

The Covert Passive Aggressive Narcissist

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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 covert 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" – [Mir17, 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" – [Mir17, 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 & 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.wnaad.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.” – [Mir17, 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 overt & covert. 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 & 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." – [Mir17, pp. 24–31]

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

“There is a relationship cycle that is typical of narcissistic abuse. It generally follows a pattern that includes 3 stages. The 1st stage is often referred to as love bombing (or the idealization stage), followed by devaluing, & finally the discard.

Having these described as stages can give the impression they are in sequential order. In some ways they are, & in other ways, the 1st 2 are experienced intermittently throughout the relationship until the discard. The cycle of all 3 can also repeat numerous times. The combination of the stages creates a dizzying whirlwind of emotion & confusion.

I will describe the stages in the context of a romantic relationship. But no matter what type of role this person has in your life, you will be able to see these 3 phrases explained & illustrated.” – [Mir17, p. 32]

2.1 Love Bombing/Idealization Phase

“Love Bombing happens at the very beginning. This is where the groundwork is laid for you to fully trust & believe in this person for years to come. Because of your initial experience with them, you end up seeing everything they do through the lens of the solid view that this is someone who is a good person, someone who cares about you, & someone you can trust with your heart.

The idealization phase usually lasts between 6 months & a year. This is generally the case, but not always.

Here are some descriptions people I interviewed gave me of the covert narcissists in their life during the love bombing phase:

- He was so kind.
- I felt so lucky to find him.
- He was different. He talked about his feelings.
- He asked me lots of questions about myself. He really wanted to know me. He seemed to really care.
- He was kind of shy.
- We were so much alike!
- He opened up to me about his abusive childhood. He was really honest & vulnerable.
- She was beautiful. Out of my league. I felt so lucky that she liked me.
- She was fun.
- He felt like my soul-mate; like I had known him for a long time.
- He was interesting, intriguing.
- He was confident. He seemed to have his life together.
- He was great with kids.
- I felt lucky to be with her.
- He seemed tender.
- I felt safe with him.
- He was a really good listener.
- He was humble, kind, sensitive, & easy to connect with.
- He could get along with anyone. It was remarkable.
- She had everything I was looking for.
- He was spiritual, open, & philosophical.
- He was soft, which was so nice after experiencing a lot of anger in other relationships. I felt like I was going into this relationship with my eyes wide open.
- We talked about everything. The communication was great!
- I didn't know men like this existed!
- My friends & family were so happy for me that I had found such a great guy.

Many told me they felt so at ease with the CN in the beginning stage. *“Although it feels amazing at 1st, this idealization is actually responsible for most of the damage when the relationship comes crashing down. They set a trap, & it’s a trap no unsuspecting victim could hope to escape from.”* *Psychopath Free* by Jackson MacKenzie.

It is very common for targets to say, *“We seemed so much alike.”* This is because the covert narcissist mirrors you in the beginning, in a sense becomes you. They are observing you during this period. They will ride the wave of emotion you are feeling, so it feels like they are just as excited about this relationship as you are. This can carry on for a while. Many survivors look back & realize that the excitement they felt, the energy of the relationship they so believed in, actually only came from them. They were the only source of life & were under the illusion that it went both ways because the CN was mirroring their emotions.

CNs are often chameleons that become whoever they are around. They don’t have a strong sense of self. They pick up what a person wants, & they become that. Because of this, people are impressed with how well they can seem to relate to all types of people.

I spoke with 1 woman who would watch her narcissistic mom observe other people’s insecurities & shower them with compliments & praise in those areas. The “targets” felt loved, seen, heard. Her mom didn’t care about these people. She only wanted to look good & be impressive. She was using them for the attention & admiration she received from them. They were her energy supply.

Similarly, if a target is spiritually minded, it is common for them to feel like they have found their soul mate when they meet & date a CN. The connection feels like home. The CN mimics the same zeal for spirituality as the target genuinely has, which feels amazing to the victim. They are on the same page it seems. This is an illusion the CN presents.

It is common for CNs to test targets, to see if they are someone who will be a supply for a long time. Some of the women I talked to told me after 6 months to a year of dating, their CN started to have doubts about them. When the negativity started, the CN’s target kicked into fighting for this relationship because she/he believed in the connection so much. This made them perfect for the CN because they now proved they would stick with them through anything. This is the type of person they want, the type of person the CN will groom.

When Sara dated Timothy, after a year of bliss there began to be issues in the relationship. They both agreed this relationship was worth fighting for, so they decided to go to therapy to figure things out. Sara thought it was amazing he was open to doing that. Most of the guys she had dated before would have never agreed to counseling. She believed it was 1 more impressive thing she had discovered about him.

What she didn’t know was 1 of the worst things you can do is take a CN to therapy, especially in the beginning. Here is why. It’s like a training ground for them. When the counselor tells them what they are doing wrong, how they are hurting you, it shows them which part of their mask is cracking. They learn what you want, & what they need to do to impress you as well as others. They do what the therapists suggest, impressing the target & the therapist. Their heart isn’t in it, but they act like it is. The therapy sessions make you feel even more love & respect for them, once again sealing their image as the perfect mate, ensuring your love & loyalty for a very long time.

They learn your vulnerabilities & insecurities. CNs make sure to build you up & compliment you in these areas. It can feel like they are part of your healing. They will later use what they learn about you to trigger you, manipulate you, control you, & wound you in ways that feel like the biggest betrayal you have ever felt.

They also hook you with sympathy in the beginning. When Sara & Timothy were in therapy, he shared that he had never felt like anyone had really wanted to get to know him, everything about him. He expressed how much he longed to have someone take the time to pursue & love every part of him. This tugged at Sara’s heartstrings. She is a caring woman, full of empathy. These are common traits of targets. She determined she would live her life doing just that. She would whole-heartedly get to know everything about him & love him like he had never experienced. She would give him all the attention he was craving, getting to know him in the way he longed to be known.

She did that for over 25 years. When he would do things that weren’t kind or respectful, she would see him as a wounded man that never got the love he needed & would excuse his behavior over & over because of it. He used her sympathy to control & manipulate her for decades. She would never have tolerated a lot of his behavior if it hadn’t been for the groundwork laid in the love bombing phase. Later, during the discard, Timothy told Sara it was clear to him that she never loved him.

After a survivor has experienced the discard phase & discovers they have been living with a CN for years, they feel embarrassed. *How did I not see this? How did I live with this for so long & be okay with it? What is wrong with me?*

It is important to know these are master manipulators that could fool just about anyone. People who haven’t experienced this will never fully understand. When others hear the stories, they can wonder why the survivor stayed for so long. It all begins with the love bombing stage. It lays the foundation & sets everything in motion.

I also want you to know that all the survivors I interviewed were intelligent people. Many of them were aware of psychological concepts. Some are in the mental health care field themselves. They are tender & have a tremendous amount of empathy. Many of them are also highly intuitive & aware of toxic behavior. They pick up when something is off with others. These are not naïve people. You can be super smart as well as highly aware & still be fooled by a CN.

Don’t feel bad about yourself if you are a survivor. You’ve had enough of someone else making you feel bad about yourself. You are smart. You are strong. You got involved with someone who used your beautiful traits against you. That is not your fault. Millions of people are taken in by CNs. Be extraordinarily kind to yourself.

All the kind words & actions from the CN during the love bombing phase – all the attentiveness, the open communication, the compliments, the ease of it all – sets you up so that when the subtle devaluing begins, you don’t even notice.” – [Mir17, pp. 32–36]

2.2 The Devaluing Phase

“The word “de-value” says it all. At the beginning of a relationship with a covert narcissist, you feel incredibly valued. Then you begin to experience little things, statements they make, looks they give that begin to demean & devalue you. It is all very subtle. Over a long period of time, you are given the message by someone you love & trust that you have to value, no matter what you do, no matter how kind you are, no matter how much you do for them, you will never ever be enough for them. The cold, hard truth is you do not matter to them, & unfortunately, the message you end up receiving is that you do not matter, period.

The confusing thing is, while you are being devalued, you are also experiencing kindness. You receive beautiful love letters, affection, & loving gestures. You continue to believe this is a good relationship, & your partner loves you. You tell everyone around you how lucky you are to have the partner you do because you sincerely believe that. Your friends tell you they wish their husband/wife/partner were more like yours. However, though you are saying all of these things, you don't notice your self-image & self-worth slowly declining over time.

Through the years, you notice your health isn't great, you feel a low level of depression, you aren't that happy, but you contribute these things to other things in life or blame yourself. The way your CN spouse treats you goes unnoticed because it has become your normal. You don't notice the consistent devaluing because it is so subtle, so the connection of how you are feeling in life is not seen as being a result of the trauma of living with an abuser.

Susan thought she had almost the perfect marriage. There were issues in their sex life she could never figure out, but everything else seemed great. They looked like the ideal couple to those around them. Like all victims, the discard phase was incredibly confusing for Susan as well as excruciatingly painful. Her husband of 18 years was suddenly done with her, telling her how happy he was without her, blaming her for all kinds of things. He told her how unhappy he had been the whole time they were married & listed all the ways it was her fault. She was blindsided & looking for answers as to what in the world just happened.

As she learned more about covert narcissism, Susan decided to read through her journals hoping she might see things that would help her make sense of what was happening. She wondered if she would see things in her writings that she wasn't remembering or hadn't noticed. *Had there been devaluing?* She didn't remember any. From her recollection, there hadn't been anything wrong with the marriage except for their sex life, which she had blamed herself for anyway. But when she began reading from the time they met until the end of the relationship, she couldn't believe all she saw with more educated eyes. She was stunned when she read a part of her journal that was written while they were dating that said, *“I'm getting married soon, & I don't know why, but I have this strange fear that I will be taken advantage of & not even see it.”* Her body knew from the very beginning. But like so many other times, she didn't trust it. She explained it away & for the next 18 years, she made countless excuses for his subtly demeaning behavior.

She also couldn't believe how many stories she came across in her journal showing how he had devalued her, sabotaging every vacation, birthday, & most holidays, times that meant something to her. All the stories started about a year after dating. A few months before they were married, she read about a trip he had gone on with a friend. She didn't hear from him for 10 days. Silence. No contact. No explanation. She had written in her journal how it felt like everything was on his time, what worked for him. She had also forgotten that she planned the entire honeymoon without his help & most of the wedding. He wouldn't show up for appointments when he had promised he would. Throughout the marriage, she saw how he did so many subtle acts to make her feel like she was too opinionated, too strong, too loud. He never acknowledged the mother she was, the wife she was, all she did for him & their family. He did not acknowledge any of her accomplishments. She never felt like she did enough to satisfy him. She was stunned as she read her own writings finding story after story of the ways she was devalued for a very long time & didn't see it.

It can be hard for people to understand why someone like Susan would stay with a man that would treat her that way. The love bombing phase is incredibly powerful to the psyche. The devaluing stage is mixed with many loving acts. That's the incredibly confusing part.

At the same time he was devaluing Susan, he was also telling her how beautiful she was, giving her heartfelt cards. They were enjoying times together, laughing about things, going on road trips, talking about their dreams together, bonding over movies, books, & their mutual love of scuba diving. As the years passed, Susan found herself feeling worse about who she was. She was tired a lot, started experiencing allergies she had never had previously, she felt drained; like she didn't have the life inside her she used to have. She never associated these things with her marriage; she thought she just needed to figure out how to find more fulfilling work in her life. Maybe she needed to change how she eats she thought, exercise more. She had gained weight over the years. There were a lot of things to which she attributed the way she felt, but never to her husband.

As she read her journals, she also realized how alone she felt for the majority of the marriage. She would write about how lucky she is to have a husband like she did. However, when she really looked at it, she, in fact, didn't have a partner who really cared about her & wanted the best for her.

This is such a difficult thing to grasp for victims of covert abuse. They convince themselves that the love they feel for their partner is also how their partner feels for them when in fact this is no true, & never was. Covert narcissists are not capable of real love. It was an illusion. That is an incredibly painful & disillusioning realization.

The devaluing stage comes on very subtly. They don't call when they said they would. They don't show up for appointments that they said they would be at. Little acts that always have excuses that give the target the message that they don't matter. They will do things like invite you to dinner; then when you arrive, it feels like they don't really want you there. You feel confused. They use the silent treatment to make you wonder if you are doing something wrong. A CN will control you through their moods, through looks they give you, through statements they make that may not seem like put-downs on the surface, but make you feel bad about yourself. They will say nothing is wrong when it feels to you like something is wrong. During the

devaluing phase, the victims are programmed to not trust themselves.

They will also devalue you by letting you think something is your fault when it is actually their issue. This is called *projection*. They project what is true about them onto you & you end up taking the blame without even noticing. The emotional needs of the victim are not of importance to the CN. Only the CN's desires, needs, or priorities matter to them.

It is also quite common for the victim to become responsible for everything. E.g., CN's don't like to help around the house. They will, but the target will feel their anger & irritation. After time, the victim learns it's just easier to do things on his or her own & to not ask for their help. The CN does not want to give in the relationship, only receive.

The mixed messages you get from a CN wreak havoc on your heart, mind, & body. They love bomb you & devalue you interchangeably for years. It is hard to make sense of because you have a solid belief that this person loves you & wants the best for you. The devaluing is often so subtle you don't notice yourself slowly declining inside as time goes by. Your self-worth & confidence are diminished as well as your physical body feeling more tired than normal. You slowly forget the free spirit you used to be & attribute things you are feeling to circumstances outside your relationship.

Targets receive lots of messages about themselves from the CN. Some they say right to your face while others you receive from the CN's actions, looks they give, deafening silence, the quiet rage emanating from them.

Real love never has mixed messages, & when the final discard happens, the truth comes out about the CN that had been disguised for years." – [Mir17, pp. 36–40]

2.3 The Discard

"This phase feels like the most confusing painful betrayal you've ever felt in your life. The person you have loved for years & who you believed loved you back is now saying the cruelest things you would have never imagined possible. They are treating you like a child, teaching you, punishing you, & telling you how you should be behaving. Every vulnerable thing you shared over the years with them is now being used to wound you in the most devastating way. They are lashing out at you with what feels like a fire hose of insults. Sometimes they are calm & sound rational. Other times they are rattling off a slew of words that make absolutely no sense but are delivering them like they are the most normal thinking on the planet. They are also mixing in words of love & affection. Then in the next breath, they are telling you how vile you are & how done with you they are. You have no idea who this person is. This is nowhere near who you thought you had been living with all these years. You are left reeling.

They paint a false reality & say things about you that simply aren't true, but you question yourself wondering if they are right, because they sound so confident, act like they know more than you, & you feel like you can't think straight. They twist your words & confuse you with strange thinking. This leaves you questioning & doubting yourself constantly. You feel weak, confused, & incredibly fearful about your future. You feel very alone.

This is the time when most survivors hear someone tell them their spouse/partner sounds like or might be a narcissist. Sometimes this happens in therapy, in a meeting with a divorce attorney, during a search on the Internet when you are trying to figure out what is happening, or in talking to a friend. You find yourself spending all your free time watching YouTube videos, reading books & articles, seeking answers, & trying to make sense of this dizzying treatment you are experiencing.

You also find yourself spying on your spouse/partner when you never have considered doing this earlier in the relationship. You are reading their emails, checking bank statements, wondering if they are having an affair. You are asking them questions, & they are not giving you answers that make any sense. In fact, they are usually taking your words & turning them against you to show you all the things that are "wrong" with you. They are defensive & angry. Then they are calm & void of feeling.

This is a crazy-making time for so many reasons, 1 of which is the vast difference in how you feel vs. how the CN feels. You are devastated. You are crying, curled up in the fetal position. They are done. They move out quickly. You are trying to find answers. They are not. You are deeply sad. They are letting you know they are the happiest they've ever been now that they aren't with you.

Many times they initiate the discard during a time that is special to you, or in a place that means a lot to you. They like to sabotage dates & places that mean something to you. Bill told me his wife of 26 years told him she was done being married to him on his birthday. After years of telling him how handsome he was, how much she loved him, how amazing he was, she told him, *"I have never fully trusted you! Most women should have never lasted this long with you. I can't believe you haven't gotten therapy for your issues after all these years!"* She kept going with a long list of other shocking & devastating words.

Similarly, when Karen's husband told her he wasn't sure if he wanted to be married to her anymore out of the blue after 17 years of being together, they were at her family's lake house where she had always felt the most safe & at peace growing up.

For many victims, the discard phase is the end of the relationship. Others experience a confusing cycle of breaking ups & getting back together several times over years of dating a covert narcissist. I spoke with targets that had been in relationships like these for over 10 years.

During the discard phase, you feel very low about yourself. The CN paints a picture of you that is not accurate, but they make you feel like it is. There are enough grains of truth mixed in with bizarre distortions of reality that make you wonder if they are right about you. It is an incredibly confusing time. The CN also becomes more aggressive with their words & actions than you've seen before, but once again, you are the only one that sees this side of them.

The discard phase is sudden & harsh. When they are done, they move on quickly & usually go right to another target. This is a stark contrast to how you feel. You are falling apart. You never expected this seemingly good marriage to ever end. While you are devastated at the thought of a relationship ending with someone you called your lover & best friend, the CN is not falling apart. They are bizarrely calm & rational. You don't see them feeling sad. You feel their rage as it is directed at you, but they are not experiencing devastation & sadness, which makes you feel even crazier.

Sam & his CN partner, Adam, had been together for over 15 years. They were both spiritual thinkers. They had met at a yoga retreat & bonded over their similar thinking on life. After years of passivity, seeming so laid back & easy going, Adam became verbally abusive during the discard phase. There would be days when Sam would receive lists from his partner about everything that has wrong with him & would need to change for this relationship to work. Then the next day Adam would ask Sam if he wanted a foot massage, & would calmly tell him he was just flowing with the Universe, trusting the process. When Adam moved out of the house, he would lambaste Sam with abusive emails; then a few hours later would send an email thanking Sam for how well he had loved him all those years. A CN's behavior in this place can be very manic. You don't know what you are going to get from moment to moment.

This may happen while you are still living with your CN partner. *"I wish I could get rid of this anger & resentment I feel toward you,"* Don said to Emily with concern on his face, then seconds later in a fit of rage, he yelled at her for ruining every friendship he had ever had in his life! Later, he brought home dinner for her & their kids & asked if she'd like him to make her favorite tea at bedtime.

Blind-sided, shell-shocked, dazed, & confused are some other ways to describe this time. They cut you off quickly & heartlessly. The ironic thing is the CN usually initiates the end of the relationship, but it is often the survivor that actually files for divorce. The CN wants to be liked, to be seen as the victim, not the one who destroyed a family. They want people to feel sorry for them & see you as the one to blame. How they look to others is their top priority.

The CN will blame you for just about anything & everything. Back to the last example, Emily counted over 30 things Don had told her she would need to change about herself for the marriage to work. The thing you start noticing when you become aware of the issues with the CN is that most of what they say about you is actually a projection of what is true of them.

After reading about this phase, you may identify that you are experiencing the discard phase right now. For many survivors, this is the time of avid research on the subject of narcissism. So many others are experiencing what you are at this moment. It's empowering & helpful to realize this. You are in the company of some amazing people just like yourself that are also looking for answers/

You may be feeling shocked, fully of anxiety, alone, depressed. You may be having suicidal thoughts, your body may feel like it's deteriorating, & it's really hard to focus at a time when you are making big decisions. You may be feeling reactive & impulsive. It's probably been a while since you were able to get a good night sleep. This is all so common.

You have been through a lot & are still in the thick of it. You will get through this. You are in the right place, & will someday see things clearly. Breathe. Reach out to friends & family who love you. Keep learning. Join a support group. Give yourself permission to have times of falling apart. Hire a good attorney who knows about narcissism if this is a divorce situation for you. Above all know that you deserve kindness & respect.

I will talk more in-depth about what it is like to divorce a CN in a later chapter & also more about their traits & ways they manipulate & control. Before I do that I want to talk about you – the target, the victim, & the survivor.

Let's talk about beautiful & valuable you." – [Mir17, pp. 40–45]

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.” – [Mir17, pp. 46–50]

4 Traits of a Covert Narcissist

“The DSM-IV gives us a list of core traits of narcissists. However, there are other traits I have found to be common in covert narcissists.

Before I list them, it is important to note that there is a spectrum with narcissists. On a scale from 1–10, you may have a CN in your life that is lower on the spectrum. They may exhibit a few of these traits. It’s also possible that you may know a CN that fits almost all, if not all of them. Narcissists can also be a combination of covert & overt.” – [Mir17, p. 51]

4.1 They Do Not Have a Strong Sense of Self

“They don’t have a solid identity, a knowing of who they are. If you think of certain people in your life that you know well, you would probably have a lot to say to describe them. They are distinguishable. With CNs, the description seems more generic. *“They are really nice,”* or *“They are easy to get along with,”* are common descriptions, but it rarely goes further than that. There is a feeling of, *“Who are they really?”* If you look at CNs, you will notice a hollow feeling about them, almost vacant. They can feel like a shell of a person.

They can often be chameleons, becoming the people they are around.

It’s common for a survivor to talk about the beginning stages of their relationship & say how amazingly similar they were. Then, after the discard when the CN begins dating someone else, they begin to become just like their new target.” – [Mir17, p. 51]

4.2 Silent Rage

“CNs have a lot of rage inside them. They may not yell, or get violent, but you can feel their quiet rage. They mask it around others, but when you live with them, it can feel like being next to a dormant volcano that could erupt at any moment. Their rage controls the climate of the home & keeps people feeling like they are walking on eggshells. This is 1 way they maintain control of people close to them.

This type of action immediately resonated for Mary. Over the years, she would ask her husband, *“Are you okay? You seem angry.”* He would respond by saying calmly, *“No. Just tired.”* Then he would stay quiet while Mary would wonder who to trust: her own instincts or his word. Her body could feel his anger, but why would he lie? She chose to trust him & ignore her own feelings. This is part of gaslighting (will discuss further in the next chapter) & other manipulative tools used to get the victim to slowly, after time, believe the CN over their own inner guidance.

Many victims told me they felt responsible for their CN spouse’s or parent’s anger. They get the unspoken (& sometimes spoken) message they are the cause for the CN’s rage. This could not be further from the truth, but it is what the CN wants the victim to believe.” – [Mir17, pp. 51–52]

4.3 Lying

“CNs are incredibly good at hiding & masking their lies. Many victims find it hard to believe they ever heard lies from their CN. CNs rarely seem like people who would lie. They come across as dependable & trustworthy. Targets in relationships with CNs often feel they have open communication about everything. However, toward the end of the relationship, they start noticing things that make them wonder.

During the discard phase, the targets find themselves spying on their partners, which is something they would have never dreamed of doing before investigating this behavior. Reading texts & emails late at night, they begin to uncover things their CN has not shared & sometimes catching them in outright lies.

If a target brings any of this to the CN’s attention, the CN will find a way to turn it around & make something the target’s fault. Since the unwavering trust has been built over time even the most bizarre excuse from the CN makes the victim still consider their explanation. It’s so hard for them to imagine their partner would lie after years of seeing them as trustworthy.

Toward the end of her marriage, Valerie started feeling strange about a friendship her husband, Jack, was having with a guy he had just met. She was happy for him, but at the same time it seemed & felt odd. E.g., they would go on late night walks together. Sometimes he wouldn’t get back home until 3 o’clock in the morning. They would send each other pictures of themselves. Jack would get really giddy every time he got to see his new friend. There were days he would ask Valerie if she could leave the house so he could have some quiet time to himself. She would & later found out he used that time to have lunch with his friend.

During this time, Jack was pulling more & more away from Valerie & their kids. She was concerned & mentioned it to him. She got the courage in 1 conversation to ask if he had romantic feelings for his new friend. She told him it was okay if he did; in fact, it would help make sense of things in their marriage. The dormant volcano exploded, hurling accusations at her, saying she had ruined every male friendship he had ever had & now she was ruining this one.

Weeks went by, & Valerie came across an email from the friend to her husband that said, *“When are you coming over? My dick isn’t going to suck itself.”* She showed Jack the email. He brushed it off saying, *“Oh, that was just us messing with you because we were angry at what you were insinuating.”*

To the outside world, it was obvious what was occurring, but Valerie had been with Jack for long & had never known him to lie. She accepted his explanation. She had gotten so used to accepting things being her fault that she didn’t recognize what was right in front of her or acknowledge that even if he was telling the truth, that was an incredibly cruel, immature, & disrespectful act. He also never once addressed her feelings. They did not matter to him. She didn’t notice this because she had lived with subtle messages that she did not matter & was not worthy of respect for a very long time.

When a CN lies & you confront them about it, they will not acknowledge your feelings as would happen in a healthy relationship. They will never put themselves in your shoes. Instead, they will deflect, so the negative attention gets turned

around on you & off of them. They will blame you for their bad behavior ... “you made me do it, you drove me to it, this is your fault ...” – [Mir17, pp. 52–54]

4.4 Hoovering

“Hoovering is a technique used by some CNs to make it hard for victims to move on. It is how they pull their targets back into their sphere of influence.

I spoke with several men & women who were in relationships that would have a long cycle of breaking ups & getting back together. This was the case with Rose. As soon as she would pull back from the relationship, the CN would pursue her more. He would apologize, explain away his hurtful behavior in terms that made sense to her & even triggered her compassionate heart. He would be loving, tender, saying everything she was longing to hear.

He was romantic & thoughtful. In her mind, she felt like she was seeing the real man return, the one with whom she fell in love & believed with all her heart. She felt loved & relieved; she took him back. Things were great for a while – until the cycle began again. He would start to be distant, pulling away, acting in ways that confused her, doing passive aggressive things that devalued her; she would pull away, rethink things, & he would come back as prince charming again ...

CNs observe you, groom you, they know exactly what you need to hear to get you back. It’s all about control for them.” – [Mir17, p. 54]

4.5 Constant Criticism

“CNs will constantly criticize & judge you. Because they are covert, this will be done in ways that are not always obvious. This enables them to control you as your self-worth slowly declines. Over time, this works on your sense of value. You end up seeing yourself as being not lovable, not wanted, & either too much or not enough.

They will judge you & put you down for the strangest things. Emma said her mom would make underhanded comments to her siblings often about how Emma doesn’t like to stand for long periods of time. In another example, Marcy’s ex-spouse would give her “construction criticism” because he was “concerned” about the way she dressed & presented herself.

The constant criticism chips away at your sense of who you are, resulting in you believing the CN is superior & knows more than you, creating an unhealthy dependence on him or her. This greatly weakens you over time & makes you vulnerable to their manipulation tactics.

Their criticism of you increases & becomes more blatant when you begin to stand up for yourself.” – [Mir17, pp. 54–55]

4.6 Jealousy

“Sam’s CN parner never said he was jealous of him, but Sam would feel like things were different when he started experiencing more success & happiness in his life. He started noticing that his partner wouldn’t have big reactions when Sam would tell him exciting things that were happening in his life. His partner would become more withdrawn & disengage from him.

Sally’s mom would sabotage times Sally had with her friends. She was so excited to meet a group of girls after they moved to a new town. 1 night, she had a sleepover, & her mom made it awkward & uncomfortable. Then she would ground Sally for unreasonable things to keep her away from her new friends.

Many survivors have a hard time explaining how their CN was jealous of them. It’s more of a feeling they gathered when they lived with them. Narcissists are deeply unhappy people. They get jealous of you when you are experiencing life & happiness. They do not want you to be happy & strong as those feelings threaten their ability to control you.” – [Mir17, p. 55]

4.7 They Project Their Own Issues on to You

“If you think about all the things the CN in your life has told you that are wrong with you, my hunch is if you really look at the list most of the statements are actually true of them. CNs don’t acknowledge their own issues. Instead, they project them on to you. This means you end up feeling guilt & shame for things that are not even your issues.

Amy put some of her & her husband’s joint savings into a real estate business venture. She spent a lot of time & effort on this project for over a year. At 1st, things were going well for her, then the market crashed. She lost the money she had used to fund the project & had to take more money out of their account to cover the loss. She was devastated. This was the 1st time she had done anything like that. It took courage, research, & many hours of labor on her part. The work she did was amazing, but in her eyes, she failed. She felt she had failed her family. She cried on & off for weeks feeling so guilty she had done this. Her husband didn’t yell at her, didn’t say hurtful things; instead, he said nothing. He was punishing her through silence. Without saying a word, he was saying volumes. She never took a risk like that again.

A healthy, loving, empathetic man would have said something like,

“So it didn’t work out this time. You did an amazing job. I’m so impressed with what you were able to accomplish! You’ve learned a lot. You know what to do & not do now, so go out there & find another investment. I know this one will be a success. You’ll do great.”

This response would have changed everything for her – to be seen, believed in, & respected. Instead she sobbed, felt so much guilt, & experienced shame; clearly, the message from her CN was that she made terrible decisions, wasn’t good with money, & should never think about doing anything like that again.

She was able to see later that the truth was her husband was actually not good with money & had made terrible decisions, losing money himself. He was projecting his own issue with money on to her. He had manipulated her for years, leading her to believe she was terrible with money, so she didn't notice that this was actually more his issue than hers. The way he went about giving her this message was so covert she took the shame & blame for years without seeing the truth.

Toward the end of these relationships, the CN will be more direct about what they think of you. Here are some common things I have heard survivors say they have been told by their CN: *You are controlling, manipulative, inconsiderate; you don't care about my feelings; you are lazy; it's all about you; I can't trust you; you only did that so you would look good to others.* Notice a pattern here? These are all traits of narcissists. They don't take responsibility for their own behavior. Instead, they project what is true about them on to you.

Another way they do this is by sharing their "fears" with you. *"I'm afraid you are going to cheat on me."* Later, you find out they had an affair. *"I have this fear that you are manipulating me."* They are the one manipulating you. CNs will manipulate you by putting the focus on you. They seem completely sincere, so you don't notice these are actually their issues.

They will say things like, *"I am taking responsibility for my part of this, but you aren't taking any."* This makes you wonder if this is true. You question yourself. *Maybe I'm not. Am I?* They throw curve balls at you all the time in order to deflect the truth that they are lying. They do it in a way that gets you spinning & self-doubting, so you don't notice the lie. They are kings & queens of saying things that aren't true, but they say them with such surety & confidence, it's hard to doubt them. No wonder you end up doubting yourself with all the smoke & mirrors to keep you confused & under their control.

There is also something else that happens, especially if you are empathic in a relationship with a CN. You find yourself feeling things that you later notice are gone after you don't live with them anymore.

Megan had a lot of self-hatred while she was married to a CN. She would take pictures of her body to be a reminder of how much she hated the way she looked. Megan would look at the pictures & feel disgust as well as anger at herself for gaining weight over the years. This was a way of punishing herself. After 15 years of marriage, the CN left. Soon after he did, she noticed her self-hatred was gone. She is the type of person who easily picks up on what others are feeling & wondered if she had actually been feeling the CN's self-hatred, which had nothing to do with her. He never let on how much he hated himself, but subconsciously projected his issue onto her. He knew about the pictures, but never took the time to hold her, to tell her how beautiful she was. He never felt sorrow for her pain, never felt empathy. He allowed her to believe the lies of self-hatred." – [Mir17, pp. 55–58]

4.8 Their Words Don't Match Their Actions

"When Bonnie was in mediation trying to agree on a parenting plan with her CN husband Charles, he kept telling his attorney & the mediator how much he wanted the best for his kids, how much he cared about them, & how concerned he was with the way Bonnie parented them. His attorney would tell the mediator compassionately, *"He's just trying to do the right thing."* Then he asked for the least amount of time commitment possible to see his kids. Bonnie told me he sees his kids an average of 1 meal a week & continues to tell her how terrible a parent she is. A CN's hypocrisy can last for years after the marriage has ended. Soon after our conversation, Bonnie called me to tell me she had just received an email from her ex-husband after being divorced for 5 years. Still continuing to only see their kids 1 meal a week, the message said he & his girlfriend were working really hard to undo the terrible job Bonnie is doing as a parent.

CNs are such convincing people that it is easy to just listen to their words & not notice their actions or lack thereof. This is especially true in the area of intimacy where they know they have a tremendous amount of power to manipulate.

When Ann was married to Tim, their sex life was confusing, which is very common in relationships with CNs. She had absolutely no sex drive or desire to be with him & couldn't figure out why (her body knew she wasn't safe with him). She felt terrible that she was depriving him & he, of course, would let her know often how hard this was for him. Thinking something was wrong with her, she tried therapy, hormones, dietary changes, & read sex books over the years they were together. Nothing changed. She felt so much guilt & shame. Her husband was very passive about it, waiting for her to fix herself. At the end of the marriage, he yelled at her by saying she had never tried & how much he had. This wasn't true, but she felt even more shame hearing his words, somehow believing that he had tried when in fact he had done nothing, putting it all on her. He had spent their years together letting her take the blame, not admitting his own sexual issues, not caring about her feelings, & not helping in any way. His lack of actions went unnoticed, & his words damaged what she thought was true about her. It turned out the problems were actually true about him since he had unresolved sexual issues he projected onto her. A CN's words are a way of distracting you so you don't notice how their actions don't match." – [Mir17, pp. 58–59]

4.9 They Are Emotionally Disconnected

"It is difficult to have a real connection with a CN. This can be a trait that is hard to put in words because it's something you feel inside you when you are around someone but have a difficult time explaining it. Something just feels off about them, but you can't put your finger on it.

There is almost a robotic feeling about CNs like they are scripted. They are so used to being chameleons, posing as someone they are not, it's like their real self is unattainable. Thinking about it another way, healthy people feel & express their thoughts & emotions in a genuine way. CNs tell you what they think you want to hear in order to achieve their agenda.

You think they are connecting with you when both of you are talking about feelings, but when you really look at your history, you were the one carrying the connection. Because they don't have a strong sense of self, they are not able to connect with anyone on a deep level. They will have times of opening up, sharing what they are feeling, but it feels different than when you talk to someone who is connected with who they are, someone who is genuine & real with no agenda.

CNs will cry or rage during times that seem over the top. Annie's partner would get irate when his sports team would lose on TV. His mood would be affected for the next couple days. But when Annie almost lost her life, he seemed indifferent, annoyed that he had to take care of her during her recovery from a car accident. It's like their emotions are displaced because they are so disconnected with who they are. This characteristic makes them dangerous individuals because they have the capacity to hurt you & others without feeling remorse.

The fundamental part of human connection is to be able to feel with each other. Without that, there is no possibility of a relationship with real depth & authentic love. This makes it very confusing when they act like they care, but in fact actually don't. Because they are emotionally disconnected, they are unable to experience deep intimacy & will always leave you feeling void of real connection." – [Mir17, pp. 59–60]

4.10 Flying Monkeys

"This is a phrase used to describe people in the narcissist's life that act on their behalf. They are the CN's biggest fans that have a solid belief the narcissist is the victim, & you are to blame for a multitude of things.

These people add to the already overwhelming hurt caused by a CN. They will do things like smear your name to others, send you scathing emails telling you how you are to blame for everything, testify against you in court, & sabotage you in any way they can. A CN brings you to a place where you doubt yourself; the flying monkeys add to this since they are also telling you things that are "wrong" with you as well. This compounds the self-doubt, confusion, & crazy-making behavior you already have from the narcissist.

Flying monkeys are the narcissist's enablers, their loyal team of supporters. Many times these people do not know what they are doing. They believe whole-heartedly in the CN just like you did for years. They are being fed very convincing lies just like you were. CNs are master manipulators, & their flying monkeys are often additional victims of their deception." – [Mir17, pp. 60–61]

4.11 They Take Credit for Your Ideas

"Samantha didn't think much of it at 1st when she would whisper a funny comment into her husband's ears, & he would immediately repeat what she said to people around them enjoying the laughter & attention. She enjoyed providing him with an experience that felt good to him. She enjoyed that he thought her comment was funny enough to share. But year after year of him doing this & never giving her the credit felt odd.

This is also a very common trait seen in the work place between co-workers. It adds to a CN's main foal of putting as much attention & accolades on themselves while giving the target the message they are unimportant, only there for the CN, & not worthy of praise or attention." – [Mir17, p. 61]

4.12 They Withhold Praise & Recognition

"When Annie was researching & learning more about cover narcissism, she found herself recalling events in her marriage that she had forgotten about & now saw them in a different light. 1 day while clearing out her garage, she came across a painting she had created years ago. She looked at it & realized her husband had never said a word about it. Her friends & family had raved about it, saying she should do an art show. They were amazed at her talent. Annie began to think through all of her accomplishments over the 19-year marriage & realized that not once had her husband said, *"Wow. That's amazing! I'm so impressed!"*

On the other hand, she recalled all the times she had given him praise, complimented him, & told him how impressed she was at things he had done. She had always supported & encouraged him.

When you study narcissism, you start noticing abuse behavior you had missed. What often goes unnoticed is what wasn't there.

It was an eye-opening realization to Jen that not 1 time in 25 years did her CN husband ever recognize & acknowledge the great job she had done as a mom to their children, all the times she volunteered to help people in need, & the way she had always taken care of things to ease his load. Instead, she felt like whatever she did was never enough.

Since interviewing people who have experienced the targeting of covert narcissism, I decided to also talk to women & men who are married to healthy, normal spouses. When you are so used to the illusion of love it is helpful as you are healing to see what the real thing looks like. It was always the same story I heard from them. So much praise. Liz has been married for 25 years to her husband & said anytime she has accomplished anything or helped him out in any way he always praises her, thanks her, & appreciates her. He lets her know often how grateful he is for her. This does not happen in a relationship with a covert narcissist. You get the message you don't matter.

Connie had moved every couple years during her 15-year marriage to Dave because of his job as a sports coach. She had been a stay at home mom taking care of their 3 kids through all the moves. She had been flexible & adapted to change well, making the best of things. Dave was gone a lot during their years together, so she took care of things at home while he was away, so he was able to move up in his career without worrying about things at home. He never once told her how much he appreciated all she did, recognizing that she could have pursued her own career. After their divorce, he told her he never needed her. She had nothing to do with helping him get where he was in his career, that he could have just hired a nanny. Another cruel & heartless message from the narcissist – you are easily replaceable.

CNs are not interested in building you up as a person, in seeing you happy, in praising you or recognizing all you do. A relationship with a CN must be all about them. When it stops being that way, they have no more use for you & move onto their next target.” – [Mir17, pp. 61–62]

4.13 They Sabotage Birthdays, Holidays, Vacations, & Meaningful Dates

“Whenever I ask survivors what their birthdays & holidays were like with their CN, the answer is always the same. Across the board, whether the abuser was a parent or a romantic partner, they all describe these special dates as being terrible.

“I can’t even tell you what was wrong each birthday. I just remember calling my best friend almost every year crying. I never felt like I had a reason to cry. He always did something, gave me a gift, but it felt like he dreaded that day & never enjoyed celebrating me. I would usually end up apologizing for something. It felt like something was always my fault.”

“My mom always made a big deal of my birthday, but I hated that day. It was all about her. The parties were lavish. Everyone was always so impressed by them, but I would hear my mom complaining about how much work she had put into it. She would talk about the homemade cake she made & how expensive everything was & how hard I was to shop for. It was exhausting, & I felt like I was the cause of her stress. I would try to help, but it was never enough.”

“Christmas always felt like a struggle. He became depressed every year. I felt bad because he would tell me how he missed the magic of his childhood Christmases & he felt sad every year that he didn’t feel that same feeling. I would try to make it beautiful & magical & special, but his mood never changed. Then he would say things to me that gave me the message I was doing things wrong. It was exhausting.”

CNs are very passive. They put the responsibility on you to make sure they are happy & blame you when they’re not.

“He was a nightmare on every vacation. I did everything, planned everything, tried to make it enjoyable for all of us, but no matter what, he would be moody, irritable, & grumpy the whole time. He would sulk & complain about the littlest things. We would be in the most beautiful places, & he would find something that would make him angry. I somehow felt like it was my fault, feeling responsible for his unhappiness.”

Narcissists do not like to celebrate you. They do not like it when you are happy. They want the attention on them, so they sabotage days & events that are special to you like Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Holidays, Birthdays, even anniversaries of people you were close to you that have passed away. They do this through their moods, by complaining, making you feel bad about something, anything. They make it about them in all kinds of ways.

There are so many examples of this dampening effect. In 1 example, Jeanine loved to travel. It was the 1 thing in her life that gave her the most joy. She came to life every time she was able to explore new places, visit friends, & have new experiences. 1 day, her husband sat her down & broke the news to her. He told her he had just talked to a psychic about her & the psychic said she was traveling too much.

They will go to bizarre measures to sabotage you & keep you from enjoying your life. When you start doing things you want to do, things that delight you they lose control of you & don’t have the power to keep you down. They use whatever means they have to punish you & keep you contained.” – [Mir17, pp. 63–64]

4.14 They Belittle You & “Teach You Lessons”

“CNs will belittle you in ways that are indirect & sometimes not noticeable. There is an overall message from them that they know more than you & you are not doing it right. This gets more aggressive during the discard phase.

This can look like advice they give you or “constructive criticism.” This can be especially cloaked when they are parents. They come across like they are just trying to help guide you, but you leave feeling disempowered & scared of life, believing you don’t have what it takes to figure things out. You get the subtle message you are doing things wrong, but it comes in the form of “concern for you.” You feel the life go out of you & you don’t know why.

During the discard phase, Jeanine’s husband moved out of the house, closed their bank accounts without telling her, & met her to discuss how money was going to work from that point forward. She was a stay at home mom taking care of 3 kids, completely dependent on his income. He told her how much he would send her each month. She told him that was less than half of what she usually needs for her & the kids. He told her the same psychic that had previously said she traveled too much also told him that Jeanine had come to this planet to learn how to work hard & not to expect others to support her. So, he was “helping her” learn her lesson by keeping the money from her.

Similarly, Mary remembers times her CN would become super nice to people when she was being direct & bold with them. He was letting her know indirectly that her behavior was too much as he tried to counteract her strength. He would also gently put his hand on her back to steer her away from them, to stop her from talking. This furthered the message that it was not okay for her to stand up to people. He was more concerned about what the other people thought than he was about standing by & supporting her. He was “teaching” her how to behave.

The way CNs belittle spouses who have stuck by them for years, been faithful to them, & loved them is appalling, disturbing, & inhumane. Survivors often feel like prisoners in their own home during the later stages of the relationship. They are told what they should & should not be doing & treated like children who need guidance. It is so upsetting to see these good-hearted people in front of me breaking down as they tell me story after story of demeaning treatment they have received by someone who they thought loved them.” – [Mir17, pp. 64–65]

4.15 They Are Self-focused & Emotionally Immature

“It’s been remarkable to hear so many stories of the self-centered & emotionally immature behaviors of CN parents. Here are 3 examples that may resonate with your own experiences.

Bill’s wife had issues with alcohol abuse. She had sought treatment for it & learned different tools to help herself. She would get frustrated with her teenage kids when they didn’t understand her process & wanted them to be more enthusiastic about her healing. *“They need to understand what I’m going through!”* she would tell Bill. She favored 1 child because she listened to her problems & alienated the other ones who didn’t want to hear.

Catherine’s husband loved the movie Phenomenon. He was upset at his teenage daughter because he kept trying to get her to watch it with him & she kept turning him down. He wanted her to get into his world, to see what he was passionate about. She never felt like watching the movie with him. He was very upset & asked Catherine to talk to their daughter about this for him.

Jen’s husband barely spent time with their kids after the divorce. His son kept trying to get together with him, but each time his dad turned him down with some excuse. 1 day, their son won free tickets to a movie. He was so excited & asked his dad if he could take him. He told him he couldn’t because he was going to see the Dodgers play with Sara (his new target). Their son told him he was frustrated & disappointed that he didn’t see him very much. Exasperated his dad told their son,

“Look; you have to understand I have a lot of people I need to take care of. I’m an uncle, a boyfriend, a brother, a son, & I have things to do. & aren’t you excited for me that I get to see The Dodgers?!”

Everything truly is about them, & the ways in which they show this to their kids is appalling.” – [Mir17, pp. 65–66]

4.16 There Are Always Strings Attached

“When they do something nice for you, it doesn’t feel like unconditional love, like they just enjoy treating you because it makes you happy. It feels like there are strings attached & you will need to pay them back later in some way.

The same is true of gifts they give you. It never feels like they had so much fun looking for you & feel so much delight in giving you gifts. It feels like it was a drudgery to them, & you better know how much trouble it caused them, & you better feel bad, & you better give back to them in whatever ways they demand later – & you better take care of their feelings after they went to so much trouble.

This applies to times they show loving acts to you, like holding the door open, rubbing your feet, listening to you, doing nice things. It all feels like it will come back to bite you & be used against you in some way if you don’t cater to them. It doesn’t feel like clean love. It doesn’t feel like it comes from someone who cherishes you & enjoys loving you.

In a normal relationship, there is a natural back & forth that happens. With CNs, the rules are different. It is all about them in every area. This is a 1-way relationship.” – [Mir17, pp. 66–67]

4.17 They Use People

“CNs use people to get what they want. You can feel it when they act like they are listening to someone. It doesn’t feel genuine. They don’t feel fully engaged; like they are really there with the person.

Sometimes they talk to people to gain information from them, sometimes to get sympathy, other times to help them get where they want to be in their career. Another motivation is to get people on their side as is the case with their flying monkeys.

If you want to see covert narcissism in action, watch the television series House of Cards. I spoke to 1 target that woke up to the fact that her boyfriend was a CN by watching a scene in a movie. Film can be a helpful medium. At the end of S1.E3, Frank Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey) is manipulating a couple who have just lost their child. He comes across like he cares about them tremendously, but in fact, he is just trying to further his political agenda. Toward the end of his manipulative conversation with them where he is trying to gain their trust, he looks at the camera to reveal what he is really thinking & says, *“What you have to understand about my people is that they are a noble people. Humility is their form of pride. It is their strength. It is their weakness. & if you can humble yourself before them, they will do anything you ask . . .”*

He didn’t care about their hearts, their grief. He was out for himself, & he was using innocent people to get there. That is what CNs do. Their motives are not pure. Their lack of empathy results in a lack of conscience. People are in their lives to be used, not loved.” – [Mir17, p. 67]

4.18 They Are Dizzying Conversationalists

“Once their mask has begun to crack, & their deplorable behavior starts to be more pronounced, you experience conversations with them that leave you feeling confused, muddled, & exhausted. You find yourself questioning reality & your own sanity.

They throw a conglomeration of words your way that makes you feel jumbled & shaken inside. You feel like your forehead is in a perpetually confused position. You feel like screaming, wondering what in the world is happening. At the same time, they have the appearance of a normal human being that is making complete & total sense.

Before you realize they are a narcissist, you see them as a normal person with empathy, someone who doesn’t manipulate. You trust their words are coming from a place of love. You give them the benefit of the doubt, & essentially project your own good qualities onto them. So when they hurl a bunch of words at you with statements that wound, confuse, & sound right as well as totally wrong at the same time, it is extraordinarily crazy-making.” – [Mir17, p. 68]

4.19 They Create Drama

“CNs get energy from drama. They create it when it doesn’t need to be there. They are not interested in creating & promoting harmony or peace. They like to do things to keep you rattled, trying to get you to become unglued. This is done through initiating gossip, planting seeds in someone else’s ears to direct them to think differently about you. Some CNs will even reach out to your friends or family to try to convince them that you are at fault, unstable, a liar & manipulator, extending their projections to others hoping to drain you of your emotional support. They will send you a rage-filled email or text out of the blue to get a rise out of you. They will have 1 of their flying monkeys make a passive aggressive comment on a post you made online. They will subscribe to your YouTube Channel or follow you on Instagram or SnapChat to let you know they are still watching you. It’s downright creepy.

Some will take you to court, mediation, or an arbitrator as much as they possibly can. It’s strange how much time & energy they spend on trying to make your life as miserable as possible. This will still happen to some survivors years after a separation or divorce. The ironic thing is many of them will talk about how they hate drama. They will put others down for being dramatic, even telling others how dramatic you are. Be aware that this is yet another projection.

They also have a remarkable way of acting completely innocent as they bring pain to others through causing confusing & dissension.” – [Mir17, pp. 68–69]

4.20 They Don’t Make Love; They Take It

“I have yet to hear a survivor say sex with a narcissist felt like love. Not all sexual experiences look the same among victims, but they all have the same theme. It’s all about the CN. Sex is supposed to be a beautiful bonding experience where both people feel loved & cherished. It is a way of expressing your love for your partner, a chance to give each other pleasure, enjoying each other. Just like a relationship with a CN, sex with them is a 1-sided experience.

There is so much to say about this topic that I have dedicated an entire chapter to this subject. I spoke with so many women & men who found this area of their relationship to be so confusing & damaging. It is important to talk about it since there is so much shame involved. Most survivors stay quiet because of the embarrassment they feel.” – [Mir17, p. 69]

4.21 They Are Not Protective

“A CN cares more about what others think than protecting you. Some men & women have that beautiful protective quality for their loved ones. This is absent with a CN.

If someone criticizes you, a CN won’t come to your defense. They will either stay quiet or in passive-aggressive ways suggest to you the criticism might be correct. When you defend yourself, the CN will tell you things like, “*You are not open to people’s opinions,*” “*you are stubborn,*” “*you can’t handle the truth,*” etc.

Many people with whom I spoke who had CN parents or spouses said they felt emotionally unprotected by these people, they felt alone in these relationships. Often a CN will stay quiet when someone hurts you, which makes you question yourself.

Sherry had an experience where someone was verbally abusive to her. She was understandably upset. Her CN husband was there & did nothing to defend her. Instead, they went out to dinner with a group of people that included the man who had been verbally abusive. Sherry felt completely uncomfortable. Her CN knew this & talked to the other people at dinner, including the abuser, as if nothing had happened. Without saying it, her husband gave her clear messages that she was not worthy of respect & kindness, her feelings didn’t matter, & she was alone in this relationship.” – [Mir17, pp. 69–70]

4.22 They Create Stories in Their Head

“CNs will tell you stories that have no basis in reality that will boggle your mind. They will create these tales & accuse you of things that are not even close to the truth. They will presume to know exactly what you are thinking & your motives behind your actions. Because we think of them as being normal for so long & loving us as we loved them, it is a strange thing to witness your spouse or parent not knowing who you are, not having an accurate picture of someone they have lived with for years, sometimes decades.

Torrey was excited when she saw how far she had come as she looked at her ex CN spouse at a local event. She had felt a lot of anxiety leading up to the day knowing she would see him. She hadn’t seen him for years since trying to have no contact & had always felt weak, flustered, & angry in his presence since the divorce. At 1st, she was rattled at the site of him, but as time passed, she found herself actually feeling love for him. After all the cruelty she had experienced, she was surprised & pleased to feel love. She had done a lot of healing work on herself & felt relieved to see herself not being as affected as she had been in the past. When he came up to her she decided to go with this feeling, so she hugged him & said: “*I love you.*” It came from a place of healing, recognizing that she really had loved him & the higher part of her felt a pure love. She knew she could never be with him & needed to continue no contact overall. However, in that moment, she decided to just let him be on his own journey & allow herself to feel that divine ever-present love insider of her. Later he wrote her & told her how disgusted he was at her for putting on a show, for acting kind in order to impress people around them. He accused her of being fake & wanting attention. Do you see the projection there? CNs wholeheartedly believe the stories they create in their minds & leave you perpetually blurting out “*What?!?*” – [Mir17, pp. 70–71]

4.23 They Have No Desire to Know You

“Pretending to want to get to know you is part of grooming you to be their supply. It is not genuine. It is an act of manipulation. As time passes, this becomes more evident. They are not interested in who you are, what you think, & what you feel. This is not a normal, healthy person.” – [Mir17, p. 71]

4.24 They Have No Interest in Making This a Great Relationship

“These are not people in relationships that fight for them or put much work into them at all. Most survivors say they were the ones planning dates, initiating communication, & trying to nurture the relationship. If there are issues in the marriage or partnership, they are not the ones to try to find solutions & work through things to come back together. CNs have no interest in putting effort into relationships.” – [Mir17, pp. 71–72]

4.25 Control & Manipulation

“Covert narcissists control & devalue victims through very subtle manipulation tactics over a long period of time. The impact this has on you is devastating. With each year that you are with the CN, you find yourself feeling less energy, less excitement for life, less confidence, less joy while you are in that relationship. You feel like you’re existing, but not fully alive. You feel yourself slowly declining, but aren’t sure why. The life in you has been drained. It’s like the story of the frog. If you put a frog in boiling water, it will die a quick & painful death. If you put the frog in lukewarm water & slowly turn up the heat over a long period of time, the frog will eventually die without noticing what is happening. This is what it is like to live with a CN. Your essence, your spirit, the light inside you slowly drains out of you without you noticing. You feel depressed & unmotivated, but you attribute how you are feeling to other things, often blaming yourself for things that are not actually your fault.

We are all aware of the term manipulation, but don’t often recognize it when it is happening to us because we don’t know what the different tactics look like that are being used to confuse & control us. In the next chapter, I will go into detailed explanations of different ways covert narcissists manipulate so you can see what this looks like in real life & be able to recognize their passive-aggressive behavior.” – [Mir17, p. 72]

5 Control & Manipulation Tactics

“Covert emotional manipulation tactics are underhanded methods of control. These deceptive tactics act to change your behavior & perceptions. Covert manipulation operates under the level of your conscious awareness. Victims usually do not realize they are being manipulated while it’s happening.” – “30 Covert Emotional Manipulation Tactics” by Adelyn Birch

It is for this reason I have dedicated an entire chapter to control & manipulation alone. Since we usually don’t see it when it’s happening, being that it operates under the level of our conscious awareness, it is imperative that we educate ourselves so we can recognize the tactics.

The biggest indicator that someone is manipulating you is how you feel around that person. When you are with someone with pure intentions, you feel good about yourself. You feel strong. When you are being manipulated you doubt yourself, you feel small, you see them as knowing more than you, & you feel confused & out of sorts. These are red flags.

The good news is the more you educate yourself, the faster you will recognize manipulative behavior, & that recognition is incredibly empowering. You will feel so much stronger & less afraid of life & those around you. You will trust yourself more than ever, & that is a wonderful place to be & live from.

Here are some ways CNs manipulate.” – [Mir17, p. 73]

5.1 Gaslighting

“Gaslighting is a form of manipulation that attempts to grow seeds of doubt in a target. It is used to make you question your memory, your perception, & your own sanity. It makes you think something is wrong with you when it is not. Psychology Today defines gaslighting as *“A tactic in which a person or entity, in order to gain more power, makes a victim question their reality.”*

CNs will accomplish this by using persistent denial, deflection, lying, & blame. The purpose of this is to destabilize you. This keeps you in a weakened state so the CN can control you. You start doubting yourself instead of being able to see the truth of what is happening.

The messages you receive when someone gaslights you are *“They are always right”* & *“You cannot trust yourself.”* If CNs can get you to doubt yourself, they have you under their control. This can last for years, even decades. this tactic makes it difficult to trust your own judgment, beliefs, & instincts. It takes away your confidence. This eventually leads you to depression, forgetting the person you used to be, the carefree spirit who was full of life.

Many victims begin to doubt their own memories. This makes them susceptible to the covert narcissist’s opinion. The CN wants to look like they know more than you so you will end up trusting them more than yourself.

Mark was all too familiar with this tactic. When he would mention stories of events that happened in the past, his CN wife would say, *“That didn’t happen.”* He was sure it did but felt confused. Then she would say, *“Who are you going to believe, you with the bad memory or me with the good one?”* This went on for 20 years making Mark question his memory & his sanity.

Making you doubt your memory is very common with gaslighting. 1 woman I spoke with said she actually made appointments with neurologists because she thought something was seriously wrong with her brain. Some CNs will go to extreme measures, like putting your purse in another room just to make you think you're losing it because you were sure you hung it up in your usual spot.

Gaslighting is so subtle & insidious, always making you feel like something is wrong with you. When Dawn & Brad were intimate, she told him she felt used after having sex with him & couldn't figure out why because they had such a great relationship. He never addressed how she felt, never looked at himself to see if there was something he might be doing that would make her feel that way. Instead, what he did was direct her attention to things that she might need to change about herself. He also told her she was too sensitive & was reading into things. He distracted her, redirecting the focus onto her so she would begin to doubt herself, not noticing his deflection. This planted seeds in her mind that Brad would sow for years to come, making her think there was something wrong with her.

In Dawn's case, you can see how Brad did not address her concern but instead redirected her to think something was wrong with her. He kept planting those seeds, watering them as often as he could. He was able to gaslight her for years.

If you find yourself withholding information from your friends & family because of embarrassment of shame, someone might be gaslighting you. After years of not having an orgasm, Dawn never told her friends because of shame, believing something was wrong with her just as Mark never told anyone about the concerns he had with his memory. He fully believed there was something wrong with him.

If you feel hopeless, joyless, confused, if you second-guess yourself a lot & question whether you are too sensitive, you might be a victim of gaslighting. If you can't figure out why you are so unhappy when you have so much good in your life, you might be experiencing this type of manipulation. Maybe you find yourself making excuses for your parent or partner's behavior to friends & family. These are all signs you might be experiencing gaslighting." – [Mir17, pp. 73–75]

5.2 Triangulation

"Triangulation is a manipulative tactic where the CN acts as a messenger between 2 people. He/she pits the others against each other without either of them noticing that the CN is the one creating the drama. Oftentimes, CNs will talk about how they hate drama & put others down for being "so dramatic." The truth is CNs create drama, but they do so in such a covert way the victims don't notice.

E.g., a CN might lie & tell a neighbor negative things you have been saying about them (when you haven't said anything). Then the CN will come to you & tell you things the neighbor has been saying about you (which the neighbor never said). The CN will word things & add emotions, so both of you feel badly for the CN having to deal with the stress of this made up rivalry. Every time you & the neighbor see each other now you both feel anger, hurt, & tension. This can build up over time as the CN keeps stoking the fire by continuing to feed both parties false information about each other. While this is happening, the CN will sit back, watching the animosity grow, maintaining his or her innocent reputation. To your face & the neighbor's, he/she will act caring & empathetic to your plight. This can go on for years.

After a year of dating, Don told his wife Jackie that his sister said Jackie was a bad driver after she had spent the day taking her around to different sights while she was in town visiting. "Really?" Jackie thought that was a strange thing to say. She knew she was a good driver & it seemed like she & Don's sister had a great day together.

"Yes, she also said you made her make your bed while you sat & read a magazine. Is that true? Did you?" Don asked with an innocent look on his face.

"What? No! I would never do that! Why would she say that?"

"I don't know." Don continued. He said it with an innocent tone that said he felt bad for Jackie. It appeared to her that he was on her side, acting like he felt bad telling her.

She was confused. She kept thinking about what he had said & thought,

"Did I drive recklessly? Did I make her make my bed while I read a magazine? I would never do that! Did I do something that made her feel I wanted her to make my bed? There must be a reason she said all that."

She questioned her own reality. Jackie was also devastated. She wanted so much for his family to like her.

Don later told her she should maybe try harder with his family. She felt so much pressure & hurt. The next several years she worked hard to connect with his family & let them see who she really was hoping they would like her. At times things seemed good, but then Don would tell her something else a family member was saying about her. This kept tensions building & made her feel on edge, insecure, & never good enough around his family.

This tactic keeps you distracted, attributing your pain to others instead of seeing the real mastermind behind all of it. It also keeps you in continuous pain & confusion, never feeling good enough. The more insecure you are, the more in control CNs are.

If someone is talking badly about his wife, a healthy husband stands up for her & keeps it from her because they know it will only cause her pain. That's the last thing he wants her to feel because he loves her. I mention this to demonstrate what real love looks like compared to a CN triangulating.

Triangulation can also look like the CN telling his girlfriend about a woman at work that keeps flirting with him. This creates an illusion of him being desirable & instills the fear of the possibility of her being replaced. Emotionally healthy people do not invoke feelings of jealousy & insecurity in people they love.

Another tactic is where a CN will tell his new girlfriend stories of how terrible his ex was to him, how hurtful & difficult she was, how dramatic she was, how crazy she was. 2 things happen here. The new girlfriend feels sorry for him, wanting to console him, giving him all her attention. The 2nd thing that happens is the CN has now given her subtle messages of how she must

behave for him to want her & stay with her. She will live out their relationship making sure she never does or says what his ex used to do & say. This is a way of controlling her behavior.

1 other form this tactic takes happens during the discard phase. When the CN has decided he doesn't want to be with you anymore, instead of talking to you about it he will go to a 3rd party, someone whom he knows will agree with him. He will often confide in people who barely know you. Then the CN will make sure you know he has been confiding in someone else & that this person agrees with him that everything is your fault & that he should leave you.

Also, after they find another target they openly talk about how much happier they are with their new partner, which is another picture of triangulation.

They do not respect you. They do not care about your feelings. They have a lot of rage & no empathy. They only care about themselves. This really is the bottom line.” – [Mir17, pp. 75–78]

5.3 Intermittent Reinforcement

“Intermittent reinforcement in the context of a relationship is when kindness & loving acts are not given consistently, but rather intermittently. *“This is an extremely powerful & effective manipulation tactic. In fact, psychology experts consider it the most powerful motivator in existence.”* 30 *Covert Emotional Manipulation Tactics* by Adelyn Birch.

Intermittent reinforcement is a conditioning behavior where CNs set the rules. Their love is inconsistent & on their time schedule. This leaves you feeling unstable & longing for their love & attention. The relationship becomes a mixture of subtle cruelty & periodic affection. They will woo you & withhold from you.

This conditions you to keep trying to please them in order to get the reward of love. It brings you to a place where you lower your standards so much that you become grateful for mediocre treatment that you never would have tolerated when you 1st met them. You end up believing you don't deserve any better & that you are not worthy of love & affection. Or you think this is just what happens in marriages. In dating situations, CNs will be uncertain about you & other times they will express how you are the only one for them. You never know fully where you stand with them.

Robert Sapolsky, a neuroendocrinologist & author, does a great job explaining why Intermittent Reinforcement is such a powerful & effective manipulative tool on a YouTube video. The link is under Educational Resources at the back of this book. I highly recommend it. He explains what happened to dopamine levels in monkeys when the reinforcement patterns changed in a study that was published a little over a decade ago. The monkeys were trained to learn that when a light went on if they pressed the lever, they would receive a reward. They were rewarded every time. Dopamine didn't go up when they got the reward. It went up in anticipation of the reward coming.

Then the scientists changed the rules. The monkeys did the same amount of work, but only got rewards half the time, which were handed out unpredictably. What do you think happened to the dopamine levels? It rose to 1 of the biggest rises you will find dopamine in the brain short of cocaine. This is what happens to the brain when you have introduced “maybe” into the equation. This is an incredibly powerful control tactic. People will work like mad for a “maybe” far more than they will for “certainty.” In the video Sapolsky notes, *“You never get more behavior out of an organism than when you have introduced a maybe into it.”*

Do you see the parallels? The monkeys were experiencing love bombing in the beginning. Then when the rules of scientists changed, this began the devaluing stage. This is why the love bombing stage is so powerful & sets you up to work incredibly hard to only receive intermittent morsels of love. Your brain was literally conditioned by the CN to stay with them because of the powerful hope of “maybe.”

A CN will say loving & nice things to you, compliment you, make you dinner, buy you gifts, but only on a random basis. Mixed in with this nice, loving behavior that keeps you thinking this is the person you fell in love with is also belittling that keeps you feeling weak & small, the silent treatment that makes you think you've done something wrong, moodiness that makes you believe you are the source of their unhappiness, & several other means of making you feel insecure & not good enough.

You will feel your CN withdrawing at times which will make you worry, feel insecure, & send your brain spinning into all kinds of anxious thoughts. *“Did I say something wrong? Did I do something I shouldn't have?”* You will expend a lot of energy trying to bring him/her back to you, trying to undo whatever you might have done. Then they will be kind to you, & you'll feel relief. It's an emotional rollercoaster run off their moods keeping you constantly giving them attention. As long as you are doing this, you are useful to them as their energy supply. This keeps you off kilter & susceptible to manipulation & control.

It makes you feel desperate, dependent on their attention, working hard for a reward of love & attention that only comes on their terms, intermittently, & unpredictably. Many times victims think they are codependent because they act in ways that a codependent does, but the truth is that many victims I've met are not codependent. They have been manipulated in such a way where they behave in ways they normally wouldn't. When they get out of these relationships & began to see things clearly, they come back to themselves, & in fact become a much stronger version of their previous self.” – [Mir17, pp. 78–80]

5.4 The False Apology

“When you research narcissism, you hear people often say narcissists never apologize. That is often true of an overt narcissist, but it can be a different story with a CN.

When Joanne met her husband & continuing for the 1st few years of their marriage, she was so impressed at how easily & quickly he apologized. He was better than her at apologizing, better than anyone she knew really. Looking back, she noticed a pattern of him listening to her express how something he did or said hurt her, then apologizing, then changing his behavior for a couple days, then repeating the same old behavior. After a while, with all the other responsibilities of life, she stopped trying;

she learned to just accept things about him that weren't ideal & enjoy the good parts. He wore her down & subtly taught her it wasn't worth the effort to confront him & tell him her feelings.

Just like with empathy, they don't have it, but they know how to act like they do. The same goes for apologies. They can be very adept at saying they are sorry, without actually meaning it. They appease you for the time being having no interest in changing to improve the relationship or treat you better." – [Mir17, p. 80]

5.5 Deflecting the Focus

"CNs have a way of turning things around & making something your fault. They will emotionally you; then you will confront them about it. They will somehow end up making you feel bad about something, & you find yourself apologizing to them even though they were the one that hurt you. This is a common pattern victims experience.

Claire kept receiving abusive emails from her CN after they divorced. She ignored them for a while as she tried to have no contact. Then 1 day she decided to stand up for herself & say something. She wrote him back & said if he sent anymore emotionally abusive emails she would have to block him. Her email was brief & to the point. He responded within a few hours with a 2-page essay telling her that what she considers abuse is actually the truth about what is wrong with her that she is not willing to face. He told her she couldn't handle people being honest with her. He went on to list several other things that were wrong with her in a cruel & abusive way. They are big fans of deflecting the focus off them & onto you, making themselves the victims & blaming you for all kinds of things that are massive distortions of reality.

I have seen this happen in spiritual circles as well as self-improvement conferences. Kevin, a spiritual leader at a healing center in Costa Rica, would speak to the women attendees in inappropriate ways. They felt uncomfortable around him. When 1 woman confronted him about his inappropriate behavior he put the focus back on her by saying in gentle voice, *"It sounds like you are being triggered, Sara. What is this bringing up for you?"* He acted like it was a learning experience for her instead of owning up to his actions & taking responsibility. This left her confused about what just happened, especially because he was the revered leader; he sounded so kind & caring. By deflecting the attention onto her, he kept his status as the revered leader; he sounded so kind & caring. By deflecting the attention onto her, he kept his status as the revered leader, & she left feeling like there was something wrong with her that she needed to fix. This also left her with the harmful message that it was okay for a man to treat her in a demeaning & disrespectful way." – [Mir17, pp. 81–82]

5.6 Blame

"CNs blame their victims for just about anything & everything. 1 of their ways of controlling is taking no personal responsibility & putting the fault on you for their bad behavior.

- *"I'm being verbally abusive to you because you set the tone when you hired an attorney, so it's your fault I'm abusive."*
- *"I had an affair because you wouldn't get a Brazilian wax when I told you how much it would mean to me. It showed me how much you didn't care about me. You made me have an affair."*
- *"I had to close the bank accounts because you bought a new washing machine when the old one broke without asking."*

Here are some statements I've heard targets say they have been blamed for by their CN:

- *"It's your fault the kids don't like me."*
- *"It's your fault I was never happy."*
- *"It's your fault my family didn't like you."*
- *"It's your fault I'm unhappy every Christmas. If you would enjoy the process of decorating the tree instead of rushing through it, I would enjoy Christmas more."*
- *"It's your fault our son didn't get into Northwestern."*
- *"It's your fault I am emotionally shut down."*
- *"It's your fault our daughter never played softball."*
- *"It's your fault I watch porn."*
- *"It's your fault I'm irritable."*
- *"it's your fault I don't have friends."*
- *"It's your fault we are in debt."*
- *"It's your fault I'm depressed & angry."*
- *"It's your fault I abuse you."*
- & the grand finale ... *"You blame me for everything because you won't take any personal responsibility."* – [Mir17, p. 82]

5.7 Distorting Reality

“CNs will throw strong statements at you that make absolutely no sense & have no basis in reality, but they speak in such a strong & convincing way it makes you consider things that are no obviously false. Their accusations of you are almost as ludicrous as them saying you alone are responsible for the lack of affordable health care or the ice caps melting, & you take a moment to wonder if they are right. You do this because you have been manipulated for a very long time. You have been brainwashed, & that takes time to unravel.

The crazy accusations they will throw at you keep you spinning inside. You end up expending a lot of energy around these ridiculous statements because you are having a hard time believing this person whom you loved & believed is lying to you & manipulating you. It takes time to unravel years of illusion & be able to see the truth. It will happen. You will see clearly, it will just take some time. You’re going to be just fine, better than you can probably imagine right now.

Mary’s story illustrates what it looks like for a CN to distort reality. Her CN ex-husband tried to drain her of money every chance he could. 1 day their daughter wanted financial help with a trip she was taking. Mary didn’t receive any child support for her as her CN had petitioned to take that away from her early. Her CN told their daughter he would give her a certain amount if Mary matched it (another common form of triangulation, sadly using children). He had much more than Mary but put her in a position to give a lot of money she didn’t have. She agreed to a lesser amount, thinking if he didn’t agree she would come up with some way to help her daughter, but she didn’t want to give in to his demands, letting him order her around as he would so often do. She was working on being stronger with him & setting boundaries as to how he can & can’t treat her. She wrote him & told him how much she could pay.

He wrote back immediately with a rage-filled email telling her what a horrific mom she was, how selfish she was, how materialistic she was. He had dramatic statements about her neglect of their daughter, followed by, *“It’s like you’ve washed your hands of her!”* She read that sentence while sitting in her bedroom. She looked up from her computer & looked at her daughter’s room across the hall from her with shorts lying on her bed Mary had just bought her. She thought about the oil change she just paid for their daughter’s car, all the hours she spent with her helping her figure out her life, all the hugs, all the meals she made her, the stocked fridge, how she made sure her favorite foods were there. *“Yeah, that sounds about right . . . this is definitely a picture of a woman who has washed her hands of her daughter.”* She sarcastically thought.

This was not only a distortion of reality but also a projection of what was true of him. The truth was this was a man who was out of touch with their daughter, barely saw her, & sadly made very little effort to be involved in her life.

I have heard so many other stories like this one from victims with whom I’ve spoken. They are amazing moms & dads who truly love their kids & take incredible care of them when the CN doesn’t, but talks to other as if he/she does. It is deplorable how they are treated by CNs who continuously criticize them for being horrible parents. They will often use their children to get back at the victim. This sadly is extraordinarily common.” – [Mir17, pp. 82–84]

5.8 Indirect Insults/Insinuating Comments

“CNs are rarely direct with their insults until the discard phase. Instead, they will phrase belittling, degrading, & disrespectful comments in a way that makes you wonder, *“Was that a put-down? It sounded like a put-down. It felt terrible. But they are looking at me with an innocent look on their face that makes me completely confused.”*

Sue went on a family vacation with her CN husband, Stuart, & their 2 kids. Their kids wanted to eat breakfast at the all you can eat buffet in the restaurant at the resort. Since it was expensive, Sue told them they would have 1 special morning where they could all eat there. The day finally came. Stuart was being difficult on the vacation, moody, irritable, as usual, so Sue got up early that morning to have some quiet time by herself before they all woke up. She texted them that she’d be down at the restaurant & they could meet her there when they were ready to eat. She thought she’d get some coffee & journal while she waited for the 3 of them to come.

The kids came running down very excited to eat this massive array of food, followed by their CN dad. They walked up to the table where Sue was sitting with her coffee. Stuart looked at Sue & said with a cheery, innocent tone, *“Oh, you came down here & ate the buffet by yourself?”* Their kids looked at him strangely as there were no plates at her table. Their daughter looked at her dad with a confused look on her face & said sarcastically, *“Like mom would ever do that . . .”*

To the average person, this may not seem like a big deal. But anyone who has lived with a CN knows that these little-disguised digs happen a lot, especially toward the end. Victims know the feeling when the CN says something that sounds innocent but can feel the passive-aggressive put-down behind it.

To continue with this couple & probing deeper in this example, Sue was about 40 pounds overweight. She felt insecure about it, especially on vacation. She was trying to eat better & lose the weight. Stuart knew this. He also knew in 27 years of being in a relationship with Sue that she would never go out to eat by herself. That wasn’t her personality. He used her insecurities to hurt her. When he “casually” “innocently” made a comment about her eating an all you can eat buffer by herself, he was saying a lot of things.

People who haven’t experienced covert narcissism might say Sue was reading into this, that he was just asking a question. Stuart would say the same thing, telling Sue how overly sensitive she is, how touchy she is, how high maintenance she is. This is why many victims are scared to tell their story because sometimes the scenarios don’t sound that bad. Like the woman who says her husband spent a lot of time working in the yard & she felt abandoned. Most people would hear that & think she needs to get a hobby. The reality is this woman was picking up on something. She could feel it. She had lived with covert messages of how unworthy she was of his love for years. She had experienced many subtle ways he would “punish” her for not being the way he wanted her to be.

It is insidious abuse because no one sees it, but the victim feels it profoundly. It affects every fiber of her/his being.” – [Mir17, pp. 84–86]

5.9 Mixed Messages

“The radically contrasting messages you get from CNs are bizarre & crazy-making.

Let’s go back to another example from an earlier couple in the book. Throughout Sara’s 15-year marriage to Bill, he would tell her he wanted her to go after her dreams & be the artist she had always wanted to be. He said he made enough money, so she didn’t have to work. She felt incredibly lucky to have such a generous & supportive husband. She spent their married life raising their kids & pursuing her art. During the discard phase, Bill told her she would have been working the whole time. He said she only married him for his money & never really cared about him.

For years Callie’s husband told her how beautiful her body was, then when he was done with her, he said, *“Maybe I should have been harder on you so you would have lost the weight. I let you eat whatever you wanted.”*

Every birthday, CN Sam would say he didn’t need anything, not to make a fuss over him. Scott, his partner, would still always make it nice for him, really thinking about what he would love to experience & what kind of thoughtful gift he could buy him. They were tight on money 1 year, so Scott got creative with gift giving & planning Sam’s special day, still making it very heartfelt. After his birthday, Sam was sulking, moody, grumpy. His partner asked him what was wrong. After a lot of circular conversations, Sam yelled, *“I thought you were going to get me an iPad!”* His partner was completely confused. He hadn’t said a word about wanting an iPad, something that was way out of their budget anyway. Even so, he found himself feeling bad like he had done something terribly wrong. When they broke up, Sam told his partner he wanted someone more spiritual, that Scott was way too materialistic for him.

Sometimes CNs will send you an email or phone message that is incredibly loving & kind. Then a few hours later, they will tell you what a horrible person you are. Relationships with CNs are filled with destructive & confusing mixed messages.” – [Mir17, pp. 86–87]

5.10 Punishing

“CNs usually use passive-aggressive means to punish you when you do not behave in ways they want. Sometimes they will give you the silent treatment, acting like they didn’t hear you, or being distant when you are longing for connection. They will pull away & starve you from attention & affection. They will do things to inconvenience you, disrupting your life in some way.

CNs will often use money as a tool to punish you by hiding assets & cutting off your financial supply, sometimes controlling every dime you spend. They will leave you to handle everything after they move out, taking care of the kids, selling the home, moving everything on your own, getting rid of things, taking care of bills, etc.

They will consistently “forget” to pick up an item at the store that you had asked them to get on their way home. They will “forget” things that will end up falling on your lap to handle. These instances are usually followed by a false apology made to appease you.

They despise helping you when you are sick or in need of care, so they will often subtly punish you during these times. Rebecca’s mom would become even more distant, moody, & angry when Rebecca got sick. She felt like her mom was mad at her for not feeling well. She would make a big deal if she did anything to help her daughter & gave the clear message she was a huge burden without saying that directly to her.

When Susan had surgery, her CN husband Harry brought her home from the hospital. She was still coming out of the effects of anesthesia when he sat at her bedside & confronted her about her “bad behavior.” He told her she didn’t seem very appreciative of his help at the hospital when she was waking up. He needed more from her than that, he said. She could barely focus on what he was saying as he was telling her about his hurt feelings. Susan felt confused & stressed, not to mention in pain, having no energy to be able to respond. He made sure to not be around a lot during her recovery. She was on her own to heal & take care of the kids.

They will punish you with their moods. You might have saved up for a concert that excites you. The CN comes with you & is irritable the whole time, making it hard for you to enjoy it.

They will punish you by withholding attention, not complimenting you when you have dressed up for a date with them, invalidating your feelings, not defending you when someone else is treating you badly, smearing your name to others, trying to turn your kids against you, subtle put-downs, & using your insecurities & personal things you have opened up to them about to wound you. Years of this treatment slowly breaks down your spirit, the life inside you. You lose track of what a loving relationship actually looks like & tragically begin to believe you don’t deserve any better.” – [Mir17, pp. 87–88]

5.11 Minimization

“A CN will minimize your painful experience with them, which makes you doubt yourself, questioning your own feelings & reality. Dr. George K. Simon, Jr. describes this form of manipulation in his book, *In Sheep’s Clothing*: *“This tactic is a unique kind of denial coupled with rationalization. When using this maneuver, the aggressor is attempting to assert that his behavior isn’t really as harmful or irresponsible as someone else may be claiming.”*

Many victims wonder if they are blowing things out of proportion thinking their ex or parent or co-worker is a CN. Women I talked to wonder if they are to blame & the CN was actually a great love that they will regret leaving. Many wonder if they themselves are narcissists. CNs will use your doubts against you saying you are overly dramatic, too sensitive, you don’t take responsibility for yourself, you blame everyone instead, etc.

The thing to remember is you can trust yourself. Your pain is real. Allow yourself to recognize this. If something feels off that is because it is.” – [Mir17, pp. 88–89]

6 Covert Narcissistic Parents

“...” – [Mir17, pp. 90–99]

7 In the Workplace

“Most covert narcissists tend to be financially successful people. They want to look good to others, & this is all part of the image that is so important to them. Because of this, they can often be found in leadership positions in companies.

When you start out working with or for these people, they seem like the dream boss, co-worker, or partner. You feel incredibly lucky to be working with them. They compliment you & make you feel valued & needed. They are often described as charismatic people, the boss that everyone likes. They are easy to work with, & many victims feel relieved to have a boss like them after experiencing difficult bosses in the past.

However, they are often chameleons & mirror the people they are around, so everyone feels like they are seen by them & understood. They win people’s trust quickly. They are charming, but not in a creepy player kind of way. They seem like the real deal. Easy going, smart, not a big ego, endearing – these are words I have heard to describe these type of people.

Just like romantic relationships, a CN boss will take you through the 3 stages. They will love bomb you in the beginning. It will feel easy, exciting, fun. They might make grandiose promises of your future with the company, your financial success, & your involvement in projects you love. You will feel excited & so lucky to have gotten this opportunity, telling your friends & family all the glowing stories of this new boss. Sometimes this person becomes a trusted friend.

I talked to Tom who became partners with his boss & worked along side him for years. Trust was built. Their families would get together on the weekends to barbecue by the lake. Their kids became friends. Everyone at the office loved this guy so when the subtle devaluing began, Tom didn’t feel free to talk about it with anyone. He voiced concerns a couple of times to see if he was seeing things clearly & the reaction of the coworkers was, *“What are you talking about? You have the greatest boss ever!”* He got the message there was no one he could confide in as well as thinking he probably misread something, doubting his own mind & intuition.

Sally had the same story with her boss as Tom had with his. After the love bombing stage, little things started to happen, like how her boss would call her late at night with a crisis at work. She felt like she had to be at his beckon call. Boundaries were crossed, & respect was not shown through acts like this. She let things slide for years because she had developed a friendship with her boss & believed she could trust him, that he cared about her.

After time Sally’s boss started bringing up “concerns” he had about her. He would talk about how he knew she had a lot of stress with her ailing parents & wanted to make sure she was okay because she didn’t seem to have a great memory lately. He would sometimes tease her about her memory but passed it off lightly as just being a joke. It wasn’t a joke; he was devaluing her, minimizing her pain.

John experienced the same gaslighting from his boss. In fact, his was so extreme he found out later his boss had been deleting files, not telling him about meetings to make him question his memory. John’s health began to decline while he worked there, but he wrote it off as just stress from working long hours. His boss gaslighted him so much over the years he actually went to see a neurologist to see if something was wrong with his brain. He was convinced his memory was rapidly evaporating & wondered if he had early onset dementia in his mid-30s.

You can see how working with a CN boss can completely deplete you of energy & affect your health in damaging ways.

Another common trait with a CN boss is him or her taking credit for your work & ideas, but doing this in such sneaky, underhanded, charming ways, you feel like a jerk if you mention it. You fear losing your job & learn to keep quiet.

CNs keep you unglued through many different tactics. 1 of these is minimizing your feelings & pain by doing things & then when you have a natural reaction they act innocent or say they were just kidding, or somehow make you feel shame for your organic reaction. They will also set you up to look a certain way in front of others, to discredit you. Amy said her boss would give her strange gifts, like a book that was offensive. She would react strongly, & he would act innocent saying, *“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry. I had no idea that would offend you. I was told it was a popular book.”* Other coworkers watching this would think she was overly sensitive & started seeing her through those eyes.

Amy’s boss would also sabotage her by letting her know about meetings she needed to be at right before they started, knowing she wouldn’t be able to make them. Sometimes she would struggle & underperform. He did nothing to help her out & did not seem to care when he saw this happening. Instead, he would add more work for her to do. She started to feel like she was letting him down. Her confidence fell. She started to believe she was the problem & he let her believe that. She was so affected by her experience that she began to isolate herself more & more from people. She stayed home a lot when she wasn’t at work, stopped calling friends to get together. She began to feel unworthy, unlovable, a waste of space.

With all CNs, there is a cognitive dissonance that happens. You have competing beliefs about your boss/friend. They still appear like the person you 1st “loved,” but they also make you feel terrible about yourself. Reconciling this is such a confusing & crazy-making thing for the brain & heart. Working with a CN leaves you feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, & confused.

Another way they keep the manipulation going is through smear campaigns. Sally’s boss would talk to other coworkers about her, & they were starting to wonder if she had a mental illness. He would share with them how “concerned” he was about her.

Most targets are self-reflective people, so often look at themselves as possibly being at fault. It is the hardest & most foreign thing in the world to consider that someone who “cares” about you & treats you so well in so many ways is also sabotaging, manipulating, & controlling you. This is not a thought that ever enters the mind of a trusting, honest, self-reflective person. CN bosses & coworkers massively affect your self-esteem & your belief in your own intuition & smart mind.

As with other relationships with CNs, there are a lot of mixed messages & intermittent reinforcement that happens. They will make grand gestures; they might defend you to others. They will look out for you at times as well as demean & devalue you. All the nice acts make you question negative thoughts you have about them. You often end up turning on yourself & thinking something is wrong with you. *“Why can’t I just relax? Why can’t I enjoy & appreciate him like everyone else seems to do?”*

Victims are not the only ones affected by a CN boss. I talked to Emma who has 2 young kids. She missed different important events with them because of her boss constantly filling her schedule. Her boss was completely aware of how important these dates were to her & her family, yet she would add more work & appointments to Emma’s schedule during these specific dates. She was so stressed out for years & wasn’t able to be the type of mom she wanted to be at home.

Emma said before she started working with her CN boss that she was more social, more confident. She was more of a go-getter. She does feel relieved after leaving her position & is starting to feel like her old self but also finds herself questioning everyone, wondering whom she can trust. She is more suspicious of people now, & not as outgoing as she used to be.

This is such a common result. Anyone who has been through years with a CN sees people & the world around them with different lenses. When you have experienced “the nicest person in the world” that turned out to be the most damaging hurtful one, it is hard to trust anyone.

If any of these stories resonate with you, if you have been through something similar, know that you are not alone & it had nothing to do with you. You are smart & capable – there are people in this world that genuinely care about you.

My hope is that reading this chapter will begin to validate your experience & your feelings & that the healing chapter will help carry you home back to your beautiful self. You will get there, & you will be stronger than ever.” – [Mir17, pp. 100–104]

8 Sex with a Covert Narcissist

“When Sara told me about her sex life with her CN husband of 25 years, I was able to reassure her that it was a common story. I told her about so many other woman I had talked to that also shared similar experiences. She said, *“Please write about this in your book! I’ve never heard anyone say what you’ve just told me. I have felt so alone in this. I thought I was the only one. I thought something was wrong with me. I had come to the conclusion that I just wasn’t a sexual person.”*

Sex might be 1 of the most common ways of gaslighting a CN uses to control & manipulate. Most people don’t notice. It’s incredibly insidious. You can’t get any more personal & vulnerable than your sex life. CNs use sex to manipulate through psychological means, making you feel like something is wrong with you. When someone manipulates & controls you through sex, they set you up to think something is wrong with you so you blame yourself, you feel shame, & it affects your confidence as well as self-worth. You lose your ability to stand up for yourself. They are attacking the deepest part of you. You end up isolating yourself because you don’t want to admit to friends that after so many years of marriage you haven’t had an orgasm, that you feel no desire for sex, that your husband/wife is completely disappointed in you, that you feel like something is wrong with you sexually. You feel embarrassed. You shut down. It is incredibly personal. You believe whatever is wrong with your sex life is your fault, which is exactly what the CN wants you to think.

When you have sex with a CN, their pleasure is the most important thing; how they feel is what it is all about for them. You get the message that you don’t deserve pleasure & are subtly punished for having your own feelings, reactions, & confusion with what is happening in the bedroom. Your feelings don’t matter to the CN. Like with everything else, it is all about them.

Susan didn’t have a sex drive for most of her marriage & couldn’t figure out why. When she married her CN, she was young & a virgin. She had nothing for comparison. In her 25-year marriage, she never once had an orgasm. Feeling embarrassed & ashamed, she wondered what was wrong with her. Her husband seemed fine. He wanted sex, so it must be her that was the problem she concluded.

This is not something she brought up to her friends. Most people don’t. What woman in her 40s wants to admit she has never had an orgasm? She was feeling enough despair; she didn’t want to add to that by seeing people look at her with shock. She couldn’t handle the thought of someone else judging her. She had enough of that from herself & her husband. So she stayed quiet about it for years. Over decades, she tried to “fix” herself & after nothing helped she wondered if she just wasn’t a sexual person.

About a year after she divorced her CN, she went to a meditation retreat. A handsome, kind man showed her around the center. When he said hello & shook her hand, she felt sensations in her body she wasn’t used to feeling. Something awakened inside her. Her eyes opened wide as the tingling feelings grew. Years later she married that man & now knows the truth, that she is a very sexual person that was manipulated, used, & made to believe she was not by her ex-CN. She is now healing from those years & being shown what real love actually looks & feels like.

Sex is 1 of the most powerful ways a CN controls their victim. When you have no desire for sex & can’t figure out why, you feel bad that you are letting your partner down. They will let you know in various ways how much you are letting them down because it is all about them & this is part of their manipulation & control tactics. They won’t worry about you, what you are feeling & your struggles. That is not a concern to them because this relationship is not about you, or even the 2 of you – it is about the CN.

When Dawn dated her CN, sex was great! They seemed to have an amazing connection. It was easy. He was romantic. He said all the right things that made her feel great about herself & her body. She felt pretty & sexy. They were both very active sexually. This was another thing that added to her believing he was the perfect match for her.

It is common for this to happen in the beginning. CNs mirror you sexually as well as emotionally during the love bombing stage. They become you, act like you, so it feels like you are both in sync. You can't believe how good every part of this relationship is!

Soon after Dawn & her CN husband got married, things started to feel different. The love bombing stage was over, & the subtle devaluing & demeaning stage was beginning. She didn't notice anything different about the sex except how she felt. She told Brad, her CN husband, that she didn't know why but every time they had sex she felt used. It didn't make any sense to her, but they were both very open when it came to communication, so she wanted to let him know how she was feeling. He looked confused, acted like he cared, & seemed as though he wanted to hear.

Even though his words were nice, she could feel his anger toward her underneath them. The conversation began with her telling him how she felt used & somehow ended up with her apologizing & comforting him. He deflected the focus, didn't address her feelings, instead turned the attention back on him as the "victim." She would continue to share with him how she felt over the years, but nothing ever changed. CNs aren't interested in looking at their own issues or changing any of their behaviors.

She found herself unable to orgasm. He would show her articles in Playboy he had read about different positions he wanted to try hoping it would help her orgasm. Even though it seemed like he was trying to help, she felt pressure to come through for him. He wanted her to orgasm so he would feel good about himself as a man & a lover. It never felt like he wanted her to experience pleasure for her, it was all about him feeling good about himself. Dawn's body knew she was not being loved & was not emotionally safe with him, so her body shut down & never had an orgasm with him. She lost all desire for sex.

He would tell her how this was affecting him. He had needs, & she wasn't fulfilling them. She felt terrible. Even though this all started out with her feeling used because her body, her intuition knew she was being used, it turned into her taking the blame for their discouraging sex life, feeling a massive amount of shame & guilt, & believing something was wrong with her.

She tried reading books & articles. She went to a therapy. She tried all kinds of things to figure out what was wrong with her. At times, she wondered if her husband had a part in this, but couldn't figure out how so she believed it was her fault. He did nothing to stop her from believing that. Years went by; life kept going, they had kids, jobs, et cetera. They would revisit talking about the sex issue here & there. Sex happened infrequently. She never enjoyed it & never climaxed. This was used to control her for years. She felt like a terrible wife. Her husband became more & more distant. He passively aggressively punished her for years, & she took it because she got to the place where she believed she deserved it. When he was distant on dates together, irritable on every vacation, sabotaging every birthday, she felt like she shouldn't expect any better because she wasn't giving him much sex, so she didn't deserve love & kindness.

" – [Mir17, pp. 105–118]

9 Divorcing a Covert Narcissist

10 Why Do They Emotionally & Psychologically Abuse?

"I've been to many support group meetings, listened to several Internet videos, & read articles & books where people have shared the reasons they think covert narcissists psychologically & emotionally abuse people. Some of those theories include they harm others because they were abused as a child, they hate themselves, their childhood needs were not met, they do not see people as people, they love themselves too much, they experienced trauma as a child, they like to feel superior, they are reacting to feeling unseen & misunderstood as a child, they weren't loved growing up, they were spoiled & idealized as a child, & they were raised with both grandiosity & worthlessness. Here is the conclusion I have personally formulated: We don't really know for sure why & it doesn't really matter.

I say this because I care about you & I've seen how victims can spend so much time & energy focusing on trying to figure out the CN in their life that they get stuck in the mire of the darkness of narcissism & never give their own light a chance to come forth.

Many of the reasons listed in that 1st paragraph may be true, & yes, it is good as a society to learn the psychology behind why people do the things they do, & there are times it helps to understand. If that helps you & you find you are able to heal & separate from the CN, then do that. Your body knows what works best for you & what you need in order to heal & get strong. But if you find yourself feeling exhausted trying to figure out why the CN in your life treats you they way they do, then it might be time to let that part of your journey go as you focus on healing & strengthening yourself.

Victims are such caring people that it is easy for us to spend our lives focused on others. This is a beautiful thing if we are helping others that really want our help & making sure we are taking care of ourselves at the same time. 1 man I talked to who was married for 25 years to a CN still feels sorry for his ex-wife, believing she treats him badly because she is wounded & needs love. He is such a special & smart man with a tender heart & is having a really hard time breaking free from her.

I am a very caring person myself, & I also see people as wounded. Most of us are. I am interested in learning why we do the things we do, but I have noticed a trend of victims absorbing themselves in this mission to figure out why. It leads to diversions, never healing themselves, & paralyzing them from moving on. It is easy for us to get caught up with the idea of an abuser being wounded, being a victim themselves, & not hold them accountable for their actions. Remember, they do have free will. They have choices just like we do. They can help their behavior. They are not helpless.

We made excuses for their abusive behavior for years. Some of them sounded like:

- *"He had a rough childhood."*
- *"She doesn't know how to love because she didn't have a good mom."*

- *“He had an abusive father that didn’t treat his mom well, so he didn’t have a good example of how to love.”*
- *“He is wounded, so he is lashing out at me from a place of pain.”*
- *“He’s just scared. It’s fear that is beneath his anger.”*
- *“She’s tired & under a lot of stress.”*
- *“He is insecure. That’s why he is treating me this way.”*

Excusing their hurtful behavior kept us in an abusive relationship & kept them completely unaccountable for their deplorable acts. It is time for us individually & as a society to stop making excuses for abusive behavior.

All of us are affected by the childhoods we experienced. Here is the thing, not all people who are wounded abuse. Some of the kindest people I know came from very abusive backgrounds both physically & emotionally. I know many people who experienced a tremendous amount of trauma in their childhood on several different levels & did not turn out to be narcissists. In fact, most of them are incredible people that treat others with kindness & respect. They make this world a better place.

Whatever the reason for narcissistic abuse, the fact is CNs are bullies that are ruining people’s lives, & that is not okay.

Let’s say they are acting out of their childhood wounds, does this mean it is okay for you to be their punching bag? Are you helping them or anyone else by being a recipient of their abuse? No, not ever.

Most CNs are not interested in getting help. They are not interested in healing, & they do not think they have a problem. So for us to spend countless hours trying to figure out why they are the way they are isn’t helping them or us since there is no way of knowing for sure. We will just further exhaust ourselves, which after what we have been through is the last thing we need.

It is time to let them own their own issues, their own feelings. You are not responsible for their actions. You are also not responsible for their feelings even though they will tell you that you are. You are not an unkind person if you let them heal themselves or go to someone else to heal. You are not here to take abuse from anyone. When we let go of trying to figure out the why, we let go of them. Then we are left with ourselves, which at 1st can sometimes feel lonely. We are so used to being intertwined with them because when we love, we love deeply with all our heart.

But the more we go inside & take care of our own wounded heart, the stronger we will feel & the more peace we will experience. Life will take on a different feeling, & we will discover people like us, others that love authentically, with their whole heart.

When we let go of the drama of the why, we are 1 step closer to freedom & feeling whole again.” – [Mir17, pp. 134–136]

10.1 Is Their Abusive Behavior Conscious or Unconscious?

“Many survivors wonder about this, partly because of cognitive dissonance, which I will explain a bit further in the chapter on healing. It is so difficult to imagine that someone we thought loved us was & (& is) consciously abusing us. This question, in my opinion, does not have a clear answer. There are some CNs I’ve known that feel more innocent while others that seem diabolical & dark.

In some ways, they are not conscious because they do not live consciously. They are out of touch with who they really are. They have lost themselves, their soul identity. They are shells of their real self. But, on the other hand, judging, criticizing, & manipulating are conscious acts. The more jealous they get of you, the more they demean you. To belittle & demean is a conscious act.

There are professed narcissists that will explain exactly what they are thinking when they are manipulating someone. They are completely aware of what they are doing. I do think most CNs are more conscious & aware of what they are doing than we would imagine. It’s just really hard for our brains to accept this when we have seen them as they wanted us to see them for such a long time.” – [Mir17, pp. 136–137]

11 The Most Dangerous Trait of All

“1 of the most concerning things I have observed about our society as a whole is that there is a growing number of people who lack empathy. This seems to be increasing, especially over the past couple of decades. As this planet has become more advanced in many ways, we are also losing what is most important. Having personally experienced the pain you have, I know you will understand this more than most. You are very valuable to this world because of what you’ve been through. You have insights that many don’t.

Many of the political leaders running the world’s countries are devoid of empathy, & this affects everything. In the United States where I live, we have 2 main political parties. I have observed overt & covert narcissistic behavior in both the Republican party as well as the Democratic party. Decisions made by political leaders as well as heads of large corporations affect all of us. If these are made from a place where empathy does not reside, it will not end well. When empathy isn’t in leadership, decisions are made that hold money & power as the greatest priority instead of the people who reside here & the planet that feeds & shelters us.

People with no empathy have no remorse & act out of their own selfishness, hurting others & not feeling bad about it. They excuse their destructive behavior & blame others. Covert narcissism is all around us, affecting our self-image & self-worth. This is even exemplified by corporations. When companies advertise products by giving us the message that we don’t look as we

should, & that if we buy their product, we will be more beautiful & acceptable, they are gaslighting us, demeaning us, & not treating us with kindness & respect, all for their own gain.

Be it personal or professional, when someone doesn't have empathy, there is a disconnection from their spirit. Our spirit, our soul is our life force. This is what drives us, what gives us purpose & meaning, what prompts us to love & to heal. It is what makes us a whole person. It is our true identity.

On a recent visit to England, I was walking up High Street in front of Windsor Castle. I was taking in the sights even though I didn't really feel like it. Just before I left for my trip, I received word of things 1 of the CNs in my life was doing to smear my name to people I love. It hit me hard & sent me into a state of mild depression. I felt numb as I walked alongside hundreds of other tourists down the busy sidewalk lined with shops & restaurants. I passed by a homeless woman sitting on the ground with a container in front of her holding different types of coins. Something stopped me in the flow of the crowd. I turned around, walked back a few feet, & asked, "*May I sit by you?*" She looked up, a bit shocked at the unusual respect. "*Sure!*"

I sat by her for a while. I asked her about her story, what brought her to where she was that day. She told me of growing up in west London, being kicked out of her abusive father & being on the streets ever since. Her body looked like it had experienced a lot of trauma for many years. Life had beaten her down, & she didn't have it in her to try anymore. I felt a kinship with her. Our paths were different, but I could easily be her. We had both experienced pain & life sucking drama. We had both felt the strength inside us slowly diminish. There was no one else I wanted to be talking to in that moment but her.

Sitting there looking at all the passers-by, I was bothered by the fact that I live in a world where hundreds of people from all different continents walked by her every day, choosing to buy mostly useless items that they would someday get rid of instead of doing something to help this woman. It bothered me that we live in a world where we have become numb to other people's pain. I am part of this world, & I have been 1 of those people walking by for far too long. After our long conversation, I asked if I could give her some money & a hug. She smiled softly. I held her & said, "*I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for how hard life is for you right now. Lots of love to you today.*" She embraced me back & said, "*Thank you for being so kind.*"

Empathy is what will change this world. Empathy is what heals. Empathy is what enables us to experience real connection with each other. Empathy is what allows us to see the things that really matter.

When someone doesn't have empathy, it is almost like they have a black hole inside of them. They don't have that warm core spark of life within them. As a result, they cannot ever fully feel the magic of a sunset, the feeling of real connection, or the transcendent experience of real love. Someone without empathy is in survival mode. They end up feeding off other people's energy since they are devoid of it. They find people who have life, who have connection, who have empathy & real love, then drain them of their own supply of energy. This is why the CN in your life chose you, & this is why he or she moved on to someone else so quickly.

If a CN were alone on a deserted island, he or she would waste away. People like you have what CNs want. They will never be able to sit with themselves & feel the peace that resides in all our spirits & souls. They are not capable of feeling the richness inside themselves like you are because they are devoid of life-giving energy.

This can feel like a bleak picture, but here is the good news. You are on this planet. You have empathy. You have a light in you that brings energy to this world. Because you were targeted by a CN for your empathetic heart, this may make you want to hide this light so you don't get hurt again. I completely understand that. It's part of your body trying to protect you.

Here is the thing. Your spirit is strong. You are educating yourself. You now know that you can trust your own inner guidance. You will be able to recognize the traits of people who will drain you. There is no reason to fear & every reason to love. There are people in this world that will see your pearls & so appreciate who you are & what you bring. They won't drain you of your life force. In fact, you will feel even more life energy when you open your heart & love them.

You will learn to put up boundaries with energy vampires & use your tender heart to reach out to those that gratefully receive it. Your heart will expand even more, & a newfound strength will develop in you that can move mountains.

You make this world a better place & I'm so grateful to walk next to you." – [Mir17, pp. 138–141]

12 Your Body Knew: Common Illnesses

"I noticed in talking to different survivors that there were some common illnesses that many of them experienced when they were in a relationship with a CN or being raised by one.

The Secret Language of Your Body by Inna Segal is a book to which I refer often for others & myself. The author lists illnesses & bodily conditions, then talks about possible emotional causes for these symptoms or diseases. I've looked up various conditions that I've had, my kids have had, & friend's of mine have had. I have been amazed how incredibly accurate her book has been over many years.

Our bodies are incredibly intelligent & are speaking to us all the time. The body knows before the mind. There have been many studies that have confirmed this. 1 such study was done at The University of Iowa. A group of scientists conducted an experiment where they put 4 decks of cards in front of students. 2 of them were red, & the other 2 were blue. Each card either won them money or cost them money. It was set up as a simple gambling game. The job of the student was to turn over cards from any of the decks, one at a time with the goal of gaining as much money as possible. What the students didn't know was the red decks were downfall decks. The rewards were high, but when you lose, you lose big. The blue decks had more gradual wins & losses with modest gains & losses. The scientists wanted to see how long it would take for the students to figure this out.

What they found was that after turning over around 50 cards, most students started to have a hunch that something was plotted. After picking up about 80 cards, most of them had figured out the difference between the decks of cards. The experiment was straightforward except for 1 fascinating twist. The scientists had hooked up each student to a machine that measured the activity of the sweat glands below the skin in the palms of their hands. Here is the eye-opening part of the experiment: the

scientists found that gamblers' palms started sweating as a stress response by the 10th card! Also, around the 10th card (in addition to sweating), their behavior started to change. They started to organically choose the blue cards over the red. The student's unconscious mind had figured out the game before their conscious mind became aware of the differences.

During the time you were with a CN, your body knew before your conscious mind became aware of the truth of this person & the hidden abuse you were experiencing. The card game was simple, though living with a CN is the furthest thing from simple. The experiment is a great demonstration of how much we can trust your body's responses. Often times, those responses manifest as physical illness or mental illness, such as depression.

When I asked men & women what type of physical & mental illnesses they had experienced over the course of the relationship with the CN, there were a lot of common conditions. I asked if they wanted me to read the possible emotional reasons for the physical conditions they had experienced. As I read from Segal's book, each survivor was amazed at what they heard. Some were brought to tears. What I read was exactly how they felt in the relationship they had.

Here are some examples, with excerpts from Segal's book:

After about a year of dating her CN, Dana developed a severe case of candida. When I read what her body was trying to tell her at the time, she couldn't believe it.

- *Self-doubt.*
- *Feeling scattered, hazy, frazzled, stressed, trapped.*
- *Frustrated with partner.*
- *Difficulty trusting.*

When she considered the descriptions, she was feeling all of those things at the time, but had explained them all away because he was such a "great guy". Everyone around her loved him & was constantly confirming how lucky she was. The trap of the powerful love bombing stage had been said, so she trusted the way he appeared more than things she was feeling deep inside. She excused things that he did that were unkind & disrespectful, believing he loved & cared about her. Her body knew & was trying to warn her. She was feeling stressed & trapped for a reason. She had difficulty trusting him because her body knew he could not be trusted. She didn't realize how much she could trust herself.

Jane was raised by a CN mom. She had chronic strep throat beginning at a young age. The probable emotional causes were very clear.

- *Anger, rage, hurt, hatred.*
- *Feeling inferior.*
- *Don't know how to stand up for yourself, even though you are burning inside.*

These were all things Jane felt growing up.

Urinary tract infections were very common among women in romantic relationships with CNs. The probable emotional reasons:

- *Carrying a tremendous amount of guilt & fear.*
- *A deep-seated belief that there is something wrong with you.*
- *Allowing people to manipulate & control you.*
- *Sexual pressure & shame.*

The body is amazing. It always knows. The women were all stunned when I read about their illnesses. Their bodies had validated everything they had been feeling at the time. Other conditions I came across in my interviews were fibromyalgia, depression, anxiety, asthma, & chronic fatigue.

Part of the healing process is learning to trust yourself. When you are in a relationship with CNs, this is something that is suppressed in you. They lie & manipulate, but appear loving & innocent; this makes trusting your own feelings as well as your body incredibly difficult & confusing. What they say sounds smart & reasonable, but your body is telling you something else. The truth is that you are your best barometer for truth. Your body is here to help you, to guide you.

When you look back at all the physical symptoms you experienced when you were with a CN & read the probable emotional causes, you will see how incredibly brilliant your body is. It knew the whole time." – [Mir17, pp. 142–144]

13 What Survivors Feel

"As I listened to survivors talk about how they felt while they were in a relationship with a CN & how they are feeling as they are uncovering the truth, I found a lot of common thoughts, fears, & feeling states among them. I thought it would be helpful to share their thoughts & feelings with you so you can see that you are not alone & help validate your own experience.

Here is a list of what victims told me they felt when they were in a relationship with a CN.

- "I felt like the CN was interesting & I was dull."

- “I felt judged for the dumbest things.”
- “I felt like things about me were irritating to her.”
- “I felt like I was too quiet, too loud, too opinionated, too strong, too lazy, too picky, & not easy going enough.”
- “I felt stifled, held down for years.”
- “I didn’t feel free to be myself, all of me.”
- “I felt needy when I was around him.”
- “I felt insecure.”
- “I felt like I was an object that was easily replaceable.”
- “It felt like he was the positive one & I was the downer.”
- “I felt like I was too emotional, too sensitive, too much for her.”
- “I didn’t feel valued & pursued.”
- “I didn’t feel like he wanted me to thrive.”
- “I felt stripped of confidence, happiness, joy, & excitement for life.”
- “I felt like a failure.”
- “I felt like the way I parented irritated her.”
- “I felt like so many things were wrong with me.”
- “I felt like I didn’t deserve love.”
- “I felt like I was never good enough.”
- “I felt like there was no way to win his approval.”
- “I had a lot of self-doubt.”
- “I felt not considered.”
- “My self-worth went really low.”
- “I felt old, tired, weathered.”
- “I felt depleted.”
- “I felt a lot of anxiety.”
- “I never felt thin enough or pretty enough.”
- “I never felt like I wore the right clothes.”
- “I felt lifeless, drained.”

Here are some things survivors said they are feeling now as they are discovering the truth about their CN spouse/parent/boss:

- “Low-level depression.”
- “I feel such deep grief like I’ve never felt before & I find myself crying uncontrollably at times.”
- “So angry.”
- “I feel alone, even though I have family & friends that support me.”
- “Sometimes I wonder if I’ll ever feel happy. I look at people laughing, enjoying themselves & wonder if I’ll ever feel that.”
- “The more my eyes are opening the lighter I am feeling.”
- “It’s hard to imagine ever being in a relationship that is the real thing, to actually be loved by someone who wants nothing from me, but simply enjoys me & truly loves me.”
- “I feel suspicious of new people I meet, not knowing who I can trust.”
- “I feel scared about the future, not confident that I will be able to make it in this world on my own.”

- “I’m feeling a lot of self-doubt.”
- “I haven’t had a good night sleep in years.”
- “There are days I find myself entertaining thoughts of leaving this planet. It all feels like too much, & it makes me want to not be here anymore. It all feels too hard & too painful.”
- “I’m tired a lot.”
- “My self-confidence is low.”
- “I feel misunderstood. I try to explain the relationship to friends, & it never sounds that bad when I say it out loud. Then I question myself & feel even more despair & loneliness.”
- “I stay home a lot. I don’t feel like being social.”
- “I find it hard to date other people because I no longer trust “the nicest people”. It’s also hard to trust myself to choose someone who is healthy. I doubt my own discernment because of everything I’ve been through.”
- “I’ve been overeating a lot which makes me feel even worse about myself.”
- “I have no desire to eat.”
- “I feel discouraged because he seems so happy & I’m still falling apart.”
- “I feel like I am always bracing myself for the next angry phone call, email, or text from him. I have symptoms of PTSD like flashbacks, depression, anxiety, withdrawal, emotional numbing, reliving different events, & feelings of guilt & shame.”
- “I’m so used to being sabotaged by this person, it’s like I am constantly waiting for the ball to drop.”
- “I am starting to feel more hope.”
- “I am beginning to feel stronger.”
- “The other day I got an angry email from my ex, & I noticed I felt the same trauma I always feel but I was able to move on faster this time.”
- “I’m beginning to dream again & starting to actually feel excited about my future.”
- “I’m feeling really grateful to be out of that relationship & have the space to heal.”

As you heal, you will find yourself going through waves of different emotions. Some days you will feel discouraged, & other days you will feel hope. You might feel like you are moving on, feeling stronger. Then you see the CN or receive an email or a phone call from him or her that sends you into a state of emotional paralysis. You find you can’t function. It takes time to get back to your center.

You have been through a tremendously difficult & painful experience. You have been treated terribly by someone who is selfish & doesn’t care about you. You have been given messages about who you are that are not true. You have been conned, manipulated, lied to, & brainwashed. You have been belittled, talked down to, & treated with disrespect. You were used. You have been emotionally & psychologically abused for years.

You have been blamed for things that had nothing to do with you. You have been made to feel like things are wrong with you when they are not. You have been treated in a way that has made you doubt yourself. Someone who does not have your best interest at heart has controlled you. You have experienced the illusion of love, not the real thing. Not even close.

Because of their manipulation, you have received the damaging message that you are not worthy of kindness, love, & respect. You now wonder if you are even worthy of enjoying this life.

You did not deserve any of this even though you have been made to think you did. Your mind, your body, & your heart need a tremendous amount of kindness & tenderness now so you can find your way home.

It is really important that you know this was abuse. You thought it was love because they acted like it was. The truth is you are a survivor of abuse. You have no physical scars, so it is easy & common to underplay what you have been through, but the reality is you are a victim & survivor of psychological & emotional abuse.

You have been through enough, & now it is time to heal & restore the truth of how beautiful & valuable you are. You are kind, genuine, loving, tender, & strong. This is the truth of who you are. You are full of life. I know you haven’t felt that for a while, if ever. You have a light in you that has been temporarily dimmed. That life buried inside you is now ready to emerge.

You will feel that beautiful smile again. You won’t always be in this valley. You are making steps to climb out. You will make it to the top where you will feel fresh, clean air that will fill your traumatized body with love, real love that feels amazing. This is what you are born to feel. You are made for love, & it is time to come back to who you really are.” – [Mir17, pp. 145–148]

14 The Road to Healing & Restoration

“When you are in a relationship with a covert narcissist, parts of you shut down. You lose sight of the truth of who you are. The life inside you is not there like it used to be. Your heart has been deeply wounded & betrayed. You feel devastated.

You may be feeling like a mess inside. The truth is you are not a mess. You have experienced evil. Your body is having a natural reaction to that. You were made for love, to be loved, to feel love, & to share love. You lived with the opposite, & everything you are feeling is a result of that & makes complete sense.

When I brought up the subject of healing & restoration to a survivor I interviewed, she said, “*Do you think that is even possible?*”

I want you to know, as I told her, healing is absolutely possible. Your heart, your body deserves it. You have been through a lot. You will be amazed to feel the strength & hope & love that you will experience as you heal.

1 of the things that are necessary for healing to take place is recognizing the truth of the relationship & that person. You experienced so many covert lies; it is incredibly helpful to be able to see clearly.

The truth is you were in love with an illusion, with the person they portrayed themselves to be. At 1st, this is an excruciating realization. You will go through doubts & wonder if you are over inflating this, if they really are innocent & you’re just scared to move on. You will have a ton of self-doubt. Eventually, with education & support, you will see that your hunch, your inner knowing, is on target. In time the truth that you were in love with an illusion will feel like a relief because truth does set you free. That full realization will validate years of confusion you felt, years of unexplained exhaustion & health issues, years of sexual confusion, years of feeling less than, & years of unhappiness along with anxiety.

You lived in an unsafe environment, were demeaned & devalued for years (decades for some of you, entire childhoods for many of you). You did not experience unconditional love; you did not live with someone who treated you with respect, who cherished you, treasured you & felt so lucky to have you in his or her lives.

No, the truth is you experienced a counterfeit.

If this was a spouse or romantic partner, this awakening to the truth is excruciatingly painful because you did love that person with all your heart. You were dedicated. You were in 100%.

The truth is that you were the life force in the relationship. When you’re really honest with yourself, when you look back with clear vision that life, that love you gave & felt, was never fully reciprocated.

It is incredibly painful & confusing to be cut off so quickly & harshly by someone you genuinely loved. Any feelings you thought they had for you are completely gone, & instead, you are experiencing a person that hates you & sees you as the enemy, blaming you for so many things that make no rational sense. At the same time, they are making sure their world always looks greener & more wonderful than yours. They move on quickly & make sure to let you know how much happier they are without you.

The truth is this relationship never meant the same to them as it did to you. You approached it from a genuine, good-hearted, loving place. They did not. They acted like they did, but it wasn’t genuine. The reality is they have massive issues & have projected them onto you for years making you think that you are responsible for things that have nothing to do with you.

A big part of healing is recognizing the truth & coming to the place where you can accept that it really was all an illusion. This takes time & can’t be forced. Seeing & accepting what really happened will be a natural result that will come with educating yourself on covert narcissism, getting support, & learning to trust yourself, treating yourself with the utmost love & kindness.”

– [Mir17, pp. 149–151]

14.1 You Were Abused

“The Merriam-Webster Dictionary online defines verbal abuse as “*Language that condemns or vilifies usually unjustly, intemperately, & angrily.*” Psychology Today, in an article titled “When is it Emotional Abuse,” defined emotional abuse as:

... an attempt to control, in just the same way that physical abuse is an attempt to control another person. They only difference is that the emotional abuser does not use physical hitting, kicking, pinching, grabbing, pushing or other physical forms of harm. Rather the perpetrator of emotional abuse uses emotion as his/her weapon of choice.

Emotional abuse in our culture is pervasive & damaging, & it’s as relevant a topic as physical & sexual abuse. Emotional abuse undercuts a person’s foundational self-confidence & love of self & replaces them with confusion about self-worth, value, justice, mercy, & love.

It is easy to diminish what you experienced because no one hit you or physically sexually abused you. It is common for victims to wonder if they are blowing their experience out of proportion or overdramatizing it. They often see themselves as the one to blame. This is what the CN wants. They do things to distract you & throw you off of seeing the truth. So many victims stay quiet because they don’t feel they have the right to call it abuse. It is such a strong word that we generally associate with bruises & visible scars, with yelling & screaming.

A covert narcissist is in some ways a more dangerous abuser. I say this delicately. All abusers are horrific, & all abuse is deplorable; all victims of all types of abuse have been through a tremendous amount. I don’t want to diminish anyone’s pain. The point I’m trying to make is when someone is hitting you or yelling at you it is clearly abuse. Covert abuse is hidden & so subtle, it is far from obvious. Manipulative, covert tactics not only hurt you, they also chip away at your identity, your self-worth & make you feel like this is all your fault.

Covert emotional & psychological abuse is what happens in cults. Leaders who make you feel loved can also talk you into committing suicide. These people are powerful. Do not diminish what you have experienced. You have been controlled & manipulated for years. You are a victim of abuse. You are also an incredibly strong survivor because you are still here & you

are reading this book, which tells me a lot about you. It tells me you are smart, a researcher, & a deep thinker. You are strong because even through your tears & confusion you are looking for answers. I also know since you have all that as your core, you are going to come out of this just fine, even better than you could imagine. Keep going. We need people like you in this world. Don't let this take you out. You are the cream of the crop. You are the type of person that makes this planet a better place. Thank you for being brave, for being you.” – [Mir17, pp. 151–152]

14.2 Cognitive Dissonance

“Cognitive dissonance is when you hold 2 conflicting beliefs in your mind. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as *“Psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs & attitudes held simultaneously.”* This is what makes covert narcissist abuse so confusing & difficult. For so long you believed this person was kind & genuine. You believed with all your heart this person loved & cared about you. When you start to experience cruelty from them that is more overt or when you begin to discover they have many narcissistic traits, this messes with your mind because seeing them as possibly being manipulative & controlling contrasts the belief that they are loving, kind, & innocent.

When you hold a belief so strongly, it is very difficult to believe something that is so contrary to your original belief even if the evidence is undeniable & staring you in the face. When you start opening your eyes to ways the CN has controlled, manipulated, belittled, & demeaned you for years, this is a massive reality paradigm shift. You will fight hard against the evidence no matter how obvious it is. This stirs up tremendous insecurity, confusion, & anxiety in the body. What makes it even harder is the fact that people around you see the CN in a positive light.

Cognitive dissonance is 1 of the most challenging parts of healing & recovery. It takes an incredible amount of mental strength to look past strong beliefs you have held & be open to really looking at the reality that is presenting itself.

With time, education, & support, your eyes will open more & more. The stronger you become in yourself, & the more you treat yourself with profound love, you will begin to see what really happened. Your brain will do a lot of shifting & analyzing. The brain looks for evidence to support beliefs. It is helpful to talk through events in your mind, retraining it to see truth from different angles.

Just know that his healing process is challenging. It will take effort on your part, but it will be so worth it. It will change you in ways that will bring about such strength & clarity that other areas in your life will be affected as well in a such a profound & beautiful way.” – [Mir17, pp. 152–153]

14.3 This Was Not Your Fault

“It is so easy to get caught up in the thinking that this was your fault for 2 reasons. The CN in your life is constantly telling you that or inferring it. Also, you are a self-reflective person that takes responsibility for your actions, not wanting to blame other people. W.r.t. what has happened with the CN, I can tell you the way you were treated was not your fault. Your beautiful traits were exploited & used to harm you, to make you question yourself.

“You were manipulated, insulted, degraded, belittled, & neglected. Full responsibility for this goes to the psychopath. It does not matter if you were vulnerable or insecure – no decent human being should ever take advantage of another. None of this was your fault.” – *Psychopath Free* by Jackson MacKenzie

This is what happened. You can let go of self-blame & focus on self-love. You have been blamed enough for probably ridiculous things. It is time now to see the truth of how special you are. Allow yourself to believe the ones that actually love you. Let go of the ones whose actions do not match their words. Let go of the illusions, the manipulators. Spend your time with the ones who sincerely love you & want the best for you. Allow yourself to feel that love. Breathe it in & let it permeate every part of you. You are beginning a new life where love exists, & everything else must leave.” – [Mir17, pp. 153–154]

14.4 The Healing Progression

“As you unfold the truth & deprogram yourself from the lies, you will experience ups & downs on your way back home to yourself. Mary remembers this happening to her. She was feeling great, working toward her goals, building a new life, & then an email came. It was a 3-page assault of her character filled with lies & manipulation. It flattened her. She cried on & off the next few days. She felt paralyzed, numb, & slipped into despair. She couldn't think clearly. She thought she was doing so well. She was. The progress she did see is that she bounced back faster this time compared to times in the past with her ex.

Time continued to pass. She had good, strong days, & also felt days of despair, loneliness, & anxiety, but she kept going to her support group & doing healing exercises. The other day she called to tell me about a massive breakthrough. She ran across an old journal when she was cleaning up & decided to read the part that took place during her divorce. She found a list she had written down of all the cruel things her ex CN had told her were “wrong” with her. For years, she had mentally reviewed these. They had affected her greatly. For a long time, she questioned herself & wondered if they were true about her & she just didn't see it. That day when she found the list, she didn't feel the same anxiety & sinking feeling like she had been used to feeling. This time she look at the list & felt almost completely unphased. She went through each one & thought, *“That's so not true. That's not even close to who I am.”* Then she took a closer look & was able to clearly see that most of these things he said about her were, in fact, true of him.

There was something else that struck her. *This was all so mean, all these things he had said to me*, she thought. For so long she had just focused on the thought, *“What if he's right? What if these are really true about me?”* She was stronger now, & able to see clearly because she had been educating herself, spending her time treating herself with more kindness & respect as well as

surrounding her self with people who treated her with real love. She was not at the place where she was so used to experiencing authentic love that meanness & bullying was starting to feel foreign to her. This was a massive breakthrough. Mary even looks different than when I 1st met her. Many of her friends have commented that she looks 10 years younger. That's what healing does, what love does, what not being in a toxic relationship does.

1 thing to notice is that CNs will tell you what is wrong with you. Targets don't do that. Targets say things like, "*When you said that, I felt this ...*" CNs are not reflective people & are emotionally immature. They blame others; they don't take responsibility for themselves but instead project their own issues onto others.

I hope Mary's story encourages you. Know that you will go up & down, but you are making progress & someday will see very clearly to the point that the words the CN in your life says won't affect you anymore. You will absolutely know the truth of who you are & no one will be able to take that from you again." – [Mir17, pp. 154–156]

14.5 A Healing Exercise

"I gave Mary different exercises to do that helped her heal. 1 of them helped enable her breakthrough. The 1st time she did this exercise she found it difficult, but each time she would revisit it, the truth was easier for her to see.

Here is the exercise for you to do if you would like:

1. Write a list of everything the cover narcissist in your life has said is wrong with you. This may be what was directly told to you, or was insinuated.
2. Now look back over the list & ask yourself with each one if this is really true about you. If you are feeling a lot of confusion right now & have a hard time thinking clearly at this point of your recovery, ask a trusted friend who knows you well if any of these are true about you. Also, if they are true, is it a big deal? Is it really something that is wrong with you? E.g., Mary's ex put her down for being overweight. Is that something that is wrong with who she is – no.
3. After answering if each one is true about you, go back over each statement of what is "wrong with you" according to Mr. or Ms. Toxic & ask if these statements are actually true of the CN who said them. The clearer you get, you will be amazed how many are projections of who the CN is & that the put-downs have nothing to do with you.
4. Now, write below the truth of who you are. Make a list of all the beautiful characteristics about yourself to help a reminder of who you really are. If you have a hard time coming up with characteristics, ask a friend who knows you well to help you with this." – [Mir17, p. 156]

14.6 Blaming Yourself

15 Traits of a Covert Narcissist Checklist

16 Educational Resources

17 Articles & Books Quoted

References

- [Mir17] Debbie Mirza. *The Covert Passive Aggressive Narcissist: Recognizing the Traits & Finding Healing After Hidden Emotional & Psychological Abuse*. Debbie Mirza Coaching, 2017, p. 224.