to grab a coffee with..." X friend. And he would say, "Well, I don't want to go." And it becomes tense. It becomes tense to the sense that I don't even feel comfortable bringing it up as a possibility, because I feel like it'll lead to an issue. And so, it's things like that, that we have been struggling with.

Esther Perel: And it's always in that direction?

Man 1: It's always usually me.

Man 2: Not necessarily.

Man 1: What do you mean?

Man 2: So, he works a lot. And therefore, I do things without him.

Man 1: Sure.

Man 2: And most of the time, he expects that if he's out of work, I'm just going to drop everything that I'm doing. And I'm going to teleport next to his side.

Esther Perel: So, both of you experience an anxiety and a tensing up, when the other one wants to go do something on their own. And both of you end up being worried about saying, "I want to go do something on my own." Because you're trying to avoid the tension between the two of you. It's either tension inside one, or tension between two.

Man 1: Yes.

Esther Perel: What you've done, is you have used a very strong together in order to give a lot of security to two selves. And now, these selves would like to emancipate themselves a bit, without triggering all kinds of abandonment issues, which you both have.

Man 2: We mostly do everything together. So, I feel that by you not allowing yourself to ask for the things that you want and you need, it's an issue. Because you don't allow me to experience the process of you being independent. You just come out one day and say, "I'm fully independent. No one's going to tell me what I'm going to do. Period." And I feel that you do that a lot. Because that's how you deal with issues. You're either... you're really binary. You're either hot or cold. Yes or no. It's never un proceso lentino, it's never a slow process to get somewhere.

Man 1: I don't feel that you should have the power to say, "No. I don't want you to go out. You should stay with me." Especially, when it doesn't really affect you, in the sense that we'll still spend the night together. We'll have Sunday together. I'm not stripping away significant time from us. Because I do know that I work a

lot. And so, when we have free time, I know we should... we try to be together and spend it together. But, at the same time, I want to do stuff and do things that I want to do, and be with my friends also. And just do things. And so, it's a little frustrating.

Esther Perel: Can I?

Man 1: Yeah. Please.

Esther Perel: When you talk to him like this, I hear you talk to your father. Like, you have no right to have this kind of power over me. He just said, "I don't want you to go." You can say, "But, I'm going anyway." Or "I understand you don't like it." And then, have a conversation about it. But, you're in a power thing. And in the power thing, you will do what the other person wants you to do. Until one day, you say, "Now, fuck it." So, you keep it in, you keep it in, you keep it in. And anger motivates you. What?

Man 1: That's just very accurate. I understand that he can say, "I don't want you to go." And we could talk about it. But, ultimately, I end up not going. And when we talk about it, we try to figure it out, in a way where we can talk about why not, or how it could be more comfortable. The reality is that, the result is, that I end up not doing what I want to do.

Esther Perel: Why? Why?

Man 1: Because if I do it, then it upsets him. And then, even if he at some point just says, "Okay. Fine. You can go." I'll go. But, he'll be calling me every 10 minutes, or texting me non-stop. And then, I'm not really enjoying what I'm trying to do. It's not even like I'm saying, "I want to do this big event, weekend thing, without you." It's very small things usually.

Esther Perel: The first thing I will highlight for you, is that your little selves, the children that live inside of you. They don't make a distinction between a small little coffee with friends, or a big event of the whole weekend. The little child inside of the two of you, experiences the whole thing, constantly. Are you with me? Am I alone? And reacts from that degree of insecurity. So, if the adult you, are trying to have a rational conversation over, "But, it's just a two hour coffee." You're talking to the wrong person. Because the one who says, "I don't want you to go", or the one who calls you every 10 minutes, is not that adult. And the one that ends up not going. Because if he's anxious, I'm anxious. And I can't have a boundary, by which I'm fine, even if he is not. Or find a way to reassure him. Or to tell him, "My phone will be off for the next two hours, or I won't answer." And begin to learn to regulate, and calm ourselves, when we are not with each other, because we have so much learned to co-regulate.

Man 2: I just want to step in for a second, and say, that it's never that he wants to have a coffee for two hours with someone. Because you have a coffee during the

daytime. Typically, this happens, if he went to a work event at night, and alcohol is involved. And then, he suddenly stops answering me, or responding, or whatever. And then, suddenly, more plans come out, out of that one work thing. And then, it becomes a full night out. And that is when I'm triggered.

Esther Perel Co...: What's so interesting in this reaction, is that he's trying to tell him, "If it was really coffee, I would actually be okay with this. The reason I'm not okay with this, is because it's not coffee." Rather than, "The reason I'm not okay with this, is because this triggers an intensity of emotions that run inside me." That is exactly what that child used to feel. I'm sure that there is more evening involved than just coffee. But, that doesn't mean that if it was only coffee, there will be no trigger.

Man 2: It's more about nighttime activities. Where alcohol, and people, and...

Esther Perel: And the fear is?

Man 2: He tends to be a people pleaser. So, if he's out with a friend, and the friend wants to bar hop 20 bars, even though he doesn't want to, even though he's tired, even though he wants to go home. He will do it. So, that's what makes me anxious. Because I know that he will not say no.

Esther Perel: Can I be really psychological with you?

Man 2: Yes. And I'm not going to like it. Go ahead.

Esther Perel: You what?

Man 2: I'm probably not going to like it. But, go ahead.

Man 1: Please. I'll watch. Go ahead.

Esther Perel: You know how I said to him, that when he talks to you, he's talking to his dad?

Man 2: Yeah. Who am I talking to?

Esther Perel: Your mom.

Man 2: Oh God.

Esther Perel: With her impulsivity and her bad choices.

Man 2: Yes.

Esther Perel: And her being influenced by other people.

Man 2: Yes.

Esther Perel: And when you talk to him, you talk to her.

Man 2: Yeah. It makes a lot of sense.

Esther Perel: It works in both directions. Right? And so, you do just enough, for it to trigger in him, this is what used to happen between me and my dad. And he does just enough of the impulsive, people pleasing, not thought out behaviors, etc. For you to think, I have to buckle down. I have to be the responsible one. I have to be the controlled one. I have to be the one who measures all the dangers of the situations. Because, obviously, he doesn't.

Esther Perel: And when we begin to re-experience with our partners, things which we experienced with our first partners, which is our parents, or our caregivers. It doesn't just come from nowhere. We pick a person who does just enough to ignite inside of us, the memory. The cellular, visceral memory, of those interactions. So that, we then start to respond to them from that place. You want to have a conversation about respect. He has a conversation about power. So, now we need to change the conversation. And that starts, probably with you talking about what gets evoked for each of you. And then, you can talk about friends, and you can talk about sex, and you can talk about... because it's the same dynamic, I think. This is the core.

Man 1: Yep.

Man 2: Yep. You are extremely correct in that. Yes.

Esther Perel: Every couple has to negotiate separateness and togetherness. It's probably one of the core tasks of a relationship. What is I, and what is we? But, as we all need connection and independence, what sometimes will happen in a relationship, is one person is afraid to lose the other. And the other person is more afraid to lose themselves.

Man 1: That's definitely how I've experienced it. And that's certainly why I react the way I react to it. It is true that you are much more constrained and in control than I am. And it is true, that I enjoy having four drinks if we're out. I do like to have a good time. And if that means getting a little bust and dancing, I do it. And I enjoy it a lot. I mean, it doesn't happen often. But, when I do it, that's a way that I have fun. And you certainly don't do that. And you don't see that as fun. I'm also not a person who'll drink to a point where I'll blackout. Or I don't know what's going on. Or I do reckless things.

Esther Perel: Before you try to reassure him, I am not like your mom. See if you can stay with him about how you understand, how it makes sense that he would experience you the way he does. Because if he experiences you as more solid, he actually may one day, allow himself to let go more. Part of why he's to do this tightness, is because he constantly thinks that he has to do it for two, which may not be the case at all.

Man 2: So, it's not about the alcohol. It's more about me seeing that you have the power of your own self. And not letting other people influence whatever you want to do, or whatever is best for you.

Esther Perel: And can you add to that? And this is an anxiety, or an awareness that I bring with me, as well.

Man 2: Yes.

Esther Perel: This is not just all produced by him.

Man 2: No. It's not all produced by him. I'm a really anxious person in general. I just can't blindly trust, that people are going to be trustworthy. And the way that you can tell me, "Trust me. This is not going to happen." And then, every single time, that the same situation comes along, it's the same result. It's the same situation. It's like either work, or friends, or whatever, or health, which is a major issue for him. I need to be there, and be like, "You need to do this. You need to do that." And if I was able to see that you are a little bit more independent, not independent. But, if you just take a little bit more care of you, it will be easier for me to be more chill.

Man 1: I mean, I hear you. And I appreciate that you care so much that you feel that you have to do all that. And I'm happy you do it, because you're taking care of me. But, I also feel that you kind of have to also let me figure out what I'm comfortable with, and what are my breaking points. Because in the end, we do have different level of risk taking. And I think overall, we also approach things, like work, and friends, and all these things, very differently, in a sense. And you have to be able to just step back and trust that I'll be fine. And if I'm not, trust me, I will yell, "Help." I'm not just going to drown.

Man 2: Yes. That is correct. But, I feel that...

Esther Perel: An interesting thing, is that each of you says, "Yes, but." I've now waited three times. "Yes, but. Yes, but." You want him to become more responsible so that you don't have to feel so responsible for him. But, he won't become more responsible, because you're always there. And he's trying to tell you, let me find my own threshold. And that is way too anxiety producing for you. You want him to trust you. But, then you act in a way that doesn't allow him to trust you, because every time he has to step in. Because you didn't do what you said you were going to do. So, if you try to say, "I will change when you do." It will sound nice. But, it won't be effective.

Man 2: No. It doesn't work. It's a vicious circle.

Esther Perel: So, the best way you have, is to say what you can do. Part of the anxiety about, does he know where to stop? Is slightly related to how he acts. And part of it, comes because you have decades of that as your marker. There will be the

challenge of accepting that he has a different threshold, which in part is why you picked him in the first place. He's looser. He's more open to the world. He's more, what you call people pleaser. He's more trusting in that way.

Man 1: Yes. That's accurate.

Esther Perel: And those are the very things that probably drew you to him. But, they also are scary for you. And this is the law of attraction. What is initially attractive because it's different, is also the source of conflict later, because it is different. You wished, when you had your mom, that you didn't have to be that responsible all the time and be the one who thinks about her limits. So, that you could be the child who goes and explores, and plays, and discovers, and makes mistakes. Rather than you be the studious kid, who never breaks a single rule, because she does all of that. And part of your reaction to him, is that you both are the responsible children. But, as a result, he became more constrained. And you became more like, "I do all the right things. I'm entitled to some fun."

Man 1: Yeah. That's basically how I see it.

Man 2: I'm just hoping that we would change sort of at the same rhythm. But, I think that's not possible. Because obviously, we've been trying, and it doesn't really work. And yeah.

Esther Perel: The way you've been addressing this, is not helping.

Man 2: Okay.

Esther Perel: And another discussion about, "It was one o'clock. It was three o'clock. It was 11.15." "No. I did call you then." I mean, you can enjoy it. I don't think you do.

Man 2: Not at all.

Esther Perel: But, in any case, it's not working. And it's not working, because there's a deeper conversation, that has to do with the way you learn to adapt. What are you really saying?

Man 1: When I say trust me about this?

Esther Perel: Or you have got to trust me, is kind of...

Man 1: It's almost, basically, you have to trust me. Because ultimately, I should be able to set the threshold of what's enough and what's okay. And I feel like for many years, you've been the one setting the threshold, because it makes you feel uncomfortable, if I'm past your threshold. And maybe mine's a little further down the road.

Esther Perel: Yes. But, what part of you accepted his threshold as yours?

Man 1: It almost felt like it was a take it, or leave me, kind of thing. This is just how you are. And that's just kind of like the price of admission. I have to deal with this, if I want to be with you. And, ultimately, I'd rather be with you and work around your anxiety. And work around what makes you feel comfortable when we're not together. Because I'd rather be with you than not.

Man 2: At the time I didn't know that you were putting up with anything. And then, suddenly, I don't know when, it suddenly exploded. And you said that you lost a friend because I made you lose a friend. And I'm like, "What are you talking about? That's not what I said. That's not what I meant."

Man 1: It's a pattern that keeps repeating because whenever I get close to a friend. And we're getting very, very close, where we check-in, maybe not every day. But, we chat often. We check-in about work stuff. We share some stuff. We have common interest. He has a hard time seeing that it's just a friendship. And that it's okay for me to have a friend who I share things with, and I have common interest with, that maybe we don't share.

Man 2: It's also that when you got close to people with your interests, you tend to get close to people physically as well. And I have a hard time with that. Because to me, there's a really straight line where friendship and more than friends, is divided. And I feel that your line is a little more blurry. And that makes me extremely uncomfortable. Because I feel that, it suddenly becomes this constant person there, that I might not want them to be so constant there. Or I feel that you focus too much on the person. And then, then that person becomes your person. And it just makes me really uncomfortable.

Man 1: Okay. I think just for the sake of clearness, when you say physical, it's not like, I don't have sex with my friends, and we don't make out.

Man 2: Oh no. Not at all.

Man 1: It's not intimate. It's simply that, I am in generally, and also just not with friends, just in general. I am physically affectionate with people that I feel comfortable with. I don't go around hugging every single person in my office. But, I hug some of my coworkers.

Esther Perel: You keep saying it's not intimate. And I think that's exactly what it is. It may not be sexual.

Man 1: Okay. It's platonic.

Esther Perel: But, it is intimate.

Man 2: Yes.

Esther Perel: And what I'm hearing you say, is that it's the intense intimacy. It's the kind of infatuation. It's the sense that you're being replaced or pushed aside. That there's somebody else who suddenly becomes his primary focus. And then, you feel basically excluded.

Esther Perel Co...: I held these sessions in a pre-COVID world, when people could still talk about how they are physical beings, who go to work and hug those that they feel close to. Who knows which world we will come back to. At this moment, the question of physical closeness is going to take on new expressions. But, the categories won't necessarily change. The discussion about how it is the friendship, the intimacy of friendships, the closeness, that triggers him. Because he experiences the energy being siphoned out of their relationship and being directed to those friends.

Man 2: I want to have the intimacy with him. And that's it. Or whoever we decide to have intimacy with together, in not a platonic way. There I don't have a problem. If it's a friend that he has his focus on, that friend and I, we sort of have to live with each other in a way.

Esther Perel: You compete?

Man 2: I wouldn't say compete. It's coexisting. Because after nine years, no one is competition. And I'm not competitive. But, it's true. I don't feel threatened that my relationship will end. I don't feel threatened that...

Esther Perel: You don't?

Man 2: I do not.

Esther Perel: You don't?

Man 2: I do not feel threatened. But, mindful that multiple relationships can happen at once. And that is what I'm afraid of. It's not that I'm going to lose him. It's that I'm going to have to share him with someone that I don't want to share my life with. I don't want to share my experiences with.

Esther Perel: That's a form of loss too.

Man 2: In that way. Yeah.

Esther Perel: It may not be a definitive loss. But, it is a form of loss. There is sharing that makes you feel that you have more, and there is sharing that makes you feel that you have less.

Man 2: Yes.

- Esther Perel: Interesting. He doesn't think you would leave him. He just thinks he would have less of you, because you would have others. And then, he starts to feel that that means he's not enough. And you will need to convey to him, that others don't mean compensation. That others mean a richer life for us all. That there can't be one person for everything, which is what you have been till now. You have been for each other, an entire community. Now, when you play together, and you're sexual with a third, you're together. So, it's a very different experience. That's why it's not the sex that is threatening here. It's the closeness. It's the intimacy. Reverse. Often reverse from straight people actually.
- Esther Perel: Imagine that you pick a night a week, first of all. You start with that, during the week, where you go and do your own thing. Whatever it is. And you don't invite each other. The point is that those are your nights off. Your nights to yourself. So, that you start to cultivate a different balance between separate and together. And imagine you don't have a curfew on those. You may actually come home a lot earlier when you don't have a curfew. You'll be surprised.
- Man 2: I was perfect with the idea until you... I was like, yeah. That would be perfect. Until you said that, I'm like... it has to be a Saturday morning. Because I know that's if he hangs out with someone on Saturday morning, by two, he's going to be back.
- Esther Perel: But, I would like you to have an evening as well. The point is, that you actually get to be away, without having the other in a constraining force. You need to be able to be away without worry. The worry that he will come back. Or the worry that he will experience more important things than you elsewhere. And the worry that you have to protect him because he's going to be upset, or depressed, or angry. The challenge now, is how do you make that space? So, that there is more room for the I, in the midst of the we.
- Esther Perel Co...: Even in a world of social distancing, the balance between connection and closeness, and freedom and independence, will remain a primary task of relationships. So, I'm leaving it to them, to see how they're going to do it now. If it's not about going to dance with other people and sweat in the club, what form will it take? The importance of this principle, does not change from a pre-COVID to a post-COVID world.
- 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. *Where should We Begin?* with Ester 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, Kristen Mueller is our engineer. Original music and an 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.

