



Discussion: Rethinking Infidelity Video

A TED Talk video by Esther Perel: *Rethinking infidelity... a talk for anyone who has ever loved*
<http://goo.gl/xn5eLJ>

Relationship therapist Esther Perel examines why people cheat, and unpacks why affairs are so traumatic: because they threaten our emotional security. In infidelity, she sees something unexpected — an expression of longing and loss. Watch the video, then give your reaction to the following quotes from her talk.

- The kiss that you only imagine giving can be as powerful and as enchanting as hours of actual lovemaking.
- We rely on our partner's fidelity with a unique fervor. We have a romantic ideal in which we turn to one person to fulfill an endless list of needs, but infidelity shatters the grand ambition of love. Infidelity tells the betrayed partner "You are not the one." It is the ultimate betrayal. It threatens our sense of self. It is a violation of trust and a crisis of identity. "Can I ever trust anyone again?"
- Affairs in the digital age are death by a thousand cuts.
- We live in an era in which we are entitled to pursue our desires. This is the culture in which "I deserve to be happy." We use to divorce because we were unhappy; now we divorce because we could be happier. In the past, divorce carried all the shame. Today, choosing to stay when you could leave is the new shame.
- What if passion has a finite shelf life? What if there are things that even a good relationship cannot provide? If even happy people cheat, what it is about?
- Affairs are an act of betrayal, but they are also an expression of longing and loss. At the heart of an affair you will often find a longing and a yearning for an emotional connection, for novelty, for freedom, for autonomy, for sexual intensity — a wish to recapture lost parts of ourselves, or an attempt to bring back vitality in the face of loss and tragedy.
- When we seek the gaze of another, it isn't always our partner that we are turning away from, but the person we ourselves have become. It isn't so much that we are looking for another person as much as we are looking for another self.

■ Death and mortality live in the shadow of an affair. Some affairs are an attempt to beat back deadness and an antidote to death. Affairs are way less about sex and a lot more about desire: for attention, to feel special, to feel important.

■ We know from trauma that healing begins when the perpetrator acknowledges their wrongdoing: expressing guilt and remorse for having the affair and hurting the partner. They must also “hold vigil” for the relationship, becoming the protector of the boundaries. If the unfaithful partner thinks about it and brings it up, they can relieve the deceived partner from their obsession over it. That itself begins to restore trust.

■ It is essential for the deceived partner to do things that bring a sense of self-worth. Even more important is to curb the curiosity to mine for the sorted details of the affair, questions that only inflict more pain and keep you awake at night. Instead, ask about meaning and motives.

■ There are many ways we betray our partners. Sexual betrayal is only one way. The victim of an affair is not always the victim of a marriage.

■ Every affair will define a relationship and every couple will define what the legacy of the relationship will be. The fact is, the majority of couples who experience affairs stay together. Some of them will merely survive. Others will turn a crisis into an opportunity. Your first marriage is over. Would you like to create a second one together?