

## Uncoupling

### 11 Stages of Uncoupling

1. Secrets
2. The display of discontent
3. Mid-transition
4. Signals, secrets, and collaborative cover-up
5. The breakdown of cover-up
6. Trying
7. The initiator's advantage
8. Going public
9. The partner's transition
10. Uncoupling
11. Transition rituals

### Main Arguments

1. Something as personal and individual as a break => follow similar patterns
2. Breakups involve many people

### Introduction

- We personally experienced the ending of the relationship as chaotic and disruptive, its demise took on a kind of social rhythm. That an experience could be orderly and disorderly at the same time was counterintuitive.
- Why do we stay in unhappy relationships?
  - We do it b/c we believe in commitment. We do it b/c we feel bound by the law. We do it b/c we don't want to hurt the other person. We do it b/c we are afraid nothing better may be out there. We do it b/c we believe in our own goodness, etc.
- Sociologically, uncoupling occurs in a uniform way – a describable pattern. In order to uncouple, two people must disentangle not only their belongings but their identities. In a reverse coupling, the patterns redefine themselves, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, as separate entities once again. Getting out of a relationship entails a redefinition of self at several levels: in the private thoughts of the individual, between partners, and in the larger social context in which the relationship exists.
- Uncoupling is complete when the partners have defined themselves and are defined by others as separate and independent of each other – when being partners is no longer a major source of identity. Instead, identity comes from other sources.
- Uncoupling is primarily a tale of two transitions: One person wants out while the other person wants the relationship to continue. By the time the still-loving partner realizes the relationship is in serious redouble, the other person is already gone in a number of ways.
- Both partners must go through all the same stages of the transition in order to uncouple, the transition begins and ends at different times for each.
- While uncoupling is primarily about relationships, it addresses additional concerns that traditionally have been central to sociology. This book is also about power. It considers how cues and signals can be manipulated to foster desired impressions. It exposes the constraining characteristics of the social circles to which individuals belong. It shows how individuals define social situations. It demonstrates the discrepancies between the

inner mental world and public performance. It explores identity and the way it is constructed, negotiated, maintained, and transformed. And it examines the connection between the individual act and the social world.

### Chapter One: Secrets

- Uncoupling begins with a secret
- When relationships end, the unhappiness is both explored and acted on. Disenchantment becomes more than fleeting anger, disappointment, or regret that comes and goes.
- The secret is different from the other secrets partners keep from each other. This secret is not about daily encounters, finances, or in-laws. This secret is about the relationship. The dissatisfied partner privately acknowledges that the relationship is a source of discomfort.
- By the simple and innocent act of solitary reflection, the dissatisfied partner unintentionally initiates a breach between the two. The breach is created by information: one who owns it, one who does not; one who can assess it, one who can't.
- The secret-keeper can hold back info, consider it privately, and shape it in ways that influence the present and future.

### Chapter 2: Display of Discontent

- Having a partner is socially acceptable. Getting rid of one is not. This value is so ingrained in us that leaving – or considering leaving – someone who is still loving or dependent produces enormous conflict. When the partner has obvious good qualities, ending a relationship is even harder still. In order to violate the imperatives of the dominant social order – that people should come in two's. Initiators transform partner and relationship, emphasizing the flaws. They justify the leave taking by stating to others the reasons why this case is an exception to the rule of togetherness.
- In leaving behind a significant person who shares a portion of our life, we experience a loss.
- Negative definitions of partner and relationship precede and accompany the leave taking b/c the loss must be turned into an acceptable loss.

### Chapter 3: Mid-Transition

- But initiators do not abandon the security of the unknown for the unknown. Both the destination and the getting there must appear rewarding, familiar, and manageable.
- Initiators seek guidelines and legitimation. While others who leave their partners demonstrates the practical aspects of how to manage (or not) the transition, the fact that they do leave also affect the initiators ability to uncouple. Adds normative legitimacy.
- To sever relationship ties is to violate assumptions about the priority of the coupled unit over the individual. In order to uncouple, the initiator must overcome social inhibitions about terminating the commitment to the partner. Those who end relationships develop a belief that responsibility to self takes priority over responsibility to the other person. They come to view the relationship in pragmatic terms: since it is not intrinsically permanent, the relationship may be terminated when it no longer contributes to personal growth.

- For the partner, however, the relationship is still central to life and, therefore, identity. The partner continues to be committed to the relationship. He or she had not turned to others for support, has not endorsed an ideology that legitimates ending the relationship, has not considered and explored in any serious way what life w/o the other person might be. In short, the initiator has begun a transition out of the relationship. The partner has not. The initiator has begun accumulating the resources to negotiate that transition. The partner has not.

Chapters 5, 6, 8 and 10: Fuck them I give up