

Hello,

I want to write about a very specific concern I have regarding my own experience with an emotionally abusive relationship whereby I believe (with the affirmation of 3 psychologists) that I was involved with a covert narcissist.

The issue I would like to highlight is about how I felt within myself and my own mental stability whilst in an abusive situation, and why I think it has a detrimental effect on a victim-survivor's apparent "credibility". How can Victim-survivors expect to be believe when they themselves feel "crazy"?

Background:

My relationship officially commenced in 2019 between myself (a 25 year old female), and a male 11 years my senior (36) whom I will call [REDACTED].

I had known [REDACTED] from years earlier along with his wife who was a friend and colleague, whom I will call [REDACTED] (3 years [REDACTED]'s junior, 33). I met them around 2011, and remained very close friends until 2017.

I knew their marriage was turbulent as I was close friends with [REDACTED] and she confided her complaints to me at length. I witnessed over the years how [REDACTED] developed extreme attention seeking behaviour usually around suggested physical health and mental illness; insecurities about her husband's perceived infidelity; and she would often speak unfavourably about [REDACTED] despite my experience and that of others in our friend group being positive. He was publicly charming, funny, and good natured, while [REDACTED] was increasingly bitter and difficult. It was apparent to see [REDACTED] as the problematic party within the marriage.

In 2017, [REDACTED]'s paranoia was directed towards me, and I was exiled from our social circle when she felt [REDACTED] and I were a threat to their marriage. This was not at all the case, but we parted ways for 2 years with no contact.

When [REDACTED] and I reconnected in [REDACTED], he explained his marriage was all but over, and expressed his ever-present love for me. With their marriage over, so commence 6 weeks of the "love bombing" phase which included discourse around "soul mates", being treated as a top priority, lots of affection, lavish dates, and promises of forever.

After 6 weeks, [REDACTED] declared that he was going to tell [REDACTED] he was ready for a divorce. And so commenced stage 2 – devaluation / bait and switch.

[REDACTED] sent an email that night about how [REDACTED] wanted to try and fix their marriage and he felt a duty to participate. But he also communicated how she was abusive in their relationship and threatened suicide if he tried to leave. He said she was aware of our relationship entirely, but was forcing him to "fix" the marriage or she would kill herself. If I asked him to leave his relationship, he said I was unsupportive and lacked understanding and empathy; and if I tried to leave, he would beg me not to abandon him in his "abusive" marriage. It was constantly used against me that I could never understand the severity of a marriage, but at the same time, he would not allow me to pull away.

Between these blow outs between us, there was intermittent reinforcement of love which would swing between telling me I was his soulmate / the one / perfect etc etc; and then he

would swing to telling me that he loved [REDACTED] more than me. While retrospectively and from the outside it seems obvious to leave this situation, when in it, it felt impossible to leave. I had to correct the narrative and prove that I was a supportive and loving partner, and I felt desperate to prove in moments of doubt that I was “the one”.

I assume the random intermittent reinforcement created the intoxicating, addictive obsession I felt to [REDACTED].

When things were good, they were some of the best and happiest times in my life, but when [REDACTED] changed, I would be subjected to verbal abuse, screaming matches, abandonment, and “ghosting” for days or weeks at a time until his return where he would apologise and commence the flattery and love bombing which by this stage, I craved. On one particular occasion, the trigger to [REDACTED]’s outburst included a tirade of abuse and blocking me for 4 days because I “looked too sad”. This was after taking time off work that day to assist him to look for a new apartment to move into.

My responses would escalate until any form of confrontation with him resulted in sweating (unusual for me), confusion, disorientation, and extreme emotional outbursts of uncontrollable crying or rage.

This cycle continued for over a year from [REDACTED] including [REDACTED] and I sharing an apartment together and him achieving a “divorce” where I witnessed the signed papers (which I now know to be fake).

[REDACTED] called me in late [REDACTED] to advise she and [REDACTED] were in fact still married, had always been married, that she had no idea about our relationship until that week, that she had never threatened suicide and had encouraged him to leave if he was unhappy, that [REDACTED] had lied and manipulated us both, and that she was in fact leaving him effective immediately.

While I was initially in disbelief and [REDACTED] denied her version of events to me; [REDACTED] confirmed her entire story with a series of evidence including conversations with their marriage counsellor, travel receipts, time-stamped photos, and finally a chilling confession from [REDACTED].

Aftermath and reflections:

This experience flipped my life upside down and caused extreme distress, nightmares, flashbacks, distrust, and social withdrawal among other reactions. While I know the lying husband, wronged wife, and scorned lover trope is a cliché tale as old as time; what I want to highlight from here is the effect the abuse had on me throughout the relationship which I definitely recognise as abuse.

While I was with [REDACTED], I experienced what felt at the time like a decent into madness. There were many times between [REDACTED] where I questioned my own grasp on reality. I paid for a psychologist, convinced I had Borderline Personality Disorder, Histrionic Disorder, Bi Polar Disorder, and PMDD; I frequently jeopardised my career to attend to [REDACTED]’s mood swings; I was an active participant in public screaming matches; I slept no more than 4 hours a night; and I felt I completely lost touch of my judgement and perception.

When people ask why I didn’t I leave, it’s because I felt like I was the problem, I was the “crazy” one and I felt lucky to be loved by someone so wonderful when I was such a mess. It was not to do with finances, children, or threats of physical violence as is commonly

suggested. It was entirely a psychological warfare on my own self-perception and my grasp on reality. I frequently called emergency mental health triage numbers begging them to help me, explaining the situation, and becoming frustrated and confused when they told me the issue was ██████'s behaviour not mine. I felt like they did not understand. I lost friends through the chaos and the drama, and the midnight distressed phone calls when I felt like I was quite literally dying from the stress and panic.

Now in 2024, engaged and in a healthy and stable relationship with a different man, I realise that many of these behaviours which I deemed my own were in fact responses to the situation I was subjected to participate in, and that I was a psychologically trapped within. Retrospectively, I also look back at ██████'s behaviours which I used to see as problematic and innate, and I realise that I too started to display the exact same tendencies which I used to judge and dismiss in her. While I am not in contact with ██████, I remain curious about the person she is without ██████.

I also reflect back to how I first became close friends with ██████ when I was a 19 year old girl. While I was an adult in a legal sense, I was impressionable. ██████ and ██████ used to encourage me to stay at their house for days at a time. I'm unsure why, but at the time, it felt like I was used as a buffer in their marriage.

So the purpose of my letter is to express concern about how DV and coercive control regulations will be able to differentiate between the victim and the perpetrator when the very nature of receiving abuse often becomes a decent into madness. There were times when ██████ and I were fighting, and I feel sure I would have come across as the aggressor. When a perpetrator is the one in control with their manipulative tactics, it leaves the victim in a vulnerable position. As with ██████ and ██████, she was the one who looked like the abuser, not ██████. And I'm certain I was the same. Gaslighting begets crazy.

Final additional point:

As a final point I want to raise this. If stealing is a crime due to the potential health risk it can subject to the non-consenting party; then how is lying about sexual partners not also a crime? Would I have had unprotected sex with ██████ had I known there were others? Absolutely not. I did not consent to have ongoing unprotected sex with a man involved with others. To me, this feels akin to removing a condom during sex. It was deceitful and misleading. It was not the relationship I consented to entering. I never agreed to be his mistress.

Letters / Textual evidence

I was going to attach letters provided by ██████ as an example of his deception and manipulation, but I do not want those publicly published. I am happy to share those if they can be private.