

THE  TIMES

2
Thursday March 27 2014

Conscious uncoupling: it's the new way to get divorced

Barbara McMahon talks to the relationship therapist who's changing the way America splits up



The best places to live in Britain Day 4 The Top 30 weekend retreats

Four-page pullout, see centre

divorce, Hollywood-style

FRONT COVER: COLIN YOUNG-WOLFF / AP BELOW: VAL MALONE / GETTY IMAGES

I've tried conscious uncoupling the British way

Two years ago my long-term partner and I separated and, finding myself pretty much incapable of coping with the maelstrom of emotions swirling inside me, I decided to go for a conscious uncoupling session. Up until now not many have heard of it. I only found out about it through a friend who had tried it herself, but now Gwynnie and Chris have announced they are separating via a process of conscious uncoupling.

How do you actually do this? Well, I know because I've done the same. A few months post-separation, I found myself £280 lighter and sitting in front of Andrew Wallas, a psychotherapist. He offers his own conscious uncoupling sessions from his home in the Chiltern Hills.

The first thing he did was to explain what conscious uncoupling is. "The main thing is to think of separation as being something that could, in the end, not be as traumatic," he said. "Each individual needs to take responsibility for their feelings." He told me that it was fine to work just with me (my ex-partner wasn't able to attend the session) but I needed to admit my role in the break-up. "You need to own all your feelings from heartbreak to shattered dreams. The temptation is to get resentful and blame the other one and that leads to a dead end."

I could recognise even then that I had a tendency to do this. I was desperate to find some kind of resolve in myself so that my former partner and our four children could come out of this painful process not utterly

shattered. Wallas's point was that uncoupling your life can be managed for yourself and any children involved, but that it is vital to recognise the role the past has to play. "You need to integrate your feelings so that you don't repeat the same mistakes again." This just didn't seem possible. Despite my best intentions, I found myself harbouring horrible evil thoughts.

I explained all this to Wallas and he said what I was feeling was understandable. We discussed my former partner. Wallas talked a lot about exploring my feelings but also, eventually, about coming to a place of reconciliation within myself. More importantly, I needed to accept and even embrace the possibility of change. In order to achieve this, I had fully to let myself experience the grief I felt. I found this very hard. In fact, as we talked I found myself becoming increasingly angry.

Wallas then put out two blankets, one red and one yellow. He asked me to stand on the red blanket and inhabit the angry and hurt "me".

Then I was to move over to the yellow blanket, whereby I would be the calm version of myself. As I stood on the red blanket the anger and confusion consumed me, but when I moved to the yellow blanket, I felt incredible — calm, accepting and forward-looking. Wallas suggested that I made an intention to remember how it felt to be free of all the negative emotions and to try to remember the calm feeling of the yellow blanket.

We ended the two-hour session with me lying on my back as Wallas talked gently. I don't remember what he was saying. All I know is that I cried like a baby but once the tears subsided I felt a lot better.

I found it invaluable as an experience, but how does Wallas feel Gwynnie and Chris will fare? "What they need to do is not fall into the habit of blaming each other," he says. "Then they stand a chance." thomoderndaywizard.com
Lucy Cavendish



your wife went out with Brad Pitt, you'd want to prove yourself, you know what I mean?"

2008

"I never talk about my wife. We're both in public professions but we try to keep our private life private."

2008

"I'm trying to think when the last bit of bad news was... I'm supposed to be getting divorced, we're supposed to be getting sued...but those things aren't happening so don't really count."

2011

"It's a big leap? What, from being a loser to going out with an Oscar winner? It's a giant leap. Let's face it — it's like winning the lottery."