

SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

MATING IN CAPTIVITY

BY ESTHER PEREL



Summary of Mating in Captivity by Esther Perel

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Were humans really meant to be monogamous?

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Does Marriage Make Us Happier?	6
Is Infidelity Really Such a Bad Thing?	10
Final Summary	13



**DO YOU WANT THIS BOOK
AS AN 20-MINUTE AUDIOBOOK?**



**Get the key insights of non-fiction books
in minutes instead of hours. Listen to
our free audiobooks while you workout
or on your commute to work.**



**DOWNLOAD
OUR FREE APP**



Introduction

Are humans really meant to be monogamous? Is it possible to stay sexually attracted to one person-- and only one person!-- for the rest of your entire life? Are married people really happier than single people? Or are all of those beliefs nothing more than social constructs that tether us to conventional lives? Over the course of this summary, we'll explore the answers to all of these questions and more!



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://www.quickread.com/app)

Does Marriage Make Us Happier?

Society tends to regard marriage as a definitive hallmark of adulthood. You're often considered to be a happy, well-adjusted, and "respectable" member of society if you're married, but does marriage really make us happier? Well, according to statistics, the answer seems to be no! Data from a German socioeconomic panel that followed a group of couples around for 20 years concluded that people are especially happy in the years immediately before and after their weddings. But this data also shows that 50% of people are less satisfied after marriage, while the other half are happier. This means that satisfaction levels are literally split right down the middle, and thus, marriage is not a universal prescription for a happier life! In fact, it's truly all about what works for each individual couple.

The American Time of Use Survey backs this up, but its results come with an interesting twist. Upon surveying couples, they discovered that people who are married wouldn't say they're happier than their single or divorced peers-- unless their partner is in the room. When they feel free to be honest, however, their happiness levels actually aren't any higher than those of divorced people. So, what does this tell us about marriage? Well, for starters, we can learn that we need to revamp our social norms. If the truth is that marriage doesn't always make us better or happier people, then we need to stop using it as a hallmark of success. And conversely, we need to stop assuming that there's something wrong with being single and stop pressuring single people into relationships!

But the author asserts that it's also important to eliminate some other common misconceptions that cause dysfunction in our relationships. She believes that "security" is one of the most harmful and pervasive misconceptions. Here's how it works in practice: when you enter into a long term relationship with someone-- especially if you marry them!-- our default assumption is to assume that that person will bring us a sense of

security. Gone are the lonely days of dates with incompatible losers; gone is the exhausting quest of trying on other people to see if they fit. Now that you have “your person” for life, you can relax and feel secure! ...right? Well, yes and no. In a committed relationship, you certainly should feel as though you’re able to relax and feel safe with your partner. Ideally, you should be able to rest in the knowledge that your partner loves you, that they’re faithful to you, and that they’re committed to keeping your relationship healthy and alive. All of those things are awesome and they’re essential to a healthy relationship. So, that’s not the sense of security that we need to eliminate in our relationships.

Rather, the author is referring to expectations of security that can smother our passion. These expectations are unrealistic and yet they have been completely normalized by our society! Here’s an example: everybody wants to believe that love will last forever. And it would be fantastic if that were true! But, realistically, there are many reasons that a relationship might not last! Although we never want that to happen, a relationship might end in death. Sadly, relationships may often end in infidelity or incompatibility as partners grow apart and realize they are no longer right for each other. None of these outcomes are desirable and they’re not what we want for our relationships. But they are realistic fates that many relationships meet.

So, when we live as though nothing unfortunate will ever befall our relationships, the author observes that we are essentially living in willful ignorance. It’s foolish to assume that our love lies are immune to the ordinary deaths and diseases that consume the average marriage. And it’s even more foolish to put all your hopes and dreams onto one person. Sadly, however, many people do this. And, in so doing, they force their partner into a role that was never meant for them! Because many people get so caught up in their romance, they make the mistake of assuming that their partner should be everything to them. So, they neglect their friends, parents, hobbies, and other sources of stability in life in favor of their

partner. This, in turn, positions their romantic partner in a role that they can never hope to fulfil.

In fact, no one can fulfil this role, regardless of their relationship to you! This fact is just as true for friends as it is for romantic relationships. Everybody needs multiple friends because no one friend can be expected to be your everything either. Different friends can connect with different aspects of your personality, drawing you out of your own head and helping you to be a healthier and more balanced person. Everybody should surround themselves with a wide variety of different people in order to be the happiest and best version of themselves. But when you put all your eggs in the basket of one person, you limit your options and force both of you to be smaller, more closed-down versions of yourselves.

And the author observes that this is a death sentence for relationships! In fact, that's often why so many couples lose their passion for one another while in a long-term relationship. Because, when you're in the early stages of a relationship, you're both functioning as separate people. Most likely, you both have your own lives and your own friends; neither of you expects the other person to be your entire world. Instead, you're simply two people who have fallen for each other and you want to spend more time together. But sometimes that desire to spend more time together morphs into the belief that if you spend all your time with one another, forever, you'll be happier. And that quickly turns into a suffocating fog of unrealistic expectations.

Therefore, it's no surprise that many people in long-term relationships find their sex lives withering. Lost beneath the fog of unfulfilled and impossible expectations-- combined with the unromantic reality of everyday life-- it's hard to find the passion you once felt for each other. It might be hard to think of your partner as a sexual being anymore. So, how can you get the passion back? The author asserts that relinquishing your false sense of security is the best way to rekindle your passion. Accept that your partner is not-- and cannot-- be everything to you and spend some

time falling in love with them again. Make a concentrated effort to know them for who they really are and remember that they are only one person. Your partner is not a concept; they're not the sense of security you crave. They're not a replacement for every other relationship in your life. They're just one person that you really love.

So, rediscover the mystery in your relationship and try to see your partner through fresh eyes! This will help you find the passion you crave and abandon the expectations that are choking your relationship.



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://quickread.com/app)

Is Infidelity Really Such a Bad Thing?

Being unfaithful to your partner is pretty universally regarded as a terrible thing to do. In fact, it's considered so heinous that many religions openly condemn it. The Ten Commandments, for example, even reiterates it twice by saying, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." By and large, modern society also reflects this belief; national statistics show that in the United Kingdom, 70% of women and 63% of men believe that cheating is "always wrong." Similarly, in the US, 84% of people-- both men and women-- believe that extramarital affairs are "morally unacceptable." As you've probably noticed, our society expects human relationships to be fairly monogamous.

If you have multiple sexual or romantic partners throughout your life, you might find that people talk about you in a negative way or act as if you are unscrupulous. By contrast, people who marry their high-school sweetheart or stay married for 50+ years are often celebrated as having achieved the highest pinnacle of romance. But is monogamy really a realistic goal for humans? The author's research indicates that the answer is rather complex. In the animal kingdom, monogamy is not always the norm. Many species will have multiple partners and form short, purely sexual relationships. And when monogamy does occur, it is driven primarily by hormones. As a result, what they experience is not necessarily "love" as we know it, but lust. Their hormones have simply convinced their brains that what they feel is a deep and lasting bond.

Scientific research indicates that the same is similar for humans, although the specifics are difficult to pin down. One thing we do know about humans is that our perception of love and sexual attraction is heavily influenced by surges of dopamine. Yale researcher Ilanit Gordon concurs with their theory that substantial amounts of oxytocin are also present in long-lasting human relationships. This led Gordon to conclude that oxytocin is an essential component of successful relationships. However, this discovery has generated another scientific mystery, as researchers are unable to determine

whether happy relationships produce surges in oxytocin or whether oxytocin must first be present to generate a sense of lasting compatibility.

But what does this have to do with infidelity? Well, for starters, we can surmise that many people rely on the presence of those “feel good hormones” to help them stay content and satisfied in their relationships. When those hormones are no longer present, some people find that they are not attracted to their partner anymore. And, in the absence of those loving feelings, many people feel the need to terminate their relationships or seek satisfaction through an illicit affair. Now, there is absolutely no question that cheating causes pain. And, if we’re being honest, it’s a pretty shady and unethical thing to do.

But if we take a look at the animal kingdom-- and the simple facts of human sexuality-- we might be forced to realize that infidelity is more natural than we think. Not only is it statistically and sexually improbable that we can maintain our attraction to one partner throughout the remainder of our lives, data scientist Seth Stephens-Davidowitz has shown that Google searches for “sexless marriages” are eight times more common than searches on “loveless marriages.” This suggests that it’s far more common to be in loving but sex-free marriages and that the desire for additional sexual stimulation is more normal than we think. In fact, only one species of mammal-- the owl monkey-- has monogamy as its default setting; all other animals, including humans, routinely experience (and act on) sexual attraction to partners who are not their life mate.

And when we consider these facts in conjunction with statistics which prove that-- even though they believe it’s wrong-- one in three women and one in three men admit to cheating over the course of a marriage, we’re left with the conclusion that we might have to alter our views on infidelity. So, while that doesn’t mean that we should believe it’s okay to cheat on your partner or to break their trust, we should start to become more accepting of pansexuality and consensually non-monogamous relationships. In fact, we definitely should because statistics from a survey conducted by the University of Michigan found that partners in consensually open relationships reported

higher levels of trust, intimacy, friendship, and satisfaction-- as well as lower levels of jealousy-- than their monogamous peers. So, let's consider adjusting our worldview to reflect the diversity of the realistic human experience!



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://quickread.com/app)

Final Summary

The concept of “mating in captivity” is a funny one when we think about it in the context of human relationships. Because most of us don’t think of our marriages or long-term relationships as a form of captivity! But then again, there are an abundance of unflattering jokes that center on the concept of your partner as a “ball and chain...” So, which is it? Is monogamy natural for human beings or not? The author asserts that the answer is a little bit of both.

Many people can be very happy in monogamous, long-term relationships. Their relationships feel fulfilling and meaningful and they feel delighted to be with the love of their life. But for other people, long-term relationships can feel stifling because of the impossible expectations we force onto our romantic partners. These expectations can kill our sex lives, ruin our romance, and lead to infidelity. And that’s why the author posits that it’s crucial for us to abandon these expectations, be realistic about what our partner can offer us, and rekindle the mystery in our relationship. It’s also important to remember that monogamy is not the default state for everyone; some people are pansexual or happy to never settle down with one partner. And infidelity might be more natural than we imagine!



GET THE FREE AUDIOBOOK IN OUR APP: [QUICKREAD.COM/APP](https://www.quickread.com/app)



**DO YOU WANT THIS BOOK
AS AN 20-MINUTE AUDIOBOOK?**



**Get the key insights of non-fiction books
in minutes instead of hours. Listen to
our free audiobooks while you workout
or on your commute to work.**



**DOWNLOAD
OUR FREE APP**

