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Speaker 1: I think it's hard for me to admit that I need to be taken care of because that's bigger than sex. It's just like our relationship as a whole.

Esther Perel: This is a couple of two men who have been together almost two years. They recently crossed to the other side of the continent to move in together. And as things began to escalate, they began to feel more and more trapped and afraid that their relationship may not be able to sustain itself.

Speaker 1: Really the past year has been really strenuous on our relationship and we were wanting to be closer. We just, I really didn't know how.

Speaker 2: We're an interracial gay couple, and I think the odds are stacked against us in some ways. I carry some trust and abandonment issues. And I know he carries his own fears about placing trust in a partnership.

Esther Perel: For a long time. If they had a fight, they could make up through sex. When they began to disconnect in sex, they began to be really scared. What holds us now?

Speaker 1: For him to have sex. He has to feel emotionally connected. And for me, it's harder for me to get and give emotional connection. So we're opposites in what we require for sex.

Esther Perel: This is a session where I focus primarily on one partner in the presence of the other who becomes the witness. I didn't know that this was going to be my choice, but I understood at one point that something about one person opening up and exploring the motives, the feelings, the struggles actually comes as a relief to the other partner. It functions to disentangle the complex loops between them by just tracking and staying with one person at a time.

I think a big issue of our relationship has been me being like, I don't know what I want. I don't know what this is going to work, but I want it to work. And I want him to try.

Speaker 2: I think we're both a little nervous.

Esther Perel: Are you? Me too, every time. But tell me your nervousness. Let's compare our nervousness.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Yeah. I think we just both felt it on our way over here.

Speaker 1: There's a, low-level fear that like, we're not equipped for a relationship or that we're not, this isn't, we're not meant to be this. And that's layered with our history and it's, being queer and, all those things are stacked against us. We're afraid that's kind of come to light today,

Esther Perel: and the stack includes?

Speaker 1: Family dynamics and the homes we grew up in and how we learn love and our experiences with love so far, our experiences with ourselves so far, our own identities and like still that being worked out. So

whenever he's saying something he needs or that he's not getting, I get really defensive because I'm like holding on to the little bit that I do know, because so much it's like in question, I feel, you know?

Esther Perel: I don't know. Yeah, but I would like to know and tell you what I just heard. To go back to the nervousness just for a moment. For you, the nervousness is this fear in the background that maybe you're not equipped, what you call equipped for being in a relationship and for you?

Speaker 2: I think, I think it's similar. Yeah. I think at the core of it, the like being seen is maybe not being enough.

Esther Perel: So those are negative anticipations. Can we just stack those against a different anticipation? What would that be?

Speaker 2: Like a, like a positive one?

Esther Perel: Yes. But I don't know if the world only exists in positive and negative. And they often are, have a relationship with each other. The very same things that we fear may hold us back are also the sources of our strength, the sources of why we still are together. So I don't think we need to switch from negative to positive, but we can switch from negative to layered. Yeah, can we do that? So what would the layer be?

Speaker 2: I think in the context of our relationship, there's a real need to be, to be seen and to be understood and to take the parts of me that are really, not okay. And see past that. And I think a lot of the fights or arguments that we have

Esther Perel: Who says fight and who says argument here?

Speaker 2: I think I say fight. I think I say fight sometimes. But I think I almost I'm like almost fighting to, to just have him see parts of me that I think can be, irrational, not always nice, and I'm hoping that he'll still love me beyond that. So I'm afraid of that, but I also want that.

Esther Perel: That's it. That's a layer. Yeah. That's beautiful. The very thing you fear is also the thing I long for and the resolution of it sometimes lives in what is called acceptance. Yeah. So this for me is your opening to this conversation.

They both come in with a fair amount of self-awareness. They're basically saying we fight, we attack, we defend, we pursue, we withdraw. And we know that is layered with our own childhood histories with our family relationships, we both bring a struggle around trust and abandonment. And just that as an opening tells me that when someone does that and then says, I fear that I'm not equipped. I want to say to them, give yourself a little bit more credit. You have more self-awareness than one often hears in the first two minutes of a session.

Speaker 1: I think that I often feel like I'm at war with myself with this, particularly with this relationship, because, you know, since I was about a teenager, I really pride myself in being independent and being the source of my own strength, trucking through things and doing that alone. And then at the same time, especially since we met and started dating, it's desiring a companion and wanting that love and that connection and the, what, what connection really means, what that really looks like has really scared me.

And really, I fought that, I've been fighting that. And it's to a point where I can't differentiate if I just, I'm needing to learn things and get over like some humps and unlearn some things, or if this isn't compatible, I can't tell the difference. And every time, we have an argument or there's a disagreement, I get really defensive and I can stonewall.

And I'm very quick to say this isn't working, that's why this isn't working, that's why we can't be. And I'm starting to see, we're both starting to feel that every time we argue every time it was a fight and I go there it's like instincts. I don't even really think I just go over there. And after the fact can see it kind of chipping away at him, like, and at our relationship too I can only say this isn't going to work so much for him.

Esther Perel: Can I ask you something? This isn't going to work. I'm out of here. Is that something that you have experienced in your life, but couldn't get out.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I think my parents had a really great example of love and then like that they like switched on each other. My parents, both my parents cheated on each other. I don't know to what extent, but I know it was severe, and when my mom cheated on my dad, my dad just lost, it became violent, verbally, physically abusive. And I was often present for all of that. And my mom left, I left with her, her and I got away from that situation.

Esther Perel: What is your background?

Speaker 1: My dad's black. He was born in California and then when he was in high school, his family, they moved to Iowa. So he went from being in a very black community in LA to a very white community. And I was, and he was called the n-word every day in school and really traumatized by racism. And I didn't realize that until recently, like piecing that together and how he raised us and some of the things he instilled in us...

Esther Perel: What's one connection you just made, that you recently made when you say there's a connection between how he grew up, how he was beaten down with slurs and racism in how he raised us.

Speaker 1: Yeah, just little things. Like we were never allowed to leave the house unless we're fully presentable. We, had to be twice as good at everything. Like nothing was ever good enough. in a lot of ways with my dad.

Esther Perel: Don't give them anything.

Speaker 1: Don't give them nothing to because I, and I appreciate my dad. Don't give them anything to take away from your power, from who you are. And I appreciate that from my dad, he really instilled in us like you are beautiful people. You're strong people. You're smart, you're capable. He really did that. And that's a gift he gave us, cause he didn't have that. I don't know why I'm so emotional.

Esther Perel: Because it's a story that brings up emotion, you're not describing to me how to cook chicken.

Speaker 1: Which I can, if you want me to.

Esther Perel: I'll take you up on that too, because there's so much there. Yeah. And because at the moment you're telling me, my dad became very violent, it became so unsafe, and my mother and I had to leave. But at

the same moment, as you're describing the violence of your dad, you're also describing the protection of your dad and that's layers too.

Speaker 1: Yes. And there's never been an acknowledgement for how his pain and his anger and him like letting himself go really impacted and changed the course of all of our lives, impacted our personalities and how we navigate the world, you know, my siblings and I.

Esther Perel: They started out with tremendous hope and positivity and they arrive two years later, defeated and afraid. Because it was great, and now every fight ends into this ain't gonna work. One of the first things I want to do with them is invite them to create more layers rather than on and off, in and out, yay nay. And to invite their stories to become more complex. It's not just this or that. It's this, that and something else. So when he talks about his father and he describes this man who he and his mother fled. But then he's also able to talk about how much the father became a source of pride and the source of strength for him. That is a very important layer, especially as he's describing the relationship within the larger context of racism, of gender and the dynamics of violence in the family.

Your mom is from?

Speaker 1: My mom is from California, too. She's Mexican heritage, like Mexican background. And she was disowned by her family when she married my dad because he was black. But my mom loved him. And even her partner now he's a black man. Like she's, she just, she loves who she, who she loves, my mom is my..

Esther Perel: She is your...

Speaker 1: She's like my, my light.

Esther Perel: As a mother, it's one of the most beautiful things when can hear from a son.

Speaker 1: She didn't, I don't know how she did what she did. And you know, really just strengthened me. I don't want to say she protected me cause she didn't protect me. And I feel like she did that intentionally. She didn't want to shield me from him. She wanted to prepare me for the world. And she did that in a very loving. And very powerful rooted way. And I really love her for that. It was hard. Like my dad was the breadwinner and my mom, she just, she didn't really work when they were together and so when they split, she didn't have any money. My dad didn't support us at all.

Esther Perel: How old were you?

Speaker 1: I was about 12 and I really just took on protection role of my mom. I think when my dad was physical with her, several times, I ran in and pulled him off of her. And she, she told me that the reason why she left is because, they were fighting one time and he was getting physical with her. And I ran in and pushed him off and she saw the look on my face and she said that she was worried that I would kill him, or he would kill her if she didn't leave and how that will impact us. And that was her cue to leave. Yeah.

Esther Perel: Did her parents support you in any way?

Speaker 1: No. No. My dad's sister was the biggest help we had because when we moved out, I said, first two nights, we slept in her car, my mom and I. And my grandparents didn't help. But my mom, my dad's sister took us in. She had a one bedroom apartment in LA and they shared the bed, I took the couch and we stayed there for a few weeks until my mom could get a place for us. We, we did it, and as soon as I could work and get a job, I got a job. I've always been very fortunate with that, with great opportunities that came my way and I was able to help support my mom from the time I was 17 until today.

Esther Perel: So when you see I fear that I may not be equipped. What are the connections that you make?

Speaker 1: I think the love that we have experienced together surpasses what I thought I would have had. I think the biggest thing for me is whenever there's conflict, I push the eject button right away, and we've had a lot of conflicts. And I think that's gotten in my head a lot about, maybe this isn't right, because we have so much conflict and it perpetuates a conflict because then I stonewall him.

Esther Perel: And what happens to him then?

Speaker 1: And then he reaches for me. And then I'm like, leave me alone. I need space. I need solitude. And he's reaching because that he feels disconnected. He, he feels like I'm slipping away and that's our two things butting up against each other. And to a point point where I can't differentiate if like conflict is normal, get through it, work through it. This is a beautiful thing we have, because we do have a beautiful thing, and we see that, we realize that. Or if in my head, we're not compatible, or this is too much conflict or you are really better off independent and alone. Like you have been like, you've done most of your adult life and succeeded at.

Esther Perel: What they're clear on is the loop. He pursues me. I withdraw. I stonewall, I stonewall, he pursues me more, but all the while thinking that the conflict is somehow inevitable, and this is what I want to explore with them. That knot that starts to breed the hopelessness that pervades them, that I don't feel. I actually, at this moment have great hope for them.

He told us so much, he says, and I'm a little confused, I'm stuck. Cause I don't know, a part of me says fighting, arguing, disagreeing is a normal part of a relationship, but a part of me doesn't really know how to deal with it. And one thing I noticed, I certainly don't want to repeat what happened in my house. And the last thing I want to do is do what my dad did because I promised myself I would never do what he did. So instead of exploding, I withdraw, I leave. And when you come after me, I'm even more afraid that you're going to make me explode because I'm trying to tell you, leave me alone. Don't you get it? Leave me alone! The more he says, leave me alone, and the more you want him to not be alone, because a. You care about him and you don't want him to be alone and b. That makes you completely alone. And you don't want that either.

Speaker 1: That's a great recap.

Esther Perel: And then he is left with the well, maybe it's not meant to be. And then it becomes maybe this isn't meant to be. And then he goes into, maybe I'm just not meant to be in a relationship with love and all of that. And it's a story. And the beauty about us in relationships is that we can start to write a different story. And the fact that you just told all of this should be for you a very clear sign that you are not like your father who has not been able to acknowledge, to make amends about that part of what he did with you. You can love him, you won't be like him. Do you know that?

Speaker 1: Yes. Learning that.

Esther Perel: Okay. Okay. This question about am I skilled for this, am I equipped for this, can I do this? If it makes any difference, I am married for 35, 36 something years, 40 years. I know the same man, and that is a question that I still have, on occasion. Do not just think that it is because you're young and you start out. I think that part of what pushes us to continue to grow and to change and to look at ourselves is that very question. How good am I to love? How lovable am I? Does my past stay with me? I think these are fundamental questions in life that don't need to lead you to the eject button.

I understood that he asks himself that question. Am I made for love? Can I be in a relationship? That question was not just a question. It also had an envelope of self contempt. And so I chose to tell him, it's actually a beautiful question. I asked myself that question still after decades. I wanted to take the sting out of the question and turn it into a real question. That invites reflection and not as a statement of this guy's self blame.

I'm gonna wait, cause I want to hear from you.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I get, I guess my family background is is not like nuclear.

Esther Perel: Meaning?

Speaker 2: My father passed away when I was around two from lung cancer, then, then growing up without a father was, I think, I think challenging because I was effeminate as a kid and I became self-aware very quickly that just didn't fly. And I learned, to the degree of practicing how to say certain words, so I didn't make my s's sound a certain way or just effeminate qualities that I think I knew quickly just for not okay for a boy. And that was everything from the things that I gravitated toward, to just the way I held my legs or the way I stood or ran, or I just became very conscious of it. Very like probably around seven years old.

Esther Perel: What was the milieu?

Speaker 2: It's very white. My family's Italian Catholic, so I have a pretty large extended family and, pretty macho, and the town that I grew up in was very small, very white, also very Catholic. I even, I went to a Catholic college too.

Esther Perel: And how was your family and the extended family? What was their relationship to effeminate boys, gay boys. That wasn't, it's not, those two are not one in the same..

Speaker 2: Yeah, no, it was not good. I was definitely called a faggot a bunch of times by a bunch of different family members growing up. And I just, I almost grew to take that word and make it something that I could almost like use and not feel anything. Like I, I deadened myself to the word while really making like very conscious choices about how I behaved making sure that the things that I inherently gravitated toward were shut down and the things I was supposed to like where like were turned on.

Esther Perel: What were you drawn to?

Speaker 2: I loved like painting and drawing. I was very artistic, but those were deemed in my family and town as like girl things. I guess I can remember like having my mom and sister try to teach me how to swing a

bat and they just don't care about sports. So it's funny to think about but I think as I've gotten older, I've realized like it's muddled what I like and don't like, and that's hard to tell am, I just liking this because I know I'll get approval for liking this, or am I doing something that I genuinely care about? And it's for me. And I came out late too. I came out really at 30 years old.

Esther Perel: And how old are you now?

Speaker 2: About to be 35. I really didn't accept myself until I was 26. It was always this fear that would break all of the relationships that I had. And, I didn't, I didn't realize I was doing you know, double duty on ruining these relationships because they were not real, because they weren't accepting who I was because I wasn't showing them who I was. But I wanted to keep them, so I kept myself from them. So it was this kind of like just double-edged sword. I think in keeping people at a distance, I felt lonely, but I was afraid to lose them. If they saw who I truly was.

Esther Perel: It's so powerful and sad to hear him describe in order to secure my attachments, in order not to lose the people I loved, I had to not love myself. I had to lie. I had to obscure major parts of me. If I'm going to show you my authentic self, you will reject me. And so his longing is to meet someone who will love him. And the meaning of that love is invested in accepting me for who I am as I am. That is his dream of wholeness.

When you have to hide when you become very good at concealing, when you learn the norms and these are intense pressures, and then you do bring them into your relationship with each other, as well. If you are, on relentless pursuit of harmony, of being accepted, of making sure that there is no friction, then I can imagine how rattled you become when he gets mad or there is discord or he needs to remove himself. For you, you never removed yourself. Your story is the story of fitting in. We're each off in our own survival strategy.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Esther Perel: So he says this isn't meant to be, is that the words?

Speaker 1: That I don't, I don't know if this is going to work.

Esther Perel: I don't know if this is going to work and you, what happens to you then?

Speaker 2: I get angry. I feel really unheard. So I'll go to this place of like I wish we could just talk about what I'm bringing up as opposed to like it being our relationship that's now in question, and I'm articulating it like this now, but usually I pounce on that and I'm sure, I'll throw a curse word in there somewhere.

Esther Perel: Can I hear?

Speaker 2: It's probably um, I wish we could just fucking talk about what we're trying to talk about, and it's like that I get sharp and I talk quick and jabby and it, obviously nobody wants to respond to that. And I feel like that just, it almost becomes this like who could outdo who at some point, and we start raising the stakes and then we're not even talking about the very thing that brought us into it.

Esther Perel: I didn't ask him to give me the dialogue verbatim, just cause I want to hear him curse. I just often think it's such a contrast between how nice some people behave while they're talking in my office and the

shit show that I know is going on at home. And because he's in the role of the pursuer, it seems like he's the nice person who is just saying why can't we be close when in fact it's not just that the other one is stonewalling, is that he's being attacked. So it's so important to get the energy of this conversation rather than just the words of what they say to each other.

So when he goes into can't we just fucking talk about whatever I just brought up, you go to?

Speaker 1: Anger. I carry, I'm realizing the past few years I carry some anger and, receiving his anger is very hard for me and I can connect to that receiving my dad's anger. I was like absolutely not like it was a reflex to get away from that. So when he's anger up, when he's angry, like reflux and get away from that. But at the same time, his bids for connection, for some reason, compute themselves in my mind and heart that like who I am is not enough, in this relationship. And it puts pressure on me. It makes me angry when you're like expecting more from me and I get angry in that and he perceives that as okay, then I'm gonna up the antics too. And so now we're just having a screaming match and now we're just pushing each other's buttons and it often leads to me saying, fuck you like with such fuck you. I feel that. And only recently he's been saying that, back too. And he feels that, so like we can't really, we haven't really had a normal fight. That's been hard for me to just have a normal average fight that couples have, because I'm always going to.

Esther Perel: What do you imagine that is? A normal fight.

Speaker 1: I don't know. I don't have a conception of it. I just know that couples fight and they stay together and they grow from it and they work it out. I will say every fight we have, I'm going to this isn't working. That's why this isn't working. I'm out. I'm like one foot out the door right now because I need to go before this turns into what it can't turn into. We haven't been able to get past that. We haven't, and he's vocalized this to me, but it's hard for him to bring up uncomfortable things because he's afraid that's going to go there. Like, it's almost hard for him to approach me with things that are unsavory or that he needs or.

Esther Perel: And that's exactly what he said before. If I was to tell them my truth, I would lose that. So I either lie to myself in order to keep you, or I talk the truth of myself and I lose you. And basically you, in your response, you show him that this is indeed what will happen. And on the other end, what's the reverse. What is being reenacted for you?

Speaker 1: I feel like I almost have a false expectation that if we're going to be in this partnership, if we're gonna be in this relationship, it needs to be refuge. It needs to not be as hard as the rest of the world is for me. Because it feels like that, like a lot of the world feels hard to me. And like when he's coming to me with hard stuff, I'm like,

Esther Perel: Give me a break.

Speaker 1: Like this is where I'm supposed to feel safe. And it's what I have felt safe. And I feel like any oftentimes if not every time he's bringing things up that I find uncomfortable, I'm like, I can't be safe here, I can't feel comfortable here and I know that's not rational, but that's the feeling. That's the reaction that I haven't been able to get over.

Esther Perel: And what is it that he brings up that evokes that for you?

Speaker 1: Wanting more of me. Wanting is usually always rooted in wanting more. Wanting more closeness. And I oftentimes feel that when he's asking for more of me that I have to give up myself.

Esther Perel: I had a moment of choice, of a number of directions I could take, but it was something he said, which was there is when he gets angry with me but then there is when he has a bid for connection, when he wants something from me, instead of experiencing it as an invitation, he experiences it as pressure. And at that moment I thought, oh, wow. Maybe this is not all about that. There is another person here who may be at the core of some of what we're talking about and that's mom. And because he adores mom and relies on mom and takes care of mom, it is much easier for him to talk about that, but mom is where we need to go. And I decided to continue staying primarily with him. Because whatever work he would do on himself would be work on the relationship.

Speaker 1: I'm still trying. I'm still trying to understand that. I don't fully understand why and how I get so reactive and defensive when he's asking for more and he's wanting more connection.

Esther Perel: There's only one person who can ask that for you. That's your mom. And so when he asks, it suddenly feels like, I've already maxed out, I've given everything I have to give. And you hear it as he's asking for more, rather than a compliment. He's not there to tap you, to deplete you. And it may trigger in you, some of your, you adore your mother and you will do anything for her, but there is also a need to recognize the burden that this has had on you.

Speaker 1: It's not a burden on me, it's not a burden on me.

Esther Perel: And when he asks for something, he gets the response that maybe belongs to her.

Speaker 1: Yeah, my parents haven't been my parents since I was 12.

Esther Perel: Children who become the parents of their parents, children who become parentified. When he then says, I want more. You're thinking more of somebody I need to take care of and less of me. On the other end, when you say I want more it's because you're working out the story of I'm finally coming out with my own authenticity, with who I really am, and I've dreamt my whole life that today I will do that. That will be nothing, no barrier, no distance, no gap between me and whoever I love. Because my whole life is a space that I could never cross, filled with that unspoken filled with that closet, with that, I'm compromising for all of you. And when you say I want more from your story, he hears more caretaking? How much more can I give? And then he says, I have nothing more I want to give. And then it becomes a battle between protecting myself, protecting the relationship and as if they are at odds with each other, there's no way that you can do both.

Speaker 1: That's often how I feel is that my self and my relationship are at odds.. I have to like concede on one or the other.

Esther Perel: And he has the same. In order to be in a relationship in order to maintain the relationship with people, I have to curb myself, curtail myself, not ask for too much, not say too much, not what you know, it, there's a strange resonance between these two clots.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I think, I really self-soothed a lot of my life and a lot of times it means wanting more connection. I'm almost saying can't you like take care of yourself in that way.

Esther Perel: I've had to do that.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I've done that. I feel that I'm like, I've done that, can't you? And this was our last fight. I was like, grow up. I told him three times, grow up, do it and do it and grow up. And I can know that he's being a vulnerable and wanting connection and not tapping. The feeling of that's those haven't connected that bridge hasn't connected yet. And it does feel sometimes like a caretaker role. I feel that.

Esther Perel: Is there some of that? Mixed in the layers, is it. I mean, in some strange way, both of you have had to take care of yourself or have taken care of yourselves alone. On many instances, when you say I want to feel closer and he hears take care of me, is there some of that?

Speaker 2: I oftentimes like to talk out a lot of things and we've talked about this both seriously and joking that I just talk way more than he does. And I've like wanting to just share in experiences that I've had that I'm like, and I don't know how to handle this. And then what do you think about handling? I don't feel like we have that frequently or as much as I would like. And so maybe I'm looking for a bit of a caretaker role in that, like to talk through things with.

Esther Perel: But I, in a way, when you want to just talk things through, that's not about being taken care of. What I'm imagining you tell me is that if he starts to voice things out loud from where you come from, you first need to solve this so that this is done so that you can go back to thinking about you.

Speaker 1: And if that feels okay for me, when it's not about us or about me, when it's about us, for example, I want more connection. It feels as if I have to concede on myself to appease his needs. He's not absolute about it. I know him enough to know that he's not saying, I feel this, you need to do this. He's just saying, hey, this is how I'm feeling. But it just always turns for me into why I need to just, I just have to roll over to make you happy. And I can't do that right now.

Esther Perel: Right. How do your arguments slash fights? And how does this dance that you describe? Which means that after he says, I'm not going to take care of you. I can't just roll over and have your happiness be the center of my life. I've done this once before, in effect, then you come in finally and well, then I won't ask for anything. So that's the last move in this dance. Yep. And how does all of this affect your sexual relationship? Does it?

Speaker 1: For sure. Yeah. He's definitely more emotional with sex. If he's not feeling connected to me, he's not very into it, might not happen. And I'm a little more, less emotional about it because for me, I think having sex with my partner is like a way that I connect, like linking our bodies in that way really makes me feel connected to you and feel human and feel like alive and seen.

Esther Perel: I wonder if there's a something in this. That love for you is sometimes experienced with the burden. Love comes with responsibility. Love comes with caretaking, love comes with the worry about the wellbeing of the other person. Yes? And sex becomes the place where you don't have to take care of anybody. You can feel free. He actually takes care of you. Sex is the place for love without a burden or connection without responsibility.

Speaker 1: Yeah. And a bit of a reward for the work, especially in the dynamics of our sex, just the roles that we play in. He takes care of me and he enjoys that. And we've learned that about each other, so it's not I don't think either of us feel burdened.

Esther Perel: But if that's the case, I would invite you to no longer think that his sex is emotional and he needs connection. And your sex is not. The desire to experience love without burden and responsibility and worry is a deep emotion. This is a part of how you see yourself. My sex is energetic. I can have sex without connection. No. What you're describing is a different kind of connection but it is equally emotional. It is equally deep. It is equally intricate. Partly because of the relationship that you had with your mom, which is love with a deep sense of responsibility and burden and worry and anxiety. And sex becomes the place that's free from all of that. And that is not just a sexual need. That is the deep emotional need that. Conveyed through sex.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Esther Perel: So it's not, he needs to love and have sex and you need sex and it has not much to do with love. Not at all. If there's one thing I would love you to take with you from this conversation. This is one

Speaker 1: I haven't really thought of it like that before. Because I think how I have approached the sex is parallel to how I approach the relationship too, which is I want it, but I don't. I'm okay without it I'll be fine with, without it,

Esther Perel: it's really beautiful how you managed to ask in sex without realizing that you are asking. Sex is a great subterfuge for our deepest emotional needs. Here we go. You may remain responsible and in a care-taking role. There's a different economic reality, there's a different racial reality, there's different family reality. There's lots of other pieces we can't really address in detail today. But you can make room for you. And that is something that only you will do. And come to your boyfriend and with your needs, rather than hold this idea that I'm fine alone. I don't need it. I'm strong. That's yours to undo. I can be strong and be taken care of. And not just imagine I like sex a lot as if it's sex I like a lot, which you made like a lot too, but there is a other hidden threat. And not to imagine that when he says I want something, he instantly is asking you to wait to set up a welfare system of two. And it will directly affect him because A he's very wonderful at taking care of you and he doesn't nearly get enough opportunity and B he won't feel that every time he just wants to talk, he's been shut down because you're having a panic attack of emotional overwhelm.

So if he says I want to feel more connected, you tell me how bring it on, love it it's a compliment rather than more work.

Yeah.

Speaker 1: That's a different lens for sure.

Speaker 2: thank you. Thanks very much.

Jesse (Producer): Esther Perel is the author of *Mating in Captivity* and *The State of Affairs*, and also the host of the podcast and 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 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 Julia Natt. Recorded by Noriko Okabe. Kristen 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 Lydia Polgreen, Colin Campbell, Clara Sankey, Ian Kerner, Alma, Courtney Hamilton, Nick Oxenhorn and Jack Saul.