

The Covert Passive Aggressive Narcissist

Debbie Mirza

January 19, 2023

Contents

1 What is a Covert Passive-Aggressive Narcissist?	7
2 The 3 Phases: Love Bombing, Devaluing, & the Discard	10
3 Traits of Targets	10
4 Traits of a Covert Narcissist	12
5 Control & Manipulation Tactics	12
6 Covert Narcissistic Parents	12
7 In the Workplace	12
8 Sex with a Covert Narcissist	12
9 Divorcing a Covert Narcissist	12
10 Why Do They Emotionally & Psychologically Abuse?	12
11 The Most Dangerous Trait of All	12
12 Your Body Knew: Common Illnesses	12
13 What Survivors Feel	12
14 The Road to Healing & Restoration	12
15 Traits of a Covert Narcissist Checklist	12
16 Educational Resources	12
17 Articles & Books Quoted	12
References	12

Foreword

“3 years ago, my reality was imploding all around me like a scene from the movie *Inception*. Everything I had believed to be true was suddenly collapsing. I was forced to face the truth. Until that moment, I couldn’t quite put my finger on exactly what the problem was. I was mostly in denial about it, but I think I knew something was wrong for a while.

As 1 of my friends mentioned the word narcissist, she pointed out, “He’s like the ones from the past, he’s just the more sophisticated model.”

The heart-breaking dissolution of that relationship sent me on a journey to Peru where I met several more characters like him, mostly in my work life. A year later & totally devastated, I reluctantly went back to the original covert abuser in my life to get on my feet again.

Back where it all began, 1st the complex-PTSD breakdown happened & then I broke through. Observing my mother with new awareness, I was finally able to see where that pattern of relationships came from. In facing my wound & working on healing, I created a new sense of purpose & the work I do now to help people self-heal after narcissistic abuse.

Recently, when 1 of my clients told me she was writing a book on covert narcissists, I was so excited that I offered to write the foreword. I'm grateful that Debbie dedicated herself to write this book on such an important, nuanced topic within the genre of narcissistic abuse.

This book is meeting a great need because unfortunately there is not enough information available for people who have been through the more covert forms of abuse. It's incredibly sophisticated & stealth, so it's often missed by mental health professionals who were not trained to recognize it.

Debbie writes,

"You think you're on the right track after discovering narcissistic personality disorder, but then you read things that are not completely what you experienced."

"Coverts do have a grandiose sense of self, are preoccupied with fantasies of power, require excessive admiration, but they hide all these attributes so people will like & trust them."

She gets it. The author clearly knows this war from the front lines.

After years of talking with people in my personal & professional life about covert narcissists, I've come to believe that in order to really understand the nature of the covert narcissist, you have to have lived it. Whether it's a spouse, significant other, friendship, boss, co-worker, neighbor or family member, the patterns are nearly identical & only someone who has been inside that nightmare can really know what the experiences is like. Even then it's hard to describe.

I believe the covert types are by far the most dangerous because of their ability to fly stealth, undetected by normal radar. They leverage their intelligence through a meticulous choice of words & silence in order to manipulate others. The smarter the narcissist, the more dangerous because the cloak of invisibility is so high-tech.

The overt type of abuser is much more obvious because they lack the intelligence to manipulate that cleverly, so they resort to aggression & violence as their primary weapons.

Plausible deniability is the covert narcissist's greatest weapon in their arsenal of gaslighting tools.

With a covert narcissist everything on the surface looks normal & often lovely for months, years, even decades. They know how to say all the right things, exactly the things that you personally want to hear. They can mirror empathy, concern, & tears better than most Hollywood actors. However, underneath the surface the feeling is off. It's so subtle that you could easily miss it or dismiss it.

After a relationship with a covert narcissist, you feel like you can't trust your perception of reality because no one else can see what you see. Most people adore covert narcissists because of how very careful they are in choosing who they unmask around & how much effort they put into optics & public perception.

When you ask for advice from friends & even professionals, you might only hear people giving the benefit of the doubt to the covert narcissist or worse yet telling you that you're being paranoid, overreacting or some other way of blaming the victim. Unfortunately, asking advice from people who don't understand it can feel invalidating, lead you to more setbacks & possibly even encourage you to stay in a dangerous situation.

It's terrifying when every part of your intuition is telling you something is really wrong but the covert narcissist & everyone else are telling you that things are just fine, & implying that maybe you are the problem.

Survivors of covert narcissists need to know that they're not crazy. This is the primary concern I hear from clients who were with covert types of abusers. Reading this book will give you that validation.

The recovery of self-trust after abuse by a covert narcissist can take some time. Be patient with yourself in this process. You have been through a severe relational trauma & while you can't see your wounds, they are very real.

This book will help you to understand what happened in your relationship with a cover narcissist through an inventory of their typical characteristics & behaviors, in addition to survivors' stories of interactions with them. You'll likely have many aha moments when you connect the dots to similar experiences that happened to you.

I know this book is going to help a lot of people make sense of the insensible.

Big hug to you!

Meredith Miller, Coach & Author. Mexico City, Mexico" – Mirza, 2017, pp. 6–8

Preface

"Are you in a romantic relationship or coming out of one that feels incredibly confusing & is making you feel like you're going crazy?"

Does your mother appear amazing to everyone else, but growing up you felt alone, found it hard to have your own identity, & you felt like things were always your fault?"

Did you feel like you walked on eggshells growing up with your dad & find it hard to connect with him, but people have always told you know lucky you are to have a dad like yours?"

Do you have a boss or coworker that everyone thinks is great, but after years of working with him/her, you find yourself feeling a lot of anxiety, never feeling good enough, & questioning your own sanity?

Has someone told you your loved one might be a narcissist? You've done some research but are confused because the person you are wondering about doesn't come across as a self-absorbed, arrogant over the top person that fits the description of a narcissist?

If any of these scenarios resonate, this could mean you are dealing with a covert narcissist. This is the hardest type of narcissist to diagnose because they are so disguised, so covert.

Covert narcissism is the worst & most insidious form of narcissism because the abuse is so hidden. Most people don't even realize they are being abused when they are in these relationships. The life inside them is slowly depleted over time without them recognizing that this is a result of years of devaluing tactics by the narcissist. Their self-worth is beaten down. There are no visible scars, but the impact these people have on you is profound. You have been emotionally & psychologically abused & you are often the only one to see this side of them while everyone around them thinks they are great. This furthers your confusion & minimizes your pain.

When I say "worst form," I do not want to minimize anyone else's trauma when dealing with an overt narcissist or any other type of psychologically abusive personality. Abuse is abuse – it is horrific & always undeserved. My heart goes out to anyone who has & is experiencing anything that harms & devalues them.

1 reason covert narcissists are so damaging is because of cognitive dissonance. This is when you have 2 competing thoughts in your mind. You love your mom, spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend & thought they loved you the same. Yet when you look back, their behaviors are making you question your beliefs about them. As you research you begin to wonder, *"Could this person really have been controlling & manipulating me for years, & I didn't see it . . . or were things really my fault & I'm just overdramatizing my experience?"* You have a solid belief that has been built up over years that this is a good person who cares about you, & at the same time, they are being incredibly cruel & controlling. The cognitive dissonance is dizzying & crazy making.

The overt types of narcissists are obvious, in your-face-face kind of people. They will let others know how great they are. When their mask comes off others around them roll their eyes & say, *"Oh, yeah, he's terrible."*

On the other hand, covert narcissists are well liked. They are charming & kind. They appear humble & empathetic. They can be good listeners & appear to really care. You can feel incredibly loved by them. They simultaneously make you feel terrible about yourself. They use cloaked tactics that you don't see for years.

It is common for people to be in romantic relationships with covert narcissists for over 10, 20, 30, 40-plus years not recognizing the abuse they have endured for decades.

This is especially devastating when it is a family member. Sometimes you are the only one who sees it when your siblings still think their dad or mom is amazing & blame you for a plethora of things. You feel like you are going crazy & you start minimizing the abuse yourself. If no one else sees it, you think it must be you that is the problem.

This type of abuse does not look as messy as it really is. It is so invisible. It is hard to put your finger on what is wrong. If you relate to any of this, you are not alone, & you can trust yourself.

I went through years of confusion & cognitive dissonance myself. I have had several covert narcissists in my life. They have been incredibly confusing & crazy-making relationships.

Years ago I searched for answers to help with my own confusion. I read a lot of books on narcissism but could not find any on the covert type. After years of piecing together information from various sources, I decided to write the book I had needed & couldn't find so other survivors would have the information they needed in 1 place.

In preparation for this book, I interviewed over 100 survivors. I did in-depth research on the topic because I wanted to make sure this book would be accurate, comprehensive, & incredibly helpful for you. You deserve that.

As I met more & more people who have been through this type of relationship, my heart was affected tremendously. Witnessing their pain, their wounded hearts, & their strength was humbling & brought out a fierceness in me that made me want to make this the most helpful book I possibly could.

In the following pages, I will explain the traits of a covert narcissist. I share lots of stories from people I've interviewed to illustrate the traits. All the names have been changed & details altered, so their identities are protected.

I facilitate a support group in my area & have seen how important stories are. When I begin the meetings, I often ask what they are hoping to get out of the evening. Most people say, *"Stories! I need to hear stories so I know I'm not crazy."* You will hear plenty of stories in this book to help you recognize things you have experienced & help validate the truth of what you have been through.

I also spend a lot of time talking about healing. If you have read this far, my hunch is you have probably been through or are going through a tremendously difficult & crazy-making experience with a covert narcissist. You deserve to find clarity & ultimately heal the wounds this relationship has caused.

Being with a covert narcissist can take you far away from the person you really are. My hope is this book will help bring you back to your stunning self.

May you find all the answers you are looking for & come to a place of freedom & peace. That may not feel possible right now, but trust me, it is.

With so much love,
Debbie Mirza” – Mirza, 2017, pp. 9–12

Introduction

“Is your husband a narcissist?”

“No! I would never use that word to describe him. He’s the nicest guy. Everybody loves him. You would love him if you met him.”

“Yes, that’s what they are like.” The divorce attorney saw Amy’s confused face, walked closer to her & said with concern, “I am seeing a lot of classic signs, Amy. I suggest when you get home, you get a hold of as much information as you can about narcissists because you need to know what you’re dealing with.”

Amy left the appointment in a daze. *Narcissist?* That was the last word she would have used to describe her husband of over 30 years. She had always seen him as kind, someone she respected. Their relationship wasn’t perfect, but most of the time she would have described it as a good marriage. She felt lucky to be with someone so easy going. However, his behavior over the past year had been vastly different than the man she thought she knew. So many things didn’t make sense. The way he was treating her was so hurtful, disturbing, & utterly confusing. Then suddenly, he was done with her. The ending of the marriage was shocking & incredibly confusing.

When she 1st met her husband, she felt lucky to have met such a great guy. He was kind. He talked about his feelings. He listened to her, asked her questions about herself, really wanted to know her. Her family & friends loved him, felt so happy she had met someone like him.

It was remarkable how alike they were. It all felt so easy. The 1st year they dated was pure bliss. Then things became difficult, but that was because of outside circumstances, she always believed. They worked through things. Their communication was great, she thought. They had some issues but always talked about things. She considered him her best friend.

Recently, though, he had been treating her in ways she had never experienced. This man she had seen as kind & loving had become incredibly cruel & aggressive toward her. He was continuously telling her all the things he believed was wrong with her & blaming her for making it impossible for their marriage to work. All of this seemed to come out of nowhere. After 30 years, he moved out & made sure she knew how much happier he was without her. It didn’t seem to bother him at all that this was ending. He wanted out, & according to him, it was all her fault.

She decided to take her attorney’s advice, reading books as well as articles on narcissism, hoping this might be the piece that would finally make sense of this confusing puzzle.

When she read the descriptions of narcissists, she kept thinking, *“that doesn’t sound like him.”* Each book described someone who was flashy, drove expensive cars, liked to show off their fancy homes, people who were aggressive, annoying, obviously self-centered. She read stories of gaslighting that seemed really extreme to her. At the same time, amidst the grandiose images, there were some things that did sound like her husband.

She read the basic traits of lack of empathy, rage, not a strong sense of self, controlling, manipulative, selfish. She began to feel like her eyes were opening to things she had not seen previously.

Even though she believed her marriage was good, Amy had spent years doubting her self, believing she was to blame for issues that did arise in the marriage. Now, the way she was being treated felt wrong, even though she still wondered if the things he was saying about her were true. He seemed so confident & sounded so rational. His words to her were cruel, but they were also mixed with loving words that made it even more confusing. When she was in conversations with him, her body felt confused, muddled, & even nauseous at times. It was hard for her to think clearly. She felt run over & talked down to by him. The words that came out of him were demeaning. He would “teach” her about life & how she needed to be.

She found herself calling close friends & family & asking them questions like,

“Am I controlling & manipulative like he’s saying I am & I just don’t see it? Am I inconsiderate? Maybe I have been selfish? I can’t think clearly. I can’t even see what is true about me anymore?”

Feeling so confused, she needed reminders of who she really was because she felt like she was going crazy. While she was feeling incredibly emotional & unstable, he was calm & rational, which made her question herself even more.

Amy became a voracious reader & researcher of narcissism. She also went to a therapist that was an expert on the subject. The therapist asked odd questions like:

“Did your husband forget things a lot, like when you would ask him to pick up some apples while he was at the store?”

“Yes! About 70% of the time.” That’s a trait?

When he would go to a coffee shop I would ask if he could get me some water while he was in there. He would happily say ‘Sure!’ About 7 out of 10 times he would come back to the car with no water & say, ‘Oh! I’m so sorry. I totally forgot.’ He seemed like he felt bad each time. I would always tell him it was okay. I felt frustrated

“I was confused because it happened so often, but I didn’t feel like it was ok for me to be upset because it was an honest mistake.” Is this common with narcissists?”

“Yes. Very. Did he ever go back & get you water?” the therapist asked Amy.

“No. Never. I never thought about that.”

“What about your birthdays? What were those like with him?”

“They were awful. But the thing is I can’t tell you exactly why.” Amy’s face scrunched up in confusion. “He wasn’t mean to me. He always bought me gifts. Sometimes took me out to dinner. For some reason, though, I ended up crying on my birthdays & apologizing to him for something. I don’t even remember why now. Maybe not being appreciative enough? He would buy me things, but many times they were things I wouldn’t want. Then he would tell me a long story about how he found this gift & all the thought & effort that went into it, & I would feel like I needed to have a big reaction even though it was something I never would have wanted. Then I’d feel bad because I was being shallow & not grateful. Birthdays were always disappointing, & I was glad when they were over. They wore me out for some reason. It never felt like he enjoyed celebrating me, treating me. He always seemed irritated that he had to do things for me. Sometimes he would spend a lot of money & get me something grandiose. It actually stressed me out because of the amount of money he used. I didn’t feel like I could say anything because of all the trouble he had gone to.”

“When he gave you big things or made grandiose gestures, were other people around to see?”

“Well, when I think about it, yes. Always ... that’s interesting. I never thought about that. I don’t remember any private moments where he would give me something special that showed how well he knew me & how much he loved me. I didn’t feel loved on my birthdays when I look back.”

With each question, Amy realized she must learn more.

1 day, after telling her story to another therapist who had a lot of experience with narcissistic abuse, Amy heard a term she had not seen in her research, & that changed everything for her. The therapist said, *“It sounds like your husband is a Covert Passive-Aggressive Narcissist. Those are the hardest to recognize.”*

Amy felt chills go up her spine. *“Please tell me more about that,”* she told the therapist. Everything began to make sense for the 1st time.

Hearing covert passive aggressive in front of the word narcissist gave her the missing piece she needed for her quest to understand what was happening. This sent her on a journey that would change her life forever, & ultimately bring her the clarity & healing she so desperately needed & deserved. Amy now leads men & women through different healing modalities in the mountains of Peru & feels tremendously fulfilled & happy. Years ago, when she 1st discovered the truth of her marriage, she never would have imagined that she would someday feel so free & happy. She now has a glow about her that is inspiring & gives others hope. She knows who she is & has learned to trust herself implicitly.

Amy was 1 of the women I interviewed as part of my research for this book. Her story reflects what I heard from so many that have experienced the crazy-making relationship with a covert narcissist.

If you are reading this, I imagine you might relate to part of Amy’s story, maybe even a lot of it. You may be on your own search, trying to make sense of a very confusing person in your life. This book is for you, to give you clarity, strength, & understanding. It will educate you as well as give you hope.

The word “narcissist” is thrown around a lot & grossly misused. *“He’s so narcissistic! Oh, yeah, I was with a narcissist too!”* People often use this word to describe someone who is selfish & arrogant. The true definition goes much deeper & unfortunately because it is used so carelessly, it diminishes the painful reality of victims of narcissistic people. Someone who has experienced a true narcissist would never toss the word around so lightly. It is important to know what it really means.

We tend to label people a lot, & that can be a destructive thing. In this case, the label is important. When victims are looking for answers, & they finally discover their partner or parent or co-worker might be a covert narcissist, everything begins to make sense. It is incredibly helpful in understanding & beginning to heal.

I was talking about healing & restoration to 1 survivor I interviewed. Through tears, she looked at me. With desperation & shakiness in her voice, she asked, *“Do you think it’s even possible?”*

It is for this woman & so many others like her that I have written this book. Profound healing & freedom are absolutely possible. I, along with so many others, am proof of this. There is hope. The healing you will experience is profound & will bring you to a very strong place inside yourself.

I also interviewed men who have experienced this abuse too. Both genders are affected by this destructive personality disorder.

Most people I talked to struggled to describe the relationship. This is common. There was a perpetual confused look on each face. It can be difficult to explain because the abuse is so hidden & subtle. They weren’t yelled at or physically abused. There are no visible scars. Yet the impact it makes on the psyche is profound.

Like the people I interviewed, I have also experienced covert narcissists, several actually. I know what it’s like to be subtly abused for a very long time without recognizing it. I also know what it’s like trying to find information on the covert type. You think you are on the right track after discovering narcissistic personality disorder, but then you read things that are not completely what you experienced. You read about aggressive behavior, physical abuse, dramatic stories of deception, & you

think maybe you are off track. Your story doesn't appear that bad compared to what you are reading, which then diminishes your own pain & adds to your confusion. That's why I felt it was so important for me to write this book & put everything I had learned into 1 place.

Many people who go to therapy to get help because they are depressed, low on energy, experiencing low self-esteem, feeling a lot of anxiety, & confusion usually have no idea that the cause of their issue is an abusive relationship, whether that is with a romantic partner, a parent, or a boss at work.

Some victims become re-traumatized by a therapist or friend that doesn't understand. Most therapists are not educated on the covert type of narcissism. Only the overt type is taught in higher education, so most understandably don't recognize the signs & traits. I talked to 1 woman who was in a covert relationship & went to therapy for 10 years. She tried a few different therapists because no one seemed to be able to help her with her depression, anxiety, & lack of energy. They didn't recognize she was in an abusive relationship. Finally, after 10 years, she tried another therapist who after 15 minutes told her she was in an abusive relationship. The others couldn't see it. Neither could she.

This is such a common story. She lived for years thinking something was wrong with her. She was being subtly manipulated & devalued at home without seeing it. Her body was reacting. She was slowly dying inside & couldn't figure out why. Thank goodness for the therapist who understood covert narcissism & recognized the signs.

When the relationship ultimately ends in a breakup or divorce, victims have a very difficult time understanding what just happened. When a relationship with a covert narcissist ends, it is sudden & painful. It can look like a "normal" divorce, but it is not even close.

Well-meaning friends & family will wonder why it is so hard for you to get past the partner, why you have no desire to date anyone, why it is taking you so long to recover & get back to the way you used to be. Breakups are a part of life, but this type of break up is a whole other animal. The only people that will fully understand what you are going through are those that have gone through it themselves.

You might be wondering whether you are on the right track when you picked up this book. You may wonder if you are being overly dramatic & looking for someone to blame by thinking your ex or parent or co-worker might be a narcissist. Here's the thing. You're smart. I am sure the narcissist in your life has given you the opposite message about yourself, but the truth is some of the smartest people I've met are people who have been in relationships with covert narcissists.

A helpful thing to notice while you are trying to find answers is the fact that men & women who are with healthy people don't enter words into online search engines such as toxic relationships; energy vampires; mean spouses; confusing relationships; hidden abuse; subtle abuse; manipulation; narcissism; covert narcissism; sociopaths. The same is true for people who are going through a divorce or a break up where they just realized they weren't a good match, or they fell out of love, or they find themselves wanting other things. If you are searching for answers because you feel utterly confused, you are on the right track because you're smart. If your body feels weak & flustered around someone, it knows something is not right. If you feel like you are going crazy, you are not alone; this is a common feeling among survivors.

Trust your gut, your intuition, how your body feels. There is nothing wrong with you. You know more than you probably give yourself credit. You are a brilliant individual that has been beaten down, lied to, & manipulated, so you naturally have a lot of self-doubts. That is normal & completely understandable.

What you have been through is not a small thing. There are several types of narcissists. The covert type is 1 of the most destructive to your heart, psyche, & physical body because it is so hidden, unrecognizable, & you are usually the only one that sees it. People who know the narcissist in your life probably think they are 1 of the nicest people they've ever met & often wish they could be as lucky as you to have a mom, husband, dad, wife, boyfriend, boss, or friend like you do. They feel the same way you did, maybe for a long time, about the covert narcissist in your life. They have experienced the same illusion, just not identified the truth.

When I was in the middle of my own confusion, searching for information & understanding my eyes began to open. The more they opened, the more overwhelming grief & anger I felt. With time, education, & support, this awakening turned into a growing strength & hope inside me. This will happen for you, too. Reading this book is going to be incredibly helpful for you as you begin to awaken to the truth of what you have been through.

Here is the truth. If you have lived with a covert narcissist, you have been held down for a long time. You have experienced the illusion of love, not the real thing. You have been lied to, manipulated, & controlled. You have not been heard or valued. You were devalued & brutally discarded by someone who said they cared about you, but in fact only cared about themselves. You have experienced a crazy-making relationship that is difficult to describe. Your self-confidence, your zest for life, your adventurous spirit, the light inside you has slowly dimmed; there is part of you that may not want to be here anymore but is cared to say that out loud or to anyone else. I understand. I've been there. This is incredibly common among survivors.

Here is the good news. You have begun a journey that will bring you to the truth you are seeking, the truth of what you have been through, & the realization of how stunning & valuable you actually are. With time, you will have clarity & feel strength & freedom that may be hard to comprehend right now, but trust me it's possible. You will experience love (the real thing this time), & you will cherish every moment of it because of what you've been through. Your light will come back brighter than it's ever been. You will be able to love people & help others in ways you couldn't have before. You will be free. Life will actually feel enjoyable, & you'll be glad you're here. I promise you this is all possible.

I wrote this book for you, putting all the valuable information I have learned into 1 book to make it easier. I spent years

researching for my own understanding & healing. For this book, I decided to dive even deeper by reading more books, finding additional articles, listening to more YouTube videos, & interviewing over 100 people around the world who have experienced a covert narcissistic wife, husband, mother, father, sister, brother, boss, boyfriend, girlfriend, or friend. I wanted to make this the most comprehensive, thorough, & accurate book I could for you. The interviews were fascinating. Even though our stories were different, & some of the relationship types were different, I found myself feeling like I was looking into a mirror when each person would tell me their story over Skype or across the table at a restaurant. These brave people furthered my motivation to get all this information down in 1 place.

I will be using stories from the people I've interviewed, but I have changed their names & specific information to protect their identity. I will not be sharing who the narcissists are in my life. I also interviewed therapists & life coaches who specialize in this area. They were extraordinarily helpful, & I will share what I learned from them as well.

At the end of the book, there will be a list of helpful resources for you to do further study if you'd like.

This can feel like a lonely road since oftentimes you are the only one who ever sees this side of the narcissist. To give you a sense of how not alone you are, here is 1 statistic:

The World Narcissistic Abuse Awareness Day website www.wmaad.com estimates there are "over 158 million people in the USA alone that are narcissistically abused by a person with either narcissistic personality disorder or anti-social personality disorder." The two have similar traits.

This is a massive problem that seems to be growing. 1 therapist I interviewed said she didn't know what was happening, but every person that has walked through her door in the past couple years is dealing with narcissistic abuse. Her appointments are constantly booked.

You are definitely not alone.

Meeting the people I've interviewed has made me discover a world out there I didn't know existed. When survivors find each other, there is an immediate connection, a feeling of safety, of understanding. We find ourselves enthusiastically nodding with relief when we hear each other's stories.

My intention for this book is to provide you with a tremendous amount of information as well as talking about different things you can do to heal.

I will be using 3 different terms when referring to a person who has experienced covert narcissistic abuse & would like to explain my thoughts behind them.

If you have been the recipient of this crazy-making behavior, you were a target, a victim, & are a survivor. The word "victim" can bring up reactions in people because we are warned against having a "victim mentality." The truth is you were a victim. This doesn't mean that this needs to be a cloud that follows you the rest of your life. You were a person who was harmed. This is the direct definition of a victim.

You were also a target, as hard as that is to believe & accept. Covert narcissists seek out certain types of people. They look for people who are kind, authentic, self-reflective, nurturing, loving, & caring people with a conscience. They look for energy supplies. Without these attributes, the narcissist has no use for you, & their manipulative tactics wouldn't work for you.

You are also a survivor. You experienced subtle, manipulative abuse & you are still here. Many people come out of these relationships not wanting to be here anymore after years of being emotionally beaten down. So the fact that you are still here, getting up every morning is something to be recognized & commended. You are a survivor. You are stronger than you know.

My hope is this book will bring you the clarity & understanding you want & need.

Welcome to the beginning of your freedom." – Mirza, 2017, pp. 13–23

1 What is a Covert Passive-Aggressive Narcissist?

"There are several types of narcissists. Some are classified as overt, covert, somatic, cerebral, parasitic, & boomerang. If you search for types of narcissists on the Internet, you will find countless articles listing many types & subtypes. All narcissists have the same core traits. The official list of these traits is found in the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (DSM-IV) by which psychiatric diagnoses are categorized. Mental health professionals use this manual when diagnosing patients.

A patient must have at least 5 of the following traits to be diagnosed as having Narcissistic Personality Disorder according to the DSM-IV:

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, & lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood & present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by 5 (or more) of the following:

- Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements & talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
- Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.

- Believes that he or she is “special” & unique & can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).
- Requires excessive admiration.
- Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations.

What are your thoughts after reading this? You might look at these & see how they perfectly fit the person in your life who you think may be a narcissist. Perhaps you might feel confused because this list doesn’t exactly sound like this person you’re trying to figure out. Maybe 1 or 2 traits match. If it doesn’t quite match or only matches a few, the confusing person in your life either isn’t a narcissist, or they might be a covert narcissist.

The word *covert* is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “not openly shown.” *Passive aggressive* is defined as “displaying behavior characterized by the expression of negative feelings, resentment, & aggression in an unassertive passive way.”

All the narcissistic traits are true of overts & coverts. The difference is the covert narcissist hides their dark attributes because they want people to like them. Their reputation is extremely important to them. Overt narcissists are usually annoying people. Most people don’t like them. They are showy. They love to talk about their achievements & accomplishments. It is obvious they are all about themselves. The overt narcissist is the type of person that will go on & on about how great they are, how much they’ve accomplished & achieved while people in the room listening are rolling their eyes.

Overt narcissists tend to have shorter marriages & romantic relationships. It is common for people to be married to coverts for decades & not know they are married to 1 for most of the relationship. It is also common for people to be in dating relationships with covert narcissists that go on for years. Children of covertly narcissistic parents often do not realize the truth about their mom or dad until their 30s.

Here are some examples of how the traits from the DSM-IV look in a covert narcissist. These people can be pastors, spiritual leaders, therapists, & heads of non-profit organizations. They can be politicians who are charming, look you right in the eye, & really seem to care. Coverts do have a grandiose sense of self, are preoccupied with fantasies of power, require excessive admiration, but they hide all these attributes so people will like & trust them. They know if they are obvious about their self-absorbed traits, people won’t like them. They believe they are “special” & entitled, but they know it would turn people off to let that out. They know they must appear humble to be liked & revered. They know how to play people, how to charm them. They are master manipulators.

They don’t have empathy but have learned how to act empathetically. They will look you in the eyes, making you feel special & heard, make sounds & give looks that tell you they care, but they really don’t. They mirror your emotions, so it seems like they have empathy. They have observed & learned how to appear to care. They thrive off the attention of others. People that think or act as if they are amazing are their energy supply. They have people around them that adore them, respect them, reverse them, see them as special & almost perfect, & in some cases seem to worship them.

“Holy Hell” is a documentary that is a great example of a covert narcissist that led a cult with a large following who stayed with him for over 20 years. The people that followed him aren’t stupid. They are smart, kind, talented, tender people who were exploited, used, & convinced by a covert narcissist (CN) that appeared to love & care about them.

After living with a CN for a long time, cult deprogramming would actually be more beneficial than regular therapy with a therapist who does not understand this disorder. The effects of ending a relationship with a CN are similar to the effects of coming out of a cult. There is a lot of deprogramming that needs to happen in order to heal & see clearly. It is gut-wrenching in the 1st stages. If you watch the interviews at the end of “Holy Hell,” you will be amazed how much you will relate to what the people are thinking & feeling when they finally leave the cult leader. Even though you haven’t come out of a cult, it is a profoundly similar experience.

Covert narcissists are likable to the outside world; they appear to giving, humble, & kind. Image is the most important thing to them. These people are law-abiding citizens. They usually have well paying steady careers. They are not outwardly aggressive. You could know them for years & never see this side of them. This can change during the discard phase, which I’ll discuss in a later chapter. It is usually only the person that gets to know them intimately that sees the destructive traits. The rest of the world sees the façade, the “nice guy.” Many therapists don’t see through the mask & indeed are often impressed with how kind & aware they are. CN’s seem to get worse around middle age; they rarely change because narcissists blame others because they usually don’t think they have a problem.

They are generally successful & charming. Everyone loves them on a surface level. They tend to not have long-lasting friendships with people that really know them deeply. They may have friends that have known them for years but don’t really know them. Yet they are rarely without a partner. After they discard you, they usually move on quickly to another source, another target that will think they are so lucky to have found such a “nice guy” just like you did in the beginning.

Many times daughters will consider their CN mom to be their best friend until later in life. It is a devastating realization when they recognize that the person who they thought loved them the most has actually been using them for years. They don’t know what to believe anymore. This new awareness at the same time helps validate mixed messages they received growing up.

Covert narcissists are often doctors, lawyers, military officers, pilots, motivational speakers, pastors, actors, professors, spiritual leaders, & therapists. They will have careers that are impressive to people & seek positions of authority. There can be exceptions to this, but this is quite common.

The covert type is the most insidious type of narcissist because you don't know what's coming at you. It is all about them, but they know how to appear like it isn't. E.g., they despite taking care of you when you are sick of recovering from surgery or an injury. They won't tell you that, but you feel it. They let you know through passive-aggressive ways. To family & friends, they will tell stories of how much they feel for you & appear to be taking exceptional care of you. They will come across as humble & will be sure to paint a picture of being a great caretaker. People around you will think how lucky you are to have someone so tender & loving by your side. The CN might even do things that look like they are taking care of you, but you will feel their resentment of you, finding yourself feeling alone & unsupported even though they are doing things that appear to be helpful.

An overt type might yell, call your names, & put you down by saying you're lazy & leave you to fend for yourself. You will feel like a covert thinks you are lazy, but they won't actually say it. You will feel how much they hate taking care of you, but they won't tell you that. They might word things in a way that gives you that message without directly putting you down. They will give you subtle messages that make you question yourself. You think you're just being too sensitive, reading into things, after all, they didn't actually tell you they think you're lazy. You will find yourself feeling badly for taking up their time, for inconveniencing them, & often end up apologizing for something. A CN will somehow manipulate things so the attention comes back on them, & you won't even notice it happening.

They will do things that are unkind to you, but somehow you end up apologizing. It's not uncommon to feel like things are your fault. They aren't doing anything wrong; you convince yourself. When you are with a CN, you learn to ignore your gut feelings, your instincts, & over time believe the narcissist more than yourself. You will come to realize that the CN has slowly programmed you to see things the way they want you to see them, gave you messages about yourself they want you to believe so they could keep controlling & manipulating you into continuing to be their "supply."

It is common for a survivor to have a really hard time explaining what they have been through, because in their mind it doesn't sound that bad, & they fear people will think something is wrong with them. A phrase I hear often in local support groups is "crazy-making." Whenever 1 person uses that term, the room erupts in enthusiastic nodding of heads, with smiles of empathy & relief that we are not the only ones that feel this way.

Many share how alone they feel & misunderstood by others who have not experienced this type of hidden abuse. A survivor will often start a sentence by saying, *"I know this might not seem that bad, & I'm embarrassed even saying it, but ..."* After she's done sharing, the whole room is filled with other survivors saying, *"I totally get that!"*

When you 1st begin to realize a person you have loved & fully believed loved you is a covert narcissist, it is so hard to believe because you have been them in such a different light for so long. It is a struggle for the brain to reconcile the man or woman you thought existed with the one that is now treating you with such anger & hostility. This is called *cognitive dissonance*, having 2 competing thoughts in your mind at the same time. This is part of the confusing & crazy-making feeling you might be experiencing. It is painful & exhausting.

A covert narcissist can appear to be a loving partner for a long time. Their behavior often becomes more aggressive at the end of the relationship. This is when the narcissist traits listed in the DSM-IV become more obvious; the sense of entitlement, superiority, & arrogant attitudes become more pronounced. They will still be covert with others, but the survivor will see & experience more of the overt traits coming to the surface. Their mask cracks when you, the survivor, begin trusting yourself. The stronger you become, the less they can control & manipulate you. When this happens, they no longer need you. You are no longer supplying them. This is when you feel their rage more than ever. This is when their behavior turns aggressive, cruel, & shocking.

After victims have left these relationships, they look back & realize how depressed they were for the majority of the relationship, how alone they felt, how they blamed their constant fatigue, health issues, & sadness on other things, not realizing the toll the relationship was taking on their body & spirit. As a result, it is common for victims to experience many healthy issues while they are in these toxic relationships. This is because covert narcissists slowly break your spirit over time without you seeing it, & you end up feeling emotionally like you were the problem, which results in physical manifestations of various ailments.

The covert narcissist is the common title for this personality disorder. I named this book *The Covert Passive-Aggressive Narcissist* because covert & passive-aggressive behavior are both parts of being a CN. *"They are both indirect ways to aggress, but they are most definitely not the same thing. Passive-aggression is, as the term implies, aggressing through passivity. In contrast, covert aggression is very active. When someone is being covertly aggressive, they are using calculating, underhanded means to get what they want or manipulate the response of others while keeping their aggressive intentions under cover."* In *Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing With Manipulative People* by George Simon.

It is a lot when you are 1st discovering things you haven't seen for years, unfolding a picture that does not match what you thought was true. Take deep breaths as you go through this book to help your body as it is taking in new thoughts. We will dive in deeper to what the behavior of a covert narcissist looks like & how this affects you; then we will talk about healing. That's where you get to exhale. Be extraordinarily kind to yourself throughout this discovery process. You deserve tenderness more than ever.

A big part of healing is educating yourself.

So, let's talk about the common pattern of love-bombing, devaluing, & discarding that are the typical stages with covert narcissists." – Mirza, 2017, pp. 24–31

2 The 3 Phases: Love Bombing, Devaluing, & the Discard

3 Traits of Targets

"Covert narcissists will seek out a certain type of person for intimacy. They know what traits someone needs to have to be able to control & manipulate them. E.g., they wouldn't be able to use their emotions & comments to manipulate if the person didn't have empathy, compassion, & a nurturing heart. They wouldn't be able to convince someone to take the blame for something that isn't their fault if the person didn't have the trait of being self-reflective.

As I interviewed survivors & listened to victims of narcissistic abuse in local support groups, I found it fascinating to see so many traits in common. Here is what I found. These people are smart. They are responsible. They are the ones who hold things together, often the heart of the family. They do almost everything in the home & as parents. These are people on which you can rely. They are loyal, faithful women & men.

They are often the dreamers, the optimists of the world, seeing the best in others. They are loving, kind, & pure-hearted. They trust the word of others because they are trustworthy & it is difficult for them to believe that someone they love would lie to them since it is not in them to behave that way. Lying, controlling, & manipulating to against how they are intrinsically made. They were made to love & be loved; that is when they thrive.

They are honest & real. They do not pose. They do not pretend to be someone they are not. What you see is what you get with them, & it is incredibly refreshing.

They tend to be flexible, easy going. Planning an event with them is a delight. They are easy working partners & generous with their time. I was just at a support group where we discussed branching to create a women's only group. A few of us were discussing what we needed to do to make the change. We talked about how we would get the money to pay for the dues & who would coordinate certain aspects, essentially all the details of what needed to be done to make this transition. It was the easiest conversation in the world. 1 lady offered to pay for all of it. Others said they'd be happy to split the cost. No one was stressed. No one was in a hurry. No one was out for themselves. Everyone was generous, not wanting the action steps to fall on 1 person's shoulder. It was peaceful, loving, productive, & easy.

Meeting other survivors has been like finding gold in this world. These are people that are not interested in drama. They love peace & harmony. They are self-reflective women & men who are interested in growing & bettering themselves. They look to see where they can improve. They don't blame others; they take responsibility for their own behavior. If they are feeling hurt or frustrated in a relationship, they will say, *"I'm feeling this ..."* or *"When you said that I felt this ..."*

They won't tell you what they think is wrong with you. This great quality, however, is used against them by a CN. CNs will blame them for things, & because they are people who look at themselves, they will be open to seeing if they are to blame. Often, the victim finds himself or herself thinking, *"There must be some truth to it. This person knows me. They live with me, so there might be something I need to change here."* They won't recognize how badly they are being treated & take way more responsibility than necessary.

CNs are skilled at phrasing things so you don't notice their cruel behavior. Emily's counselor told her, *"Your husband has this amazing ability to start out a conversation appearing so humble & kind. You become so impressed you don't notice how he blames you by the end. You take that on & feel shame. You end up apologizing for something that isn't even your fault, but he sets you up to feel like it is."*

Targets are trusting people. They are nurturing, forgiving, & compassionate. They are full of empathy, & this, sadly, is 1 of the most exploited traits by a CN. Your empathy is a big reason they chose you. They will prey on this treasured part of you by using displays of emotion & manipulative comments in addition to actions to control & punish you.

1 woman with whom I talked said her brother passed away recently. She was very close to him. When the anniversary of his death came, her husband suddenly sunk into a deep depression. Because he did this, she didn't feel she was allowed to be sad. She turned her attention on him to make sure he was okay. CNs do subtle things like this to control you, to keep the attention on them, & to sabotage times that are sacred to you.

Another example of how a CN will turn the focus back on them is demonstrated by Wendy's dramatic story. Wendy's eyes had been opened to something she experienced years ago where she now sees that her husband exploited her sensitive heart. Her care & concern for him brought her to a place of feeling bad; she ended up taking care of him after he had been cruel & dishonoring to her. She told me the story of how this happened. Her husband was on the phone with his mom. When they were done talking, he told Wendy that his mom had said Wendy was controlling & manipulative. They had been married for about 10 years at the time. Here & there her husband would go through times of questioning Wendy, telling her things his family would say about her to see what she thought. This time after starting to defend herself, Wendy stopped & said,

“You know what, I have been defending myself to you for 10 years. If you don’t know who I am by now, I don’t know what to tell you. You’re just going to have to decide for yourself what you think is true about me.”

He responded with silence, left the room & went out to their backyard to think. After a few minutes he came back & suddenly fell to the ground in agonizing pain. He said his back hurt & he couldn’t get up. He stayed on the floor at night. She felt horrible. She brought him containers to urinate in when he needed them throughout the evening. She felt like she was the cause of all the stress he felt. If she didn’t exist, he wouldn’t be feeling this. There would be no issues between him & his mom. In the morning he asked her to call the ambulance since he was still in great pain. They wheeled him out, gave him some shots, & he came home pain-free. The pain never came back. Quite a quick recovery for such excruciating chronic pain over a 2-day period . . . This is dramatic, but not unusual for a CN. Many survivors have told me stories of CNs faking injuries & illnesses, some for years. They will go to great lengths to make you feel bad & turn the attention back on them. He was cruel to tell her what his mom said. As long as you are feeling bad, shame, they have you. You are under their control. He should have defended Wendy to his mom. He should have never told her about the phone conversation, knowing it would just hurt her. That is what love looks like. The real thing, not the illusion you get used to with a CN. This tactic works on targets because they are tenderhearted, sensitive, caring, & trusting people.

Another thing I noticed about targets I interviewed & observed is they are smart individuals. They have been manipulated to think they are not, but these are people that are very intelligent. Most of them could have their Masters in Psychology by now after their research & experience. Many of them are now helping others who are going through their own pain. These are beautiful souls. They love solutions where everyone wins. They are team players who will have your back & be your biggest fan. I have experienced such love & encouragement from each & every 1 of the ones I’ve met. I feel grateful to know them. They are great listeners, independent, hard-working individuals, although most of them have been told they are lazy by their CN, which is a common put down & the farthest thing from the truth.

During more than 1 interview, I found myself sitting across from a woman watching her body physically shake as she told her story. My own tears would come & go. I have a tender heart & a fierce one, like many survivors. These people are the cream of the crop. They are the ones we are so grateful to have on this planet. They are the ones who bring life & love wherever they go. For me to see each 1 of these treasured beings have their spirits crushed, their souls wearied, & their hearts wounded over & over year after year, it did something to me. I felt angry. Really angry. This is wrong. These beautiful women in front of me have been leveled, confused, & emotionally raped for years. Their pain was palpable. The more I heard, the more motivated I became to write this book. These survivors did not deserve any of this. 1 person caused their bright light to almost go out, & that’s not okay.

Targets are strong people. They are fiercer than the CN in their life could ever imagine. Every survivor has the capability to open their eyes & see the truth of what they have been through, then become a force to be reckoned with. They will be a force for good, of course, because that is who they are.

That is who you are.

Now it’s time to educate you, dear powerful one, on the traits & manipulative tactics of a covert narcissist, so you can finally see clearly & make your way home.” – Mirza, 2017, pp. 46–50

- 4 Traits of a Covert Narcissist
- 5 Control & Manipulation Tactics
- 6 Covert Narcissistic Parents
- 7 In the Workplace
- 8 Sex with a Covert Narcissist
- 9 Divorcing a Covert Narcissist
- 10 Why Do They Emotionally & Psychologically Abuse?
- 11 The Most Dangerous Trait of All
- 12 Your Body Knew: Common Illnesses
- 13 What Survivors Feel
- 14 The Road to Healing & Restoration
- 15 Traits of a Covert Narcissist Checklist
- 16 Educational Resources
- 17 Articles & Books Quoted

References

Mirza, Debbie (2017). *The Covert Passive Aggressive Narcissist: Recognizing the Traits & Finding Healing After Hidden Emotional & Psychological Abuse*. Debbie Mirza Coaching, p. 224.