

How to Leave a Narcissist... For Good

How to Leave a Narcissist... For Good

Moving On From
Abusive and Toxic
Relationships

DR SARAH DAVIES



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This book is dedicated to all those who find the strength, courage and humility to face narcissistic abuse and take the steps to grow, recover and move on . . . however painful, difficult or frightening that may be at times. You are an inspiration and may you continue to grow and shine.

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Introduction

No doubt, if you are reading this book, it's because you already have some interest in, or awareness of, narcissism. For many people, starting to awaken to the idea and coming to realise that a person in their personal or professional life is a narcissist can be quite a shock. It can be the beginning of a somewhat difficult and confusing process. Perhaps you suspect you need to end a toxic relationship with someone who is a narcissist, or maybe you have already done it and are struggling to come to terms with your experience.

I have experienced narcissistic abuse at first hand. I have walked through the recovery journey myself, and I continue to do so as a Counselling Psychologist and Trauma Therapist, alongside the many clients I work with in my private practice. A large part of the clinical work in which I specialise is helping people identify, work through, manage and recover from narcissistic abuse.

If you have reached for this book because you have experienced being in a relationship with a narcissist, or have experienced narcissistic abuse, then I would suggest that an important

fundamental first step in recovery from this kind of abuse is to understand more about the nature of narcissism: what it looks like, what it sounds like, the origins of narcissistic traits, and so on.

The first few chapters will offer an overview of narcissism. The principal focus of this book is not on the narcissist, however. After helping you to understand the basis of narcissism, the focus then shifts to you and your recovery. The aim is to provide information, tips and techniques to help you manage your relationship, to break free from the narcissist's spell, to learn how you can protect yourself, and to avoid being negatively affected by narcissistic abuse in the future. Too much focus on the narcissist is itself a big part of the problem. Recovery starts when you begin to bring the focus back to yourself.

The aim of this book is to support you in this process of recovery. There are case studies based on the experiences of others to help you make sense of your own experiences. (All identities and personal details have been altered to ensure privacy.) Some ideas and suggestions are included to help guide your healing, as well as to help ensure you are not vulnerable to experiencing narcissistic abuse again. Part of this may include developing awareness of, and perhaps starting to break any patterns of attraction to, this kind of relational dynamic in the first place.

Narcissism: there is a lot of it around. As humans, we naturally seek to make sense of, and ascribe meaning to, our experience. Making sense of a narcissist's behaviour is not always easy, though, especially at the beginning. Learning what you can about narcissism, including its potential origins, can really help you

start to process your experience specific to narcissistic abuse. However, a word of caution. As it dawns on you that this is perhaps what you have been, or still are, experiencing, there is a danger of becoming ‘stuck’ at this stage – stuck at the stage of trying to work it all out analytically; stuck at trying to understand why he/she/they have acted in the ways that they have. This can be quite paralysing. This is a stage of desperately trying to work out and understand, analytically and cognitively, how or why this has happened. The questions you are often left with will probably include some or all of the following, and more:

‘How could this person do this? How can they be so wonderful some of the time and so cruel at other times? They were so lovely at the beginning ... what happened? Did they ever really love me? Are they even capable of love? What did I do wrong? What’s wrong with me? How could they ‘switch’ so much? How can they be so venomous? Why did they do this to me? Will this ever change? How could I not see it? Why did I not listen to the warning signs? Is it my fault? Am I responsible? What did I do?’

I’d like you to know that it is absolutely a normal and necessary part of the process to spend time relaying your past experiences in relation to the narcissist, trying to work through the chronology of events, as well as the progression and demise of the relationship. This is simply your mind’s natural inclination to want to make sense of all that has happened, to process information and to ascribe meaning to your experience. It is your mind’s innate mechanism to understand and process your experiences. In the

quest for very human and natural sense-making, you will likely want to find the clues and the answers to the many questions you may have. This is completely understandable, and very much a part of the early stages of recovery. Up to a point, it can aid coming to terms with narcissistic abuse. It can also be very helpful for you to learn from. You may look back and recognise in hindsight the signs and the clues that were there – the snidey comments, the missed dates, the inconsistencies, the ‘hooks’, the lies, the jealousy, the selfishness, the inconsideration, the gaslighting and more ... This is all helpful and very much an important part of the recovery process. Many people in the shock and trauma of narcissistic abuse find themselves locked on for hours, relaying and thinking this through. To some extent, this is normal, expected, and an essential part of the process. At some point, however, it is really important to recognise the difficult fact that, in reality, you may never have the answers to all your questions. And the simple reason for this is because:

It is impossible to use logic to try and understand completely illogical actions.

Nonsensical behaviour is simply what we have to expect from any narcissist. So while it is important and helpful to try to work through and seek to understand some of your experience in relation to the narcissist, ultimately you come to a point where you start to reconcile that you may never know, or understand, or get the answers to the many questions you are left with. I often see people become stuck at the stage of trying to work it

all out. Sometimes people are stuck there for a very long time. Unfortunately, this is not recovery in action. It's being stuck in illness, obsession, analysis paralysis, shock and trauma. You cannot understand illogical people and their illogical actions with logic. Instead, in order to move on, you must begin the difficult process of reconciling yourself to being left with unanswered questions, along with accepting all the feelings that go with that.

In reality this process can feel like a painful dance and, at times, like a seemingly endless and horrific tango: two steps forward, two steps back – while wearing shoes that are two sizes too small! Please know that this is all part of the recovery process. You will probably wrestle again and again with wanting to understand and make sense of all that has happened. This is all very natural and understandable. This process in itself is to some extent necessary. There will be good days, and other times it will most likely feel like an overwhelming struggle. Ultimately, however, you will start to see that it is futile to persevere with trying to make complete sense of what is essentially somebody else's nonsense. It will likely come up again and again throughout the healing process – but less so, in time, as you learn to sit more comfortably with the not-knowing and to accept this more readily. This will get easier. With the right tools, support and therapy work, you can and will feel better.

Importantly, if you are arriving/have arrived at the realisation that you are currently, or have been, involved with a narcissist, chances are you have probably already been through enough. That is one of the reasons why it is so crucial, from this point forward, that you learn to be very gentle, kind, forgiving and compassionate with yourself. For some of us, our self-esteem may be so low, or

we may have experienced so much abuse, that the concept of self-care sounds a bit alien at the moment. That's OK. This will be covered in later chapters, but for now, this means recognising that: (a) you've had a tough and difficult experience; and (b) from now on, you can begin to tune into whatever is a good thing to do for yourself and to focus more on what you need – all that is simply kind, loving, supportive and healing.

Just take a moment to pause here and notice what it is like, right now, having read that point about the importance of self-care and self-compassion. What do you notice within yourself? What are your thoughts or feelings about that? Are you keen to skip past this bit? Did you automatically dismiss this point as too basic? Do you feel like you already know all this? Or is it that you don't really get what the concept of self-care really means right now? Are you usually too busy putting other people's needs before your own? Does the idea of being kind or compassionate to yourself bring anything else up? If so, what? Does it feel selfish? Does it help to acknowledge that perhaps you may be too hard on yourself sometimes? Or is this difficult to consider right now? Is there any room for improvement? There usually is.

How to Leave a Narcissist ... For Good will cover more about self-care, our inner self-talk, kindness and compassion in later chapters, as these are important fundamentals in fostering a healthy relationship with ourselves. It is also a crucial component in recovery from narcissistic abuse and, importantly, an effective shield that protects us from getting into and staying in abusive relationships again in the future. For now, though, self-care may mean reaching out to friends, talking to a therapist, taking a relaxing lavender bath, treating yourself to something

nice, taking a spa day, spending time with people who care about you, walking in nature, enjoying a round of golf, reading a self-help book or positive literature, eating well, seeing a show with friends or family, shopping, volunteering, yoga, resting, meditating, or otherwise trying any way in which to be gentle and kind to yourself.

Many people who find themselves in a relationship with a narcissist are actually some of the kindest, most understanding, forgiving, caring and loving people you could possibly wish to meet. Usually, though, their focus will be on caring for and loving others, and attending to everybody else's wants and needs before their own. So chances are you already actually know how to love, be kind and care – because you do this for others. Recovery starts with fine-tuning this forgiveness, kindness, care and compassion for *yourself*.

Healthy relationships begin first and foremost with developing a truly healthy and loving relationship with yourself.

Once we have this in place, all other relationships become much easier. This is putting healthy relationships in the right order.

Being involved with a narcissist feels a lot like being on a roller coaster: there are highs and lows, it's exciting and fun at times, absolutely horrific and frightening at others. And just like a roller-coaster ride, if you stay on for long enough, it will leave

INTRODUCTION

you sick. If you're reading this book, there is every chance that you've had enough of being on this ride. My aim is to help you develop the insight and self-help tools to get off, stay off, recover, and move on with your life.

This book is written with the simple intention of sharing my knowledge and experience to help you and others. There may be some things you like and agree with and, I hope, find helpful; there may be things that you don't. You may find some parts difficult reading. I would like to encourage you to take whatever it is you find helpful, and I truly wish you all the very best with your recovery and healing journey.

Best wishes,

Dr Sarah Davies

PART ONE

**NARCISSISTS AND
NARCISSISM**

What is Narcissism?

Arming yourself with information about narcissism is a crucial first step in learning how to recognise it and to then avoid it in the future. It also helps you to understand the issues and limitations of being in a relationship with a narcissist. The story of Narcissus and Echo captures the essence of a narcissistic relationship.

Narcissus and Echo: The Tragedy

The word ‘narcissism’ comes from Greek, specifically from a Greek mythological character, Narcissus. The story of Narcissus and Echo captures a tragic relationship that highlights the dynamic seen between narcissists and those, the ‘echoists’, who are typically drawn to them.

Narcissus was a charismatic and handsome hunter, with a reputation for breaking hearts by rejecting the love of others. Never satisfied, he was arrogant and aloof. The story goes that, as punishment for his ongoing disdain and arrogance, the goddess

of revenge, Nemesis, casts a spell on him, to make him fall in love with the very next person he sees. Soon after, on a fiercely hot day, tired from his enthusiastic hunting, Narcissus decides to take some rest by a still lake. As he takes a drink from the lake he sees an image in the water and immediately falls deeply in love – with his own reflection. From that moment forward, Narcissus remains completely enthralled and captivated with his own image and all that for which he is himself admired. He does not realise at all that he is in fact in love with his own idealistic image. And so he begins a futile pursuit for this unobtainable love.

Echo was a beautiful and sweet mountain nymph, who was disciplined by the goddess Hera for being too talkative. As punishment, Hera deprived Echo of the ability to express herself directly so she could only utter the last words of others, finishing sentences, yet unable to start them. When she meets Narcissus she becomes completely infatuated with him. She desperately tries to reach out to him, to connect, to communicate with him and have him hear her, see her, acknowledge and love her ... but she can't. And he can't. Echo desperately and painfully longs for the attention and affections of Narcissus, but he remains completely fixated on himself. Narcissus continues to reject Echo and her love, yet undeterred she goes on to spend her life obsessed and consumed by her pursuit of the impossible with Narcissus. Echo eventually disappears, so all that is left of her is her echoing voice. Narcissus also wastes away with the obsessive love he has for himself, dying from the agony of never being able to achieve the object of his desire. Both end tragically in discontent and pain, heartbroken and alone.

The story of Narcissus and Echo describes the futile pursuit and obsession around the fantasy of ‘love’ from both sides. Narcissus is self-obsessed and in love with his own image, barely noticing those around, while Echo focuses so much of her attention and efforts on him that there is nothing of herself left.

‘It probably started sooner than I cared to acknowledge, in the early months of us being together. The inconsistencies and verbal abuse ... There were several times when I would be hit with an absolute torrent of verbal abuse. Being called selfish (hardly!), mad, even being called the abuser – a narcissist ... It sounds crazy now, but I just took it. I was actually in a state of shock and disbelief as to how he could go from being so lovely to so utterly vile. I guess I just couldn’t see what was going on. I was blinded.

‘In hindsight, this abuse would often come at times when I was wanting to go out with friends, trying to enjoy a girls’ night from time to time. To start with, he would wish me a nice evening, often buying me gifts before I left. My friends would be envious – their partners didn’t do that, they’d say. I see the gifts and the timing of them now as quite sinister, because my friends would say how sweet it was of him to get me nice things, and then they couldn’t understand if I would say, later on in the evening, that he was being horrible to me. They sort of dismissed it as “This is a lovely man who buys nice gifts!” He was a wonderful boyfriend to the outside. I very quickly just kept the bullying to myself. I realise now, that was what he wanted.

‘Anyway, the evenings would start well, then during the

night I'd get calls and messages where he would get increasingly abusive and irrational. I'd be accused of not caring about him, leaving him, being selfish, flirting, being promiscuous. None of it was true at all, but I strangely felt very guilty! I would feel terrible, like I had done something wrong. I was scared. I'd even question myself if I had! Then I would be the one desperately trying to make it up to him, when I hadn't even done anything. The next day I would be walking on eggshells the whole time. He would give me the silent treatment. He would sometimes act as if nothing had happened, as if he had no idea what I was talking about, or flippantly blame it on booze. I was so blind to it all at the time. I only see it more clearly now I am out of it. I spent a lot of time in confusion. I did so much for him, but it was never enough. I lost myself, I lost my voice. I could not understand why he just couldn't appreciate me or love me back. I realise now that it's because he is not capable of that. It was futile. And I need to focus on my self-worth and reminding myself that I deserve better.'

Understanding the true nature and the depth of issues in narcissism, as well as those of echoism, codependency, and other traits that leave us vulnerable to being attracted (or attractive) to narcissistic personality types, is fundamental to recognising and ultimately accepting the futility and madness in this kind of relationship dynamic.

It is important to start to separate yourself from the narcissist, and vice versa, coming to understand the other person's behaviours, mentality, struggles, issues, and so on, as theirs alone. It is not for you, me or anybody else to assume, take on or

take responsibility for the other person's actions, choices, pain, trauma, addictions, lies or anything else. It is important – in fact, essential – for their own recovery and growth, that they learn to do that for themselves. If, for whatever reason, they can't or won't, it is also crucial to know that is also not your responsibility or issue. Equally, what *is* your responsibility is to return the focus to your own actions, choices, behaviours, traumas, needs and wants. It's about bringing it back to you and working on yourself. Healthy detachment and working towards reclaiming a healthier balance are vital in recovery and healing from abusive relationships.

Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Narcissistic Personality Disorder, often referred to as NPD, is a 'Cluster B' psychiatric condition as defined in the *DSM* (or *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). NPD is characterised by long-term patterns of behaviour and attitudes that centre around self-importance, disregard for others, and a pathological need for attention and admiration, together with a distinct lack of empathy. People who are narcissistic have a pre-occupation with achievement and success, money, power, perceived power, grandiosity and self-importance. They are manipulative and do not think twice about using or taking advantage of other people or organisations for their own selfish gains. In fact, many narcissists view others simply as commodities. They are unable to ever really experience deep, authentic relationships or connections with people.

The key features of Narcissistic Personality Disorder include the following:

- A strong sense of grandiosity, with expectations of special treatment from others or institutions.
- Core issues of personal identity: narcissists need constant positive regard and feedback, admiration and worship from others in order to regulate their self-esteem and sense of self.
- Displays of selfish and self-seeking actions and behaviours.
- A grandiose and exaggerated sense of self-importance: narcissists will exaggerate or lie about their achievements, importance, status and abilities.
- Arrogance.
- Anxiety.
- A pathological need for admiration and attention.
- Poor self-esteem and deep-seated insecurity – overcompensated for with arrogance, a haughty perspective, or belittling, judgemental behaviours or comments about others.
- A preoccupation with ideas and fantasies about success, power, wealth, love, brilliance, looks or image.
- A sense or belief that they are 'special', 'different' or 'unique'.
- A strong sense of entitlement.
- Interpersonally highly manipulative and/or exploitative, narcissists will take advantage of others for their own gains.

- A distinct lack of genuine empathy. Narcissists can actually seem very attuned to the feelings of others, but often only in anticipation of how somebody else's feelings may affect them. Any displays of empathy are used to manipulate, and are ultimately geared towards their own selfish means.
- A reluctance to take or accept personal responsibility for any mistakes or wrongdoings.
- A strong tendency to blame others.
- Addictions and issues with excess, including obsessive-compulsive tendencies, drug use, alcoholism, sex and love addiction, pornography, gambling, workaholism, etc.
- An inability to form or maintain long-term or meaningful relationships.
- A fear of and/or incapacity for real emotional intimacy and/or commitment.
- Aggression or aggressive behaviour, difficulty controlling anger and rage.

It is worth noting that a person may have some or all of these traits. If you recognise a lot of them in a current or former partner, it is possible that they have NPD or narcissistic traits. A formal diagnosis is usually only given by a qualified clinical professional.

These are the main traits, but narcissists can differ in their behaviours. Generally speaking, there are two main types of narcissist and I'll cover them in more detail now.

Overt Narcissism

An **overt narcissist** is arguably much easier to spot than other more subtle forms of narcissism. They are the more stereotypically recognised example of narcissism. ‘Overt’ reflects the grandiose characteristics, as often depicted in Hollywood or seen in the business world, politics and on the celebrity scene. Traditionally, the overt narcissist is seen as the suave, sophisticated, charismatic and confident male (although of course they can also be female), usually in some kind of position of power. They are often entrepreneurs, business owners, CEOs, politicians, in the arts, or in roles of strong standing and status. Wearing smart, expensive, designer, sharp or eccentric clothing, powerful fragrances, and showing off a twinkle in their eye, they are the type of narcissist that will turn heads at a party. They attract and seek to surround themselves with unsuspecting admirers. They exude buckets full of charm, charisma, confidence and sex appeal. The overt narcissists often appear powerful, self-confident and self-assured, arrogant, in control, thick-skinned and indestructible on the surface. They are typically often very vain, yet fit and good-looking Lotharios – although with insecurities, obsessions or paranoia about their looks and image. They can also be fantastic fun, wild, have a great sense of humour, be romantic, spontaneous and seemingly loving and lovable. They may even show an enticing snippet of vulnerability in order to cast a spell over others. It is easy to see why so many people fall for the charms of the overt narcissist. They have the power to make those around them feel instantly wonderful. They also, though, have the power to destroy and abuse.

It is often easier to spot an overt narcissist as they behave and treat people in a much more obvious, clear and direct way. They are almost always unashamedly self-seeking, attention-seeking, high-risk-behaving, selfish, manipulative addicts. They tend to be fixated on wealth, status, success, recognition, admiration and power, yet at the same time are extremely sensitive to actual or perceived rejection, criticism or blame. They are overtly changeable, manipulative and often aggressive in their attempts to control others and to get what they want. Anybody who dares cross them will likely be met with the wrath of narcissistic rage. They are people who will seek to bully, harm or, conversely, suddenly drop associates, completely cutting off from them as if they had never existed. They are also likely to set up smear or hate campaigns in response to any rejection or fall-out. They will want to cut off or punish anybody who does not worship or admire them in the way they so desperately need. Ultimately their self-serving manipulation is achieved through a variety of outlandish and incredibly subtle ways.

'I remember very clearly the first time I met John. I was at a conference party with work. We both worked in law, and so I had some friends and colleagues that already knew of him. He immediately caught my eye when he walked into the room. There must have been hundreds of people there, but I saw him, right on the other side of the room, walk through the door. He was incredibly handsome, tall, and one of the first things I noticed was his bright captivating smile. He was so attentive, talking to everybody as he made his way across the room. When we were introduced I honestly felt weak at the knees. He was so

handsome, charismatic, dressed good, smelt good ... I couldn't believe he was there, wanting to talk to me!

'I was having a very bodily reaction to his mere presence. I know that might sound a bit crazy, but that was the power he had over me before we had even spoken! I'm usually quite a calm, collected and confident person but I was nervous talking to him. There was huge chemistry and energy between us both – I'd never felt anything like it. I also felt like I could see deep into his eyes, like I could see the real him. It felt like a deep connection.

'Looking back, I realise now it was all so intense and at the time it was all-consuming and fast became addictive – he was like my crack-cocaine hit! That night we exchanged numbers. I remember as he left, he walked out of the door and then turned back around to smile, just at me. At that moment I felt so special. Like, out of hundreds of beautiful, intelligent and interesting people at this function, he could only see me. It was mesmerising. There was a power there from day one, no question. He texted me that evening and we quickly got into a fast-paced exchange and arranged our first date for later that week ... It was intense from the very start.'

Covert Narcissism

The **covert narcissist** is a slightly different type of presentation and one that is arguably a little more difficult to spot. In essence they share the same core pathology as the overt narcissist, having a fragile ego and self-esteem, stemming from the same kind of

early damage. (We'll be exploring this shortly.) However, the covert kind of narcissist comes across as more innocent and more vulnerable. They can be softly spoken, seductive, gentle, unassuming, perhaps shy, quiet, sensitive, alluring, sweet and helpful. Their core deep-seated fear and vulnerability are masked by an array of more subtle techniques of control and manipulation than are typically observed in the overt narcissist. This includes seeking to get their own needs met by coming across as caring and helpful, altruistic even. They are the rescuer. They may be very generous, buying gifts, offering funds, as they use financial status to gain power and control. They manage to shame others in a variety of subtle and indirect ways. Feigning or using illness or health concerns (real or imagined) to elicit sympathy, care and concern, for example, or guilt-tripping others as a way of gaining control and getting their own needs met. Or else finding subtle and indirect ways to receive attention, sympathy or admiration. This can also include using love or sex as a way to control or manipulate. The covert narcissist can be quite the silent seducer. All techniques are ultimately used in order to satisfy their own narcissistic supply needs.

The covert narcissist is often the martyr who sacrifices his or her own needs for others (and if only everybody could see and appreciate this!). The covert narcissist will find it easier to willingly portray their 'weaknesses' or 'vulnerabilities' than the overt narcissist. They will therefore happily relay stories of how they have been victimised, treated poorly by others, misunderstood, explain how hard done by they are and how it's everybody else's fault. Again, this is all with the end goal of manipulating and controlling in order to receive the attention, affection and

sympathies they so desperately need for their fragile ego state. A narcissist can display a mixture of the two.

From my clinical practice and experience I have identified a number of main covert-type narcissistic profiles, outlined in further detail below. They are harder to detect than the out-and-out overt, arrogant, grandiose-type narcissist more often depicted in the mainstream. They are, however, equally – and in some ways more – troubling, as often these personality types demonstrate attractive and appealing qualities, at the same time as being controlling and manipulative, which only adds to a partner's confusion. An important point to note is that narcissists can have more than one kind of covert profile: you might recognise the qualities of two or more profiles in the same person.

The Achievement-Focused

The achievement-focused narcissist seeks out those with status or connections, and those with a desirable or important job. For the achievement-focused, all that tends to matter is what you do in life as well as what you have or own. Nothing is ever enough for a materialistic narcissist. They will communicate, in a variety of ways, that whatever you achieve is never quite enough. They will seek partners who tend to be frazzled, burnt-out workaholics playing their own part in seeking contentment from the elusive arrival of 'enough'. Here, there is often a distinct disregard for emotional well-being. They may ignore or not recognise a partner's fatigue/stress/tiredness or emotional needs, instead supporting the idea that their love for you is dependent on achievements or gains, doing this via criticism and/or praise

for accomplishments or displays and/or withdrawal of love and support.

‘My partner rarely helped with things at home. I worked a big job, long hours, demanding work, and I would get home exhausted and stressed. He stayed at home, just managing property that we owned. I’d get home and the house would be a mess (despite having cleaners) – no food in the fridge, nothing prepared for dinner. He would expect me to work and sort out the house and cooking, too. I was exhausted. Looking back, I was running on empty. I don’t know how I did it. But I felt compelled to please. To not let him down. I didn’t want to disappoint him. If I showed him I was tired or struggling, it was like it was a weakness. When we saw friends, he would talk endlessly about how proud he was of me and all that I achieve and all the things I juggle. It felt like it became impossible to do any less.’

The Victim

The victim-type covert narcissist is quite content with showing and sharing their ‘vulnerabilities’ with others. They will more or less constantly be complaining about how poorly they are or have been treated. They tend to have a history of ‘bad’ exes, relationships or jobs. All previous unhealthy or toxic relationships have been the other person’s fault – or so they claim. They never consider their own part in any of it. More abusively, the victim-type will complain about how they are the victim in the current relationship. They will point the finger at their partner and complain

about how he/she is not understanding or considerate enough of their needs; they may perhaps suggest that they are the ‘victim’ of others’ anger, insecurities and so on. But notice how they are the victim, and never keen or able to take responsibility for their part in any issue. The aim of this is to position themselves as the victim, and therefore pull others into a ‘rescuer’ position, or guilt-trip people into actions that ultimately serve their own selfish needs and wants.

‘When I met my partner he had a good, well-paid job that he found stressful but otherwise enjoyed. It gave him the status that I realise now he absolutely needed for his fragile self-esteem. About a year into the relationship he resigned, and at that time we decided to relocate. Bizarrely, he then would constantly be referring to the “fact” that he “gave up his big job for me” and so somehow I should be eternally grateful and in debt to him for it. I never asked him to do that. It was not even my decision. I was confused about his behaviours, but at the same time I started to read and learn about narcissism and controlling, abusive behaviour, and realised that was a part of it. He was trying to make me feel guilty and bad.

‘Our relationship started to deteriorate and, having reached my limits, I decided I could not take any more of his controlling ways, and I somehow managed to find the strength to leave. I hear he still blames me for his career move, and – not only that – now paints me out to be the bad guy by suggesting we moved for him and then I left and abandoned him! As far as I can see, he gets a number of gains from portraying himself as the “victim”. Friends and family of his rally round and offer

sympathy, and all bad-mouth me as the evil, mad one. He is the victim – poor him. It’s rubbish – it’s narcissism.’

The Rescuer/Saviour

The rescuer/saviour kind of narcissist is actually one I see and hear a lot about in my private practice. Interestingly, people seem to meet or enter into relationships with a rescuer/saviour covert narcissist at times of their own vulnerability – perhaps at a time of a recent break-up or divorce, bereavement or particularly stressful time at work. The rescuer almost certainly tends to appear at a time when you are at your most vulnerable. They appear like a knight in shining armour ready to care, protect and look after a new partner. This is a variation of love-bombing – effectively care-bombing – and frankly, if timed when you are in need, it is welcome and easy to succumb to at the time. However, just as with love-bombing in the early stages, this ultimately leads to creating an unhealthy dependence, and in time the rescuer narcissist becomes controlling.

‘I had not long been divorced when I met Michael. It had been an emotionally abusive relationship and a bitter long-drawn-out divorce. I was exhausted. Then along came Michael, and I couldn’t believe my luck! He was romantic, caring and doting. He would buy me gifts, come and cook for me after work – in fact he would pick me up to and from work. He helped me get back on my feet financially. Soon he was paying household bills, at his insistence, and then he moved in, within six months of us meeting.

‘Looking back, I was so beaten from my previous relationship I pretty much didn’t even have the energy to say “no” to any of his suggestions. I just let him do whatever he wanted to. To be honest, it was quite welcome to have somebody so loving and caring at the time, as that was quite opposite to how things had ended up with my previous partner. But in time, as I started to feel better and stronger, I started to realise how utterly controlling he was. He would want – in fact I’d say need – to do almost everything for me. I could hardly breathe. If I ever insisted I wanted to buy my own food or travel to work alone, he’d become suspicious, argumentative, upset or resentful. He was incredibly needy. He would guilt-trip a lot.

‘I started to experience bad anxiety and panic attacks as I realised I had ended up in another abusive relationship – he had jumped on me when I was vulnerable. It was then that I sought professional help to end these patterns once and for all. I thought: I need to leave this kind of relationship for good!’

The Addict

Addiction is a common trait in narcissists, and one that is usually fairly easy to spot in potential partners. I have, however, included this under my covert profiles as it can be an infliction that is used to manipulate and hook partners in a slightly more subtle way. By this I mean that the addict will look to partners to help them, rescue them, fix them, or in any other way take responsibility for their actions. Addiction in any form is essentially narcissistic behaviour. Addicts in their active addiction are selfish and self-seeking, with the focus being on obtaining and indulging their