

Understanding the Language of Narcissistic Abuse.

Via Suzanna Quintanaon

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. In honor of this I hope to shed light on the more insidious form of emotional abuse that, while not physically visible, causes as much damage and trauma while leaving what can be lifelong scars on the hearts and souls of its victims.

Before learning about Narcissistic Personality Disorder, I spent a decade in shame and silence, taking the blame, hating myself, hiding away and gradually slipping into a numbed emotional state to survive the daily punishments from a man who took great pleasure in inflicting them.

Narcissistic Abuse is a dark and confusing tunnel where victims might spend years not realizing what is happening, unaware that their abuser has maliciously and intentionally created a world to isolate, demoralize, and dehumanize their victims to better feed and supply their disorder. It is my hope that by giving definitions to the language surrounding NPD that those currently suffering will see their own story reflected in mine, gain the knowledge necessary to better assess their situation, and then take the first steps needed for escape and eventually healing.

Because as Maya Angelou once said: When you know better, you do better.

I fell hard. And fast.

Overwhelmed by his attention and adoration, I jumped in headfirst without blinking, believing him after only weeks of dating when he declared his never-ending love and that I was his soul mate, that I had brought meaning into his meaningless existence.

I was everything he had ever wanted, ever dreamed for, ever hoped for, he said, and proved it daily by drowning me in love and passion. He couldn't keep his hands off me, we made love often, sometimes up to five or six times a day. Not an hour went by that I didn't hear from him. He wrote me notes, he wrote me poetry, he recited poems in public, he told everyone I would be his wife, that I was the mother of his unborn children.

I didn't have time to think, to reflect, to question. There was nothing I could do but free fall into his love and ride it like a roller coaster with my eyes squeezed shut—it was scary as hell, but I didn't want to get off.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Love Bombing

A manipulation tactic involving lavish demonstrations and constant bombardments of attention and affection in an attempt to gain control by moving the relationship forward quickly.

Everything he did was perfect. Everything he said was perfect. It was as if he had some secret insight into my soul and what I wanted in a relationship, as if I had handed him a list of the top 20 qualities I

longed for in a man and within the year had checked off every last one. He said it was because we knew one another in a previous life and we were destined by the Universe to find one another. He had searched for me for so long and then I appeared just at the right time.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Grooming

A calculated and predatory act of maneuvering a person into a more dependent and isolated position by claiming a “special connection” where they are more vulnerable to accepting future abusive behavior.

I gave him everything, without question, without reservation: my kindness, my loyalty, my love, my forgiveness (over and over again).

But that was then, before I knew I was an...

Empath

A highly sensitive and empathetic person who feels and often takes on the emotions of others often at the expense of their own emotional well-being.

I was full of forgiveness and understanding. I had to be. Otherwise, I would have been forced to listen to those quieter voices in my head suggesting something wasn't right, things didn't add up. I would have had to open my eyes and see the small cracks in the shiny mirror of love that had started to form.

But it was easy to ignore my inner voices when he seemed so full of remorse anytime another side of him was exposed—or rather a side that I had found out about. All his bad behavior was in the past, he promised, over and over again. He hated the man he used to be, and I couldn't help but feel sorry for him. He was just misunderstood, he said. Deep down he really was a good person who wouldn't hurt anyone on purpose. Especially me.

But that was then, before I knew I had entered the world of a...

Pathological Liar

A person who habitually and compulsively lies in order to suit their own needs.

Over the years, even if I did stumble upon something new about him that made me question the relationship, he swooped in so fast and drowned me in so much love that I couldn't help but become dizzy in his grasp, even question my own intentions to assume such terrible things about him. How could I think he would do that (whatever “that” happened to be each time)? Then I would feel guilty for even asking him about it. I loved him, after all, and I was his soul mate, as he claimed. He was a changed man and it was all because of me.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Hoovering

Named after the Hoover vacuum, it is a tactic used to “suck back in” the victim by exhibiting improved or desirable behavior.

We became the couple who had it all. He showed me off like a new car. People wanted to know our love story and I became an expert at telling it. I left out the smaller pieces, of course, the unpredictable moments here and there that appeared and disappeared so quickly that it was easier just to push them out of my mind—like the names of women that seemed to pop up here and there, everywhere, and then nowhere.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Normalizing

A tactic used to desensitize a person to inappropriate or abusive behaviors; manipulating a person to agree or accept something that is in conflict with the law, social norms, or their own basic code of behavior.

I had never met anyone more charismatic or charming. The first few years I was the sole receiver of his gifts, which made it easier to let that inquisitive side of me, the one interested in the truth, fall away. So by the time he began sharing his charm with others, saving less and less for me unless I had something he needed (such as approval or sex), I had already subconsciously resigned myself to being a part of the audience in his one-man show.

Going out with him in social situations became a spectacle. I was in awe of how he transfixed a room, captured every ounce of energy there was to be had. Everyone liked him, or so I thought. All of his charm was now being directed to any other woman in his immediate presence, no matter their age, no matter if they were married or single. Nothing mattered to him outside of making them laugh or smile through his own efforts.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Supply

A narcissist’s insatiable need to gain the attention and adoration of others for the purpose of building them up and confirming their false sense of superiority and entitlement.

I soon became exhausted, focusing solely on getting through each day. I blamed everything on myself. Then I blamed it on having kids. He disagreed. The kids weren’t the reason I was such a mess, he said. It was because of me—I couldn’t handle my own children. He compared me with every other mother in America. They could all do it, why couldn’t I?

At the time I didn’t think I was asking for all that much: on some Sundays I had asked to go grocery shopping by myself, and once I asked if he could watch my infant and toddler while I went to get my teeth cleaned. Figure it out, he said, like every other mother does. So I imagined a scenario where I would hold my baby, nurse him if needed, while my right foot hung off the dentist’s chair and rocked my

toddler. This never happened, though, which proved my inadequacy as a mother, since I didn't go to the dentist until my kids were in daycare, two years later.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Ambient Abuse

The stealthy, subtle, underground currents of maltreatment that sometimes go unnoticed even by the victims themselves until it is too late; the fostering and enhancement of an atmosphere of intimidation, fear, and instability; often viewed as the most dangerous type of abuse.

The last few years there were days I wouldn't leave my house, the dark pockets under my eyes from all the crying and shouting and begging, making it appear as though he had hit me. But he never hit me. On several occasions he placed his hands around my neck, professing his love while squeezing, whispering how he could kill me he loved me so much. But he always let go just as I got dizzy or needed a breath, and then broke down and cried and promised he would never hurt me. I learned to remain stoic during this ritual and listened patiently while he reminded me how lucky I was to have a man who loved me so much, who put up with me. Since I had no faith in my own emotional state, I had no choice but to believe him. I told myself I was lucky to have him, especially considering how crazy I had begun to feel, losing all logic, questioning myself at every turn, staring into the mirror day after day and not recognizing the woman who stared back.

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Gaslighting

A form of mental abuse that includes brainwashing or convincing a mentally healthy individual that their understanding of reality is false, making victims doubt their own memory, perception, and sanity; the term is from the 1944 movie "Gaslight," in which the villain used this technique.

As time went on I became more isolated, though he still "allowed" me to have dinner with friends once in a while, or to visit my mom, or to go to my high school reunion. Wherever I went, though, his questions became more persistent, insistent once I came home.

Who did I see? Did I get in touch with any old boyfriends? What did I talk about? Did I talk about him? What did I say? Why was I lying? Did I find that man in the restaurant attractive? Did I cheat on him? Did I think about cheating? Why wouldn't I just tell the truth?

But that was then, before I knew anything about...

Projection

A psychological defense mechanism where a person "projects" their own undesirable thoughts, feelings, or actions onto someone else in order to seek acquittal from their own conscience; example: accusing the victim of cheating when the accuser is actually the one cheating.

Days, months, years passed and more and more he began walking around me, ignoring me, even at the dinner table when he ate the food I had prepared and I sat at the other end using every muscle trying not to cry. I cried while doing the dishes, standing out on the porch in the middle of winter, sitting in the bath, lying in bed. His presence was felt only in the small breeze that walking by me caused, as if I weren't a human being but instead a piece of furniture that got in his way.

But that was then, before I knew anything about the...

Silent Treatment

A preferred weapon of Narcissists; a passive-aggressive form of emotional abuse in which displeasure, disapproval, and contempt exhibited through nonverbal gestures, such as glaring, while maintaining verbal silence.

The last two years I put myself to sleep to avoid all feeling. That way, even when I knew he was lying or when I found out about something he had done, it somehow made it easier. And I was wholly unaware that other stronger forces were at work, and had been at work, to keep me numb and silent and weakened:

Dosing {small and temporary revivals of the love bombing phase}

Denial {denying one's actions even in the face of physical proof}

Bait & Switch {luring the victim in with kindness and affection and once they are "hooked" the abuser switches to being demanding, inattentive, and cruel}

Because of the tender physical state I also existed within, plagued by daily stomachaches, nausea, and panic attacks, I also possessed nowhere near the amount of strength or energy required to face any sudden additional traumas, such as when I discovered he had been hiding money, or lying about me to our friends, or his infidelities. In this self-induced emotional coma, daily life took on a dream quality, which softened the edges and allowed me to take shelter while outside what felt like a tornado threatened to destroy everything I knew. I hid, I cowered, I retreated, and I gave up all hope on anything ever being good again.

But that was then, before I found myself in the office of a psychologist who was an expert on...

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

A personality disorder in which the individual has a distorted self-image, unstable and intense emotions, is overly preoccupied with vanity, prestige, power and personal adequacy, lacks empathy, and has an exaggerated sense of superiority. NPD is closely associated with egocentrism—a personality characteristic in which people see themselves and their interests and opinions as the only ones that really matter.

And my life would never be the same.

I was a victim of emotional abuse. But my story doesn't end there. In fact, that is where it begins.

Through empowerment, education, and enlightenment I have not only survived but thrived in my new life of freedom and peace. I was a victim, but I am no longer a victim. This, however, was only due to the journey I committed myself to take in understanding what exactly I experienced in my relationship with a Narcissist, which included understanding the language surrounding it. With this knowledge, I was then able to forgive myself, recognize I was not the one with the problem, and take responsibility for my own growth and emotional development upon escaping the situation.

Above all, however, my healing has come only because I granted myself the love and the time needed to heal. Unlike all those years ago, now when I look in the mirror I immediately recognize the woman looking back. And she is awake, and she is brave, and she is loving and strong and compassionate.

The one thing she is not, though, is crazy. And as I finally learned, she never was.

If you believe you might be a victim of Narcissistic Abuse, my hope is that through your own education and enlightenment you will then gain the tools and find the support necessary to help you escape your suffering and find the peace that you so deserve.

Because when you know better, you will do better. I promise.