

Infidelity: The end or a new beginning?

How betrayal can be transformed into a relationship growth opportunity

We've always been told, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, and yet, according to a report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies on reasons for divorce, cheating ended 20% of marriages. That's one in five being directly impacted, but most of us could think of many who have had their lives and hearts crushed by infidelity. A betrayal like this cuts to the core, leaving us feeling like we're not good enough. So why do people do it and what's the silver lining?

It's easy to conclude that if someone cheats, a marriage isn't working, but infidelity is a complex phenomenon interwoven with our threads of desire, fear, curiosity, and longing for acceptance, belonging and intimacy. Renowned relationship therapist Esther Perel outlines the inherent conflicting needs that arise in any relationship which make it challenging to nourish those different parts of self.

On the one hand, we have a need for safety, security, and stability. Marriage is an institution with a legally binding contract that attempts to lock in those things for us. However, also true to our human nature, is our need and desire for curiosity, adventure, risk, novelty and the unknown. To assume that we would be able to meet all of these, at times contrasting needs, from one other person in our primary relationship is quite a big ask. Even more so, to continually ask over a lifetime. Being proactive about nurturing your myriad of needs in work, travel, hobbies, or experience can aid regeneration and relationship vitality.

The same study as previously mentioned stated that 27% of marriages ended due to communication issues and 21% due to incompatibility or drifting apart. These elements of talking, growing, evolving cannot be understated for your relational success. It's also worth noting here that our culture's only KPI for relationship success is time. It doesn't ask if you are happy, content, fulfilled, sexually and romantically engaged, it doesn't even care if you like the other person. It all comes down to: did you stick around? Is that the metric you want to define your relationship by?

So, what's the silver lining if you find yourself navigating the tricky waters of infidelity? If taken, it can be a huge opportunity for honesty,



The barista meant nothing! From now on, all coffee will be brewed at home.

communication, and growth. When gently explored, infidelity will highlight unmet needs. There may be deficits in the relationship, but there may not be. Anyone feeling unnurtured, unseen, or uncared for in their dynamic may be more susceptible. However, a person may also be seeking a new self, new exploration (romantic or sexual), a new experience or a new emotional landscape. Underlying infidelity is always a lack of honesty, usually starting with yourself. Once that honesty surfaces, there is real opportunity for deep authenticity.

Turning the pain of betrayal into an opportunity for growth is no small feat. It requires immense courage, honesty, and commitment from both partners. The process often involves rebuilding trust, a gradual and fragile endeavor. Open communication becomes the cornerstone of recovery, where each partner must voice their feelings, disappointments, and expectations. This dialogue, though difficult, is vital for healing and reinventing the relationship. True intimacy is about deeply knowing and being known by another, and that can be the ultimate gift of traversing this rocky terrain.

If you and your partner have experienced infidelity and need support with your relationship repair, reach out to The Love Scout.

Words: **Scout Smith-O'Leary**

Scout is a Relationship Therapist providing counselling to couples & individuals. Based in Manly. Telehealth available. Call **0410 030 463** or visit thelovescout.com or for more info or to book a session.

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