

Esther Perel: Every season for "Where Should We Begin?" I receive thousands of applicants, and one of the most frustrating things is that I'm only going to be able to see ten couples. And I've been grappling with this. How can I connect with more of you? There are so many powerful questions, so many pain points that I would like to be able to at least address with you even if shortly. So this series is going to be different. It's you calling me with a very precise question, with your pain point, me calling you back, and together we think out loud. And we go from where should we begin to where can you start?

Her: Hi. So I have been with my boyfriend for two years now and I am super happy in this relationship, but we are also very different. We come from really different places. I am middle Eastern. He is white. I immigrated to this country when I was a kid, grew up with a single mom, lived in a multi-generational household didn't have a lot of money growing up and he had of kind of the opposite upbringing, like grew up in the typical American sheltered suburb. And I knew that things weren't fair, that things were unequal, on a lot of different levels, but it didn't really get to me. What I'm struggling with now is the feeling of how unfair it is as opposed to just the knowledge of it.

Esther Perel: What is her question?

Jesse: Her question is how do you deal with basically pent up resentment and anger in a relationship because of how you grew up, but especially around privilege. And what she says to me in that, which I thought was most interesting is that I didn't know how I grew up was any different for a long time, until I started becoming, hanging out with American kids and realizing like, shit, that's not how I grew up.

Esther Perel: Mm.

Jesse: All right. I'm recording. She's here.

Esther Perel: Okay.

Her: Hi.

Esther Perel: Hello. Hello. How are you?

Her: Good. How are you?

Esther Perel: I'm fine. I'm fine. I was listening to your message and I thought since you had some time after you left it as well, ask me the question again.

Her: So basically, I sometimes recently have been feeling resentful. And I think that my resentment is towards kind of greater inequalities, but I think that I'm projecting those inequalities onto my boyfriend. What do I do with that resentment?

Esther Perel: How does the resentment speak? How does it manifest?

Her: I just get angry and I keep it inside, but I think it, it comes out in passive aggressive ways towards him making him feel like he's doing something wrong in the little things that he does when really he's not doing anything, it just gets snippy with him.

Esther Perel: What does it say? How does it speak? What does it do? How does it snap?

Her: Like me talking to him?

Esther Perel: Like your resentment, talking to him.

Her: It's kind of like how dare you take advantage of the easy option when I have to do it the hard way.

Esther Perel: Keep going.

Her: Yeah. It's like, you don't understand how easy you have it and you don't appreciate what you have. And I wish that you would just, I wish it was harder for you too.

Esther Perel: If it was harder for you. You'd understand a little more about how hard it is for me. Is this a secret topic, a hidden topic, or is this out in the open?

Her: It's out in the open it's relatively recently that I realized it's even a topic for me, but it's out in open.

Esther Perel: What triggered it?

Her: First, it was that we're, we kind of work in similar fields and and living together, I get to see just the ins and outs of his financial life and of mine. And he makes significantly more than I do. And then it was small things like taxes. Like his dad was able to pay for an accountant and I had to pay quite a bit of money for mine. And just learning more about his, his family's financial situation and comparing it to mine and our future together.

Esther Perel: And when you brought it up?

Her: I just said, like with the tax thing, I just brought up, I'm having some feelings around, around you. Like not going with this accountant service and relying on your dad's accountant, which then leads to, well, do you want me not, do you want me to use the same service that you use, even though I have this other option available? And of course it's not true, but then we end up in this kind of quiet space of, of like each hurting a little bit. Me, because I have the resentment and him because he's like, why is this my problem now?

Esther Perel: Can I ask you something?

Her: Sure.

Esther Perel: If I asked him what drew you to each other, would I hear something to the effect of, she worked really hard to get to where she is. I admire her strengths.

Her: Yeah, you would.

Esther Perel: I would okay. So he, he is not oblivious to your reality. He understands that, where did you come from?

Her: Iran.

Esther Perel: Okay. Does he know more than just the name of the country? Does he know a bit of the situation?

Her: Yeah, yeah. He knows quite a bit and he's very close with my mom.

Esther Perel: Okay. Okay. So basically you have a good start. It means he's not oblivious. He knows probably quite a bit about what it took to get here, what it took to start here. Is it fair to assume that you also put money aside to help your mother if she needs it?

Her: Yeah, absolutely.

Esther Perel: Right, your salary is not just for you. Your income is not only for you and he probably respects it and maybe even admires it.

Yes so far?

Her: Yes, absolutely.

Esther Perel: Right. So when you resentment becomes activated and it wants to say, you don't understand, it is not exactly true. It is the way resentment talks, but resentment sometimes is biased too. And on the other side of resentment sometimes is loss, longing, envy. Like, I wish I could have it sometimes easy like you.

Not just, I wish you would have it as hard, as very hard, so you would understand what hard means to me. And it's not really sure that you even want him to have it so easy or that you want to have it so easy because there's a part of you that probably admires your skills, your strengths, your grit.

Her: That's totally true. I think there is quite a bit of envy in there. As we think about building our lives together and suddenly there's this option to have it be easier because I'm with someone who has it easier. That seems appealing, but at the same time, it there's always in the back of my mind, the thought that if this ends I'm back to my like immigrant life, It's hard again.

And I'm envious that, that for him, it's kind of an option. He's opted into this and to thinking about this and for me, it's not.

Esther Perel: Right.

Her: But you're right. I also, I do feel strong and I am proud of myself and and I am totally aware that has come from what I've experienced in my life. So it's complicated.

Esther Perel: Yes, it's complicated. It's layered. It's not this or that. And, but you're right. He chooses, but you know what, so have you, because if I was asking you what drew you to him, somewhere I'm imagining you'd tell me, right whenever I'm going off track that you would also say that part of what you appreciate in him is his curiosity and his deep interest in you and your life experience and your family's experience and the world and the politics outside of this country, et cetera. And B that he comes from a strong family.

Her: That's true.

Esther Perel: And that what draws you to him is his nuclear family, the kind of bonds they have with each other. The stability that, that represents the continuity in his family can have the opposite of the disruptions and the breaches that took place in your family.

Her: Yeah. At the same time his family did, they split up later than my did, but they did. I don't think I could have been with him or anyone for that matter, who hadn't had some of those issues in their own life.

Esther Perel: Which issues?

Her: Of a family divorce of some kind of, some kind of pain or something that sounds kind of harsh but you know, something to compare it to something, to help you have empathy.

Esther Perel: It's not harsh. It's not harsh at all. Your family, there was, the loss in your family came through divorce?

Her: And yeah, and separation.

Esther Perel: Separation of what sort?

Her: Physical, my dad is not in this country.

Esther Perel: Right. But because by choice or...

Her: By choice. Yeah, there was a divorce then we came here.

Esther Perel: And what you say is having someone else who also experienced a breakup in the family who also experienced loss and pain from within the family is a point of identification that we have with each other. That is very important to me. So he may come from privilege, but there is something about loss inside the family. And what that feels like that we do share. And for me, knowing that someone had experienced some tragic element in his life was very important. He wasn't just the coaster all over the place.

Her: Yeah. He's not that guy. And that, yeah, that is important to me.

Esther Perel: Okay. So now you sit with him and you tell him, you know, I realize. As we live closer together and we live in the same home. It's like, I get to see what I had and what I didn't have by looking at you. You probably do the same with me and I get to see how you've come to expect certain things by virtue of how you grew up and same for me.

And I get to see the way where we see the world as something that is stable and consistent, and the places where we see the world as more precarious and

fragile. And this is not a problem that we need to solve. This is a reality that we learn to live with.

Her: Yeah, I guess. Yeah, I guess that's the answer right there. It's it's just ongoing.

Esther Perel: This will, if you stay with this man, this will be accompanying your story for the rest of the duration of your story. And you either make it a complementarity where you sometimes envy him, but also sometimes have lots of gratitude for it, appreciation for it, joy for what it gives you. For you and your mother for that matter, you know, because otherwise what happens is that the very, one of the very things that drew you to each other then becomes the source of conflict. You wanted it, but now you are fighting with it. Do you have differences around wastefulness and things like that?

Her: It's funny you use that word. Yeah, we do, but yeah, we do. We do. I'm much, I'm much more careful.

Esther Perel: And do you use it to snap at each other or do you see it as a difference or do you. Actually say I could learn a little bit from you.

Her: Yeah. I think he's better at this than I am. I do kind of snap. Like, there's just, there's not a, a mindset of abundance usually for me. So it's hard to get out of that and I snap at him, but I am he's, he's so much more like able to just accept the word different. And be, and be happy about that. And then trying, I'm trying to do that too.

Esther Perel: Right. But I will tell you something you didn't always want to have to be so frugal, so careful, so counting, but you had to. And a part of you wished you didn't have to, but a part of you is afraid that if you stop doing it since life could at any day, put you back in scarcity mode, you better just keep on with the program.

Her: Yeah.

Esther Perel: It's not what he is or is not doing on the it's also what it evokes inside of you.

If you ask him to do the way you do it's because you're asking him to resolve your internal conflict. If you do like me, then I don't have to think about the fact that there isn't just this way of being. You got it?

Her: Yeah.

Esther Perel: All right. Is this a good start?

Her: Yeah. This is a start. Yeah.

Esther Perel: Yeah. So I'm inviting you to go and have one of the first and many conversations that you need to have with him about this, but this is going to accompany the two of you. This is for the rest of your relationship. This is part of your relationship. It's in the mortar. It's not a problem that you need to solve.

Her: Yeah. Okay. All right. Yeah. Thank you.

Esther Perel: Good luck.

Her: Thank you.

Esther Perel: Bye-bye .

Her: Bye.

Esther Perel: So I'm looking for many ways to stay connected with you as I continue to help you develop greater confidence and competence in your relationships. This time it comes in the form of a game. "Where should we begin - a Game of Stories" is a game that helps you connect and reconnect, deal with the social atrophy that so many of us have experienced, and unlock the storyteller within. So gather your partner, your friends, or your date, grab a seat, pull a card and be my guest in sharing the stories that you rarely tell. Let's play along. Estherperel.com/thegame