

The Love Scout
Heartache epidemic

Longer lifespans and relationships based on romantic love have created an epidemic of heartache and breakups.

To understand the modern epidemic of heartache, we must first zoom out and consider two key aspects that have changed the way we relate to one another. Firstly, when we look at the history of marriage, reasons for engagement were most often to consolidate wealth or increase status, social power or access to resources. People married to have a better life. It wasn't so long ago that the number of pigs you owned was a key factor in determining who you would spend the rest of your life with. The idea of marrying for romantic love is a very new concept in the grand scheme of things.

Secondly, we need to consider our own evolution. In the 1880s, life expectancy in Australia was around 50 years. As such, people partnered up, raised children, had a couple of years to relax and then they died. Life was simple. In less than 150 years, we have seen the life expectancy increase by more than 60% (over 30 years!). These two factors cannot be understated when trying to understand modern relationships.

So, what happens to a society that bases its relationships on romantic love when we have an extra 30 years to live? What happens after we raise the children and realize we are no longer in love with our spouse? What happens if we fall in love with someone else? We are currently amidst this uncharted social and evolutionary territory, and one unexpected and savage consequence we face is the suffering of heartache. Not only are we a pain avoidant species, we have such little capacity for heartache because of our lack of exposure, limited skill set in emotional regulation and toxic culture around romantic co-dependence. When we broadcast a belief that we need another person to complete us, the fallout when they leave us can thrust us into a deep and dark existential crisis.

If you have ever had the experience of the person you love turning around and saying "I don't want to be with you anymore, or I don't love you anymore" you may know the blinding pain of having your heart ripped out of your chest, the air sucked out of your lungs all



Who keeps the cat?

whilst being repeatedly punched in the gut. Breakups, separations and divorces often cause deep despair, confusion, pain, depression, anger and loneliness, and though the experience is all too common, we are yet to find a cure for this condition.

To make matters more troublesome, the impact of technology on romantic relationships has shifted the landscape of dating into one of superficiality and disposability. The frequency and intensity of rejection that people now face is at unprecedented levels, and the cost of the casual swipe is the collective erosion of self-esteem amongst men and women alike. The de-personalization of apps makes it easy to forget that behind most profiles there is a real person and the sheer mass of potential mates makes it impossible for us to have the time to care. Ironically, this de-humanization leads us further away from the thing we truly crave; genuine love, connection and intimacy.

Infinite possibility and limited emotional capacity is a Michelin star recipe for existential pain. This article serves as a reminder that we are currently amidst a great social experiment and nobody really knows how to handle long lives, romantic loves and multiple heartaches. As always, I invite you to keep your heart open, empathy flowing and be gentle to your fellow human.

Words: Scout Smith-O'Leary

Scout is a Matchmaker and Relationship Educator. Learn more about her upcoming dating workshops at www.schoolofconnectionsydney.com



Meet my new "bestie"

Mal's Wild Side

Who let the cats out?

In the dead of night, our local wildlife faces a life or death struggle to survive

Long nosed Bandicoots had totally disappeared from my Northern Beaches suburb. But they had made a gradual comeback after a forty-year absence (some think due to fox control). I wanted to provide a habitat for these cute little Aussie battlers, so I began planting more native grasses and shrubs in my backyard. Amazingly, after more than a decade of futile expectation, I captured one on my motion sensitive, infrared, wildlife camera. It was a noticeably pregnant female with a big bulging pouch! My joy was tinged with panic though, because on the same camera, at the very same place, on the same night, three separate cats were also filmed.

Coincidentally, on ABC Breakfast Radio that morning, Wendy Harmer was literally in tears after discovering that one of her resident Bandicoots had been mauled to death by a cat. She was advocating a #catcurfew- something that Knox Council, in Melbourne, have just introduced.

Domestic cats are estimated to kill around 67 million native mammals, 83 million native reptiles and 80 million native birds in Australia each year. Well-fed cats still instinctively hunt and cats with bells on their collars still catch wildlife. Cats also carry a parasitic disease, spread through urine and faeces, called Toxoplasmosis. This can also harm wildlife (and humans).

Environment Minister, Matt Kean has recently established a program, in conjunction

with the RSPCA and several local Councils (including ours) called "Keeping Cats Safe at Home". This is designed to change attitudes and behaviours in the community towards responsible cat ownership- (de-sexing, micro-chipping and registration is encouraged). The Cat Protection Society agrees that cats should be kept indoors.

"Indoor cats" are protected from a range of potential harm caused by cars, dogs, tick paralysis, secondary poisoning (from rat baits) and the feline immunodeficiency virus (caught from fighting with other cats). And, as a bonus, owners get reduced vet bills. There are some wonderful outdoor enclosures on the market from companies such as catnets.com or catmax.com

Unfortunately, there is currently no legislation around preventing domestic cats roaming, except under the Companion Animals Act, which allows for cats to be prohibited from entering designated Wildlife Protection Areas. This is unless a cat is declared a "Nuisance cat" with evidence of harm to other animals. Any further restrictions within an LGA would need to come via a Council ruling (although the courts have banned cat ownership in some developments such as Madison Way at Allambie Heights).

But back to the Bandicoots. They are nocturnal marsupials that live for about 2.5 years and feed primarily on beetles, ants, larvae, fungi, roots and shoots. Their gestation period is the shortest of any animal (only 12.5 days) and in a good year, they may have up to four litters of 1 to 5 young.

A Murdoch University study has found that native digging animals (such as Bandicoots) play a key role in promoting eco-system health. Their activities increase soil nutrition, seed dispersal and water infiltration. Foraging animals are also credited with reducing bushfire risks by taking leaf litter underground. Incidentally, recent studies reveal that Black Rats and Rabbits are much more likely than Bandicoots to be the primary hosts of ticks.

My garden Bandicoot has since had two gorgeous young. I have letterboxed surrounding streets, imploring them to keep their cats in. My fingers are now well and truly crossed. And for anyone poised to write me hate mail, I actually love cats..just not the ones outdoors, by day or night, in Australia.

Words: Malcolm Fisher