

A Digital Guide to
Dating Apps,
Narcissists,
Emotionally
Unavailable Men,
Red Flags, Hookup
Culture, and High-
Quality Men

The Modern Dating Guide for Women

How to
Decenter
Toxic Men &
Incompatible
Relationships
& Outplay the
Player At His
Own Game

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Contents

Introduction	1
I PART ONE	
1 Decentering Relationships and Developing Emotional Mastery	5
2 Only Go For High-Quality Men With These Traits	16
3 Women's Horror Stories In The Era of Modern Romance	30
4 How To Protect Yourself Long-Term From Narcissists	53
5 Dating Power Moves For Women To Ward Off Narcissists	66
6 Why Hookup Culture Harms Women – And Why You Need to Leave	74
7 Why Dating Apps Can Be A Hunting Ground for Narcissists	88
8 Red Flags of Narcissists and Toxic People on Dating Apps	95
9 Dating App Messages and Profile Red Flags of Toxic People	105
10 How to Outplay the Player	116

11	Why Some Men Disappear Even When They “Want” You	122
12	Deprogram Your Pick-Me Tendencies	
13	Essential Questions To Ask Yourself As A Woman Before Marriage	132
14	Therapists, Psychiatrists and Childfree Millennials Explain Why Single Women Are Often Happier	143
15	Creating Healthy “Obsession” In Good Men – The Right Way	152
16	Why Smart and Successful Women Often Date Envious Men	176
17	The Signs He’s Pretending To Be A “Nice Guy”	181
18	Why Women Who Are Unbothered In Dating Win	186
19	It Pays To Be A So-Called “High-Maintenance” Woman	192
20	Why High-Quality Men Love “Difficult Women”	207
21	Part II: Knowing The Red Flags	211
22	Signs Your Boyfriend Is Toxic	220
23	Questions To Ask Yourself If You Think You’re Being Emotionally Abused	236
24	50 Devious Habits of Toxic Dating Partners	245
25	Signs He’s Not Emotionally Unavailable - He’s A Narcissist	253
26	Red Flags That Narcissists Disguise As Green Flags	263
27	What Narcissists Look For In Women They Target	269
		274

28	Signs He's Not Avoidantly Attached, He's A Narcissist	280
29	The Traits Psychopaths Look For In Women They Date	285
30	Why The "Girl Best Friend" Can Be A Cover For Shady Men	291
31	Red Flag Relationship Behaviors You Didn't Realize	299
32	What It Really Means If He Calls You "Wife Material"	305
33	Why Women Leave Marriages (And Signs You Should Leave Yours)	313
34	What Makes A Man Husband Material	320
35	"Crazy" Women Aren't Always Crazy	325
36	Red Flags You're Dating a Guy With "Mommy Issues"	332
37	Becoming An Empowered Single Woman	337
38	Part III: Healing from Toxic Love and Relationships	342
39	Therapies and Tools for Healing	351
40	You May Be Trauma Bonded To Toxic People	361
41	How to Break Trauma Bonds In Toxic Love With Narcissists	370
42	Science-Backed Ways to Have A Massive Glow-Up	384
43	Why Your Toxic Ex Comes Back When You've Moved On	389
44	30 Badass Affirmations to Stay No Contact With Exes	392

Introduction

If you're reading this guide, you've likely encountered the toxicity of modern dating culture. Whether it's a string of emotionally unavailable dating partners, situationships with manipulative narcissists, or experiences with misogynistic or avoidant men, it's important to know that you are not alone. Thousands of women have experienced what you have and many are opting out of modern dating altogether or at the very least heightening their standards.

This guide is meant to help you navigate the red flags, gain a better understanding of the common pitfalls of hookup culture, and develop strategies to protect yourself and gain emotional mastery as you decenter toxic relationships and incompatible dating partners and recenter yourself.

Since you purchased this digital guide, you now also have access to exclusive in-depth healing guided meditations designed to help you recover from manipulation tactics such as gaslighting, stonewalling, pathological envy, projection and more. You can access these meditations by [clicking here](#).

You may continue reading the guide and revisit this link at any time to access the meditations.

1

Decentering Relationships and Developing Emotional Mastery

It may sound counterintuitive, but starting from a place of decentering incompatible dating partners and relationships is the exact place of fulfillment most women need to start from in order to be in a position to identify what healthy love looks like and opt out of toxic situations. Women have been programmed to center relationship status in a way men haven't and operate differently in dating and relationships than men. But what if you're a woman who still wants romance or love? Or a woman who isn't opting out of marriage or a relationship altogether? Or a woman who is uncertain of what she wants, but still wants to heal? Decentering men can feel almost *radical* and jarring when you're so accustomed to being socially conditioned to pander to men. Yet there are many ways to decondition yourself and start living a more authentic life that is not about serving men but rather about prioritizing yourself, serving you and your best interests.

Decentering relationships and incompatible men can look

like:

- Not taking men's words at face value and never assuming they're actually looking for a relationship regardless of what they claim. Holding the knowledge that many men due to social conditioning may be looking for pleasure, an ego stroke, or a trophy and may feel entitled to your time and energy without reciprocity. It's important to carefully evaluate men based on their long-term actions and patterns, rather than being impressed by the bare minimum or fast-paced love-bombing.
- Staying away from male-centered friends who pressure you into toxic relationships while being in miserable situations themselves or who throw you under the bus for male validation.
- Making the focus of your life *your* hobbies, personal development, friendships, self-fulfillment, passions, dreams, interests, career, rather than relationships. Naturally forgetting to respond to men's texts because you don't see them as the center of your existence and busy, flourishing life. Dating and relationships are no longer a priority – your hobbies, interests, passions, dreams, self-care are.
- Never moving countries, states, or cities for a man, and avoiding cohabitation unless marriage is involved to avoid investing your time, energy, and labor into a partnership without commitment. Not giving up your career or education for a man even if he is a provider. Not marrying unless it includes a solid prenup that compensates you for labor, possible pregnancy, and has a strict infidelity clause and financial payout in these cases.
- Avoiding pregnancy unless it is something you would

authentically do *with or without* a man and the man has the financial resources and emotional stability to provide you and your child security long-term no matter what happens in the relationship.

- Not accepting coffee or walk, hike dates, or low effort dates and hangouts. Understanding that men use these offers to date multiple people cheaply (red flags like these and more will be discussed throughout this book). Unless you are the one insisting on a coffee meetup for safety, be wary of men who offer these first as this can be a potential red flag of a noncommittal, low effort man.
- Becoming relaxed and open to *receiving* from and being courted by your dating partners rather than trying to overexert yourself trying to *prove* yourself to a dating partner.
- Dismantling myths and stereotypes about singlehood and not giving into romanticized notions about marriage and motherhood without considering the lived experiences of millions of women worldwide and the sacrifices and costs involved in both. Developing a deeper understanding of the propaganda of the traditional expected lifestyles for women and learning to differentiate between your authentic desires and social conditioning.

What is Emotional Mastery?

Emotional mastery is not about emotionally numbing your emotions. It's about channeling and harnessing them into empowerment. When a woman has *emotional mastery*, she has a certain level of control over her ability to harness her emotions productively into maintaining high standards,

living an enriching life, and setting healthy boundaries in her relationships. You are able to master your emotions to take charge and conquer life's circumstances and your relationships in ways that benefit you and the world.

You're in control of your emotions and you know how to channel them strategically to set healthy boundaries. You are responsible and strategic about assessing compatibility and do not romanticize the red flags. Rather than headfirst jumping into relationships, in a state of emotional mastery, you prefer to sit back, observe, discern who is and who isn't right for you and take advantage of opportunities in the perfect moment. This slower pace helps immensely in matching you with the right partners rather than settling for incompatible and toxic people.

If you have achieved this state of emotional mastery, you will likely engage in the following behaviors and possess the following traits in dating and relationships. Women with emotional mastery do not tolerate the following.



Disrespect. In response to disrespect, self-respecting women never overexplain their feelings. They take aligned actions to enforce their boundaries instead.

These are not the women who are writing long paragraphs in their notes app, drafting a dissertation to send their dating or relationship partner how much they've hurt them, and outlining exactly how to fix it, begging and pleading for respect from a man. They know from experience that certain types of toxic men thrive on that kind of attention in the dating world, and they don't have the time to explain to a grown adult how and why their actions are wrong or instruct them on how to come correctly, only for those men to learn from them and effectively cosplay maturity for the next woman. Instead, they walk away and detach before they become too invested in someone who cannot meet their needs. They express themselves primarily through their behavior and withdrawal of attention, rather than their words, and it speaks volumes.



Low effort. High-quality women don't waste their emotional energy trying to change dating partners who don't meet their standards.

Energy is currency, and high-quality women know how to best harness that energy to benefit them. The time you spend ruminating over and chasing a dating partner is time you could be spending chasing your goals, dreams, your career, money, and better dating options. Women with emotional mastery know this on a deep level, which is why they're not willing to spend massive amounts of energy on an unsuitable suitor. They are self-focused and grounded in what they know they deserve. If a man suggests a low-effort date they're not into, they won't engage with them further. If he tries to negotiate her standards or tell her she is too picky or high-maintenance, she knows there will be another man around the corner who won't ever have her starving and malnourished begging for the bare minimum. If she wants to be "well-maintained," she certainly can be, and she's not willing to settle for toxicity in the meantime.



Being married just for the sake of being married or having children with the wrong man. They don't settle for less just to say they settled down.

High-quality women with emotional mastery don't pursue marriage and children with just *anyone* just in order to say they're married and a mother. They're not desperate for commitment, because their strongest commitment and loyalty are to themselves. When a man knows you desperately crave something, he has ultimate power over you and can hold it over you. High-quality women genuinely aren't impressed by the thought of marriage because they know that on average, it actually benefits men, not women. They know marriage and childrearing are serious business, and they take it very seriously. For them, being with the wrong man is a liability, not an automatic benefit, and they assess and vet their dating and relationship partners very carefully for compatibility when it comes to attraction, personality traits, financial stability, emotional stability, and emotional maturity. This is why these women tend to end up with great partners, or at the very least, do not settle for toxic ones, and live thriving lives.



Rewarding bad behavior. Self-respecting women with emotional mastery do not reward bad behavior with more attention or people-pleasing. They issue appropriate consequences and engage in “productive” revenge that lasts a lifetime by moving forward into success.

There are certain types of toxic men that will expect you to reward their bad behavior with more attention or people-pleasing, because they’re accustomed to pick-me women who want to maintain relationships at any cost. Women with emotional mastery are different: she believes in consequences and holding people accountable through her actions. If she finds out a man has betrayed her in some way or is mistreating her, she will ghost him without a word rather than rewarding him with crying spells and “How could you?” drawn-out speeches. Again, negative attention is still attention. You’ll even spot this type of woman on vacation in another country with a much hotter man shortly after such an incident. This is the type of woman who quietly moves on to have the most massive glow-up of her life after a break-up, becoming the most successful, beautiful, richest, and most vibrant version of herself – she makes her exes weep, not the other way around. These are the types of women who are often underestimated because they don’t rage and pine for a man outwardly – they harness all that emotional energy into themselves and catapult themselves into a lifestyle their toxic exes couldn’t even afford. Now that is true emotional mastery, and high-quality women know that the best revenge is success.

Hot-and-cold behavior from a dating partner.

High-quality women know their intrinsic value and they value themselves above any potential dating partner, so they won't be tolerating toxic shifts or mixed signals in a romantic dynamic.

High-quality women understand their worth and treat themselves as important. They place themselves on the pedestal and engage in practices that embody that self-love and self-respect. They prioritize themselves and their self-care, their dreams, and their goals. This is revolutionary in a society that tells women on a daily basis that they were only worthy if they are in a relationship. As a result, high-quality women know everything they bring to the table and they are well aware of how their dating and relationship partners benefit from their presence. If a dating partner demeans them after a period of love-bombing them, they will not tolerate it. They treat themselves exceptionally well, so a partner who treats them any less than that only detracts from their life, and they have the emotional mastery to opt out of a toxic situation that has the potential to harm them once they identify the red flags.



They don't accept the bare minimum just to get anything. They lead exciting and fulfilling lives, and a man is only a small part of that.

High-quality women don't center their dating partners just because of their potential. They assess people based on a cost-benefits analysis of their true nature. Does this dating partner bring value to their life, or do they create chaos, uncertainty, and more pain? Do they bring romance, excitement, fulfillment, emotional nourishment, or do they bring less than the bare minimum and expect you to grovel for more? If the latter, high-quality women know they are worth far more than that and deserve better. They refuse to accept the bare minimum when they know they can get top-tier treatment from other dating options and even themselves, their friends, their peers, and family members. They lead enriching lives, pursue exciting dreams and careers, and have flourishing social networks that give them love and fulfillment in every facet of their existence. Having a high-quality partner on top of that is simply the cherry on top, and they're not going to settle for anything less than a partner who adds to their life in beneficial ways.

Narcissists and otherwise manipulative, toxic people can be of any gender, and female narcissists and psychopaths certainly exist. However, women in general tend to be more socialized to seek out romantic relationships at the expense of their own well-being, taught to value relationship status over their own mental health, which is why they usually need to deprogram harmful beliefs before pursuing a healthy partner. Women in the dating world who seek relationships are also often told to settle for less. What they *aren't* told

is the overwhelming research that indicates that being in toxic relationships and marriages does not benefit them and that they would be better off single than settling. Studies indicate that women tend to fare worse in marriage than men likely due to societal expectations and more emotional and domestic labor being thrust upon them. That is why it is more important than ever to be selective in your choice of a long-term partner, whether it's a boyfriend or husband. Next, learn the five high-quality traits you should look for in a partner if you do eventually want to settle down but *aren't* interested in settling for a toxic relationship.

Only Go For High-Quality Men With These Traits (Otherwise, You're Better Off Single)

Empathy, respect, and consideration for your needs that goes above and beyond and is present even in times of conflict.

A healthy boyfriend or partner will encourage you to speak up for yourself and respect you when you do, attentively taking into consideration your boundaries and desires – a toxic one will retaliate and silence you, often doubling down and trampling on the very boundaries you've set. If he is unable to respect you as a human being even when he is angry with you or when he disagrees with your perspective, and abruptly changes his entire personality based on whether or not you're serving his interests, this is not a partner you want long-term in your life. You don't want to be stuck with someone who rages and lashes out or punishes you

for expressing yourself or being open about your needs. A boyfriend or husband who is able to look at conflict with emotional maturity and approach feedback with a healthy mindset, one where he considers where he could also improve, and listens mindfully to your concerns, is a person that *could* be a healthy life partner so long as this behavior carries on long-term. Don't settle for a partner who thinks you're needy just for having basic needs and emotions or tries to make you settle for crumbs and the bare minimum just to maintain the relationship.

Genuine generosity long-term in many different ways.

A man who exhibits genuine generosity is someone who is generous in the time, effort, attention, affection, and the romantic gestures he exhibits toward you – not from a place of resentment or obligation or in feeling entitled to get something back, but from a loving desire to see you happy because he truly cares for you. They have a natural “provider” mentality – *not* because they don't think you can't do it on your own, but because they're your biggest cheerleader. A man who genuinely loves you would never want to see you burdened and is aware of the social inequalities and violence in the world that overwhelm women already. This is why, in the best relationships, you'll often see women being cared for and catered to by a man who appears to love a woman just a bit more than she loves him, even though she loves him and honors him deeply as well. This is the type of loving and caring man who lavishes her not just with romantic dates but with tremendous attentiveness to her needs and desires.

He is affectionate way beyond the honeymoon stage, and he never stops seeing her as the apple of his eye. He goes out of his way to make life easier for her. Women are often unfairly labeled as gold-diggers when they want a “generous” man with a provider mentality, but this goes way beyond any materialistic reasoning. Men who are initially stingy with their money also tend to be stingy with their emotions and effort. High-quality men love to be generous in many different ways toward the women they love long-term, so it’s important to avoid dating partners who start out with low effort in the beginning, or partners who only love bomb you with short-lived gestures, only to revert back to a sense of entitlement or resentment toward you.

Appreciation of your irreplaceability.

Men who try to make their girlfriends jealous on purpose are not usually emotionally mature men. Many of them are actually quite narcissistic, and according to research, and they provoke jealousy on purpose to gain power and control, exact revenge, test the relationship, or in some cases, to compensate for their own insecurity. Whether they have a wandering eye on social media, in real life settings, or just have a general need to always talk about their exes, be mindful of the red flags and stay wary of manufactured love triangles. Your future boyfriend and husband should only have eyes for you and appreciate your multifacetedness. They should honor all the traits and assets that make you uniquely you, treasuring your beauty, intelligence, sense of humor, achievements, and special charm on a daily basis. They should express this appreciation not only with words, but with actions. A good

boyfriend or husband will distance themselves from people and situations you're not comfortable with – a toxic one will go out of their ways to find ways to emotionally or physically cheat.

The ability to emotionally validate and come up with constructive, healthy solutions.

Dating someone who is only a problem-solver and who is not emotionally validating will not feel nourishing to you. You want a boyfriend or husband who can understand your emotions and validate them, not just someone who tries to overanalyze whether you are “right” or “wrong” in feeling the way you do. For example, you don't want a boyfriend who always tells you that you're being too oversensitive when you're expressing an issue you had with a friend, or who neglects you during a health crisis. You want a healthy boyfriend who goes out of their way to make things easier for you, like driving you to your doctor's appointment when you're too anxious to go, or giving you support in addition to validating advice on how to navigate conflict. Many toxic people will hypercriticize your emotions or pathologize them because your emotions give you access to the path that will make you feel most empowered, and they want to escape accountability for how you feel about them when they trespass your boundaries as well. When you're angry and upset, there's often a reason behind that. A boyfriend who is both emotionally validating and problem-solving will not only suggest solutions, he will often *create* one, and give you gentle guidance and nurturing in times of distress.

An interest in your dreams and your interests.

Your best boyfriend will inspire you to chase after your dreams, co-partner with you in building your dream life and become the highest version of yourself. Men who claim they don't care about a woman's accomplishments are toxic and misogynistic. They're scared of being emasculated and surpassed by high-achieving women. Do you really want a partner like that long-term? He will not support you once you have interests outside of him and the relationship. He will be envious of what you accomplish and will try to sabotage you when he sees you're growing independent. A high-quality man will cheer you on when you succeed and go out of his way to support you – whether it's encouraging you before an exam or giving you flowers after a promotion. A toxic man, on the other hand, will be your biggest low-key hater and try to deflate and “humble” you whenever you dare to show healthy pride in yourself. Think very carefully about how a potential partner treats your dreams, goals, and aspirations. It represents how much he will respect you throughout the relationship.

Signs You're Dating A High-Quality Man and Not A Narcissist

Dating a high-quality man is drastically different from dating a narcissist (and narcissists can be male or female). However, it can be hard to tell the difference between a narcissistic and high-quality man when narcissists often masquerade as high-quality men initially, only to reveal themselves to be manipulators later on. Here are the key distinctions you should look out for if you want to know if he's a high-quality man.

They're genuinely generous and attentive long-term – and there isn't an agenda behind their kindness.

A high-quality man respects *all* women from an authentic place of kindness and compassion. He remains consistently attentive to and affectionate with the woman he's dating or in a relationship with. He is naturally generous with his time, effort, and romantic gestures – and doesn't do anything from a place of, "I need something back in return." A narcissist uses excessive attention and affection known as love bombing to hook his dating partners initially, only to later devalue and disrespect them to keep them under his control. A narcissist's empty romantic displays are orchestrated to indebt you to them and instill a sense of fear, obligation, and guilt. Their nice façade is always used to exploit others for a specific agenda.

They don't blow hot and cold because they're not looking to manipulate you. Unlike a narcissist who continually tests your boundaries, they make sure not to do anything to jeopardize the relationship at any point.

High-quality men won't display the Jekyll-Hyde behaviors like narcissists do. If they are romantically interested, they will show that interest persistently and in healthy ways. The difference with a high-quality man is that if he's not interested in a woman for a relationship, he won't pursue her at all. He won't "use" her for an ego boost, sex, or another secondary gain. He's not looking to waste anyone's time, so he won't lead on anyone, including himself. Unlike a narcissist who blows hot and cold to get you addicted and attached to them through intermittent reinforcement, or to get you working hard for his approval, you won't have to work hard for the high-quality man's appreciation. He won't keep you guessing in the first place.



They don't try to make you jealous. They know your worth and your irreplaceability and go out of their way to reassure you they value you in both their actions and words.

We know from research that narcissists create love triangles and provoke jealousy on purpose. High-quality men do not engage in these ridiculous tactics – they are secure and confident in themselves, so they don't seek outside validation from other women outside of their relationship. They have the empathy to know what inappropriate behavior and act is accordingly – even when “no one is watching.” That's because their actions stem from their good character, whereas a narcissist operates from manipulation, ego, and a need for power and control. High-quality men on the other hand lack a wandering eye and show the utmost respect for their partners and cherish them – not just during the honeymoon stage of the relationship, *but through every stage of the relationship*. High-quality men recognize a woman's unique qualities and traits and go out of their way to make sure you know how important they are to them long-term. They address your concerns and insecurities with compassion and go out of their way to reassure you that you are the only woman they prioritize. Their words match their actions, and they are loyal and act from integrity.

They use social media constructively and not in shady ways.

High-quality men don't have time or energy to spend on social media in frivolous ways unless it adds in some way to their businesses. Unlike narcissistic men who are constantly hitting the like and follow button on inappropriate or shady accounts to make their partners jealous or sliding into the DMs of other parties in hopes of gaining validation, high-quality men make sure others know they are already partnered and fulfilled if they use social media at all. They have the same boundaries on social media as they do in real life and do not do things that would ever spark a partner's insecurity, confusion, or suspicion. They have a healthy relationship with social media in that they know how to celebrate the happiness of their romantic relationships, highlight, and give praise to their partners while still maintaining some decorum and privacy yet not excessively exploiting their relationships as status symbols. They will showcase the woman they're dating consistently with healthy pride.

They validate your emotions, whereas narcissists pathologize them.

High-quality men are emotionally balanced and stable. They have emotional control and are sensitive to the needs and rights of others. This is what makes them excellent listeners and communicators. A narcissistic man will call you "crazy" the minute you hold him accountable, or gaslight you into believing you're asking for too much if you expect basic respect. A high-quality man treats you with respect as their

default. Even if they don't agree with you all the time, they will still validate your emotions and understand where you are coming from.

They don't keep in close touch with exes or have suspicious friends you would worry about.

Narcissists often keep a harem of people who they can use for attention and ego strokes. They also use these people against you and pit people against each other to make them jealous. When you call them out, you're likely to be labeled as controlling. The high-quality man is just as selective about his friendships as he is about relationships. He won't have any suspicious female friends that raise red flags or exes that he's holding onto, or express attraction to people he's not dating. In fact, he will usually not pursue close contact with women who aren't his relationship partners or family members just out of respect alone. The high-quality man knows that cheating can be both physical and emotional: he makes sure he doesn't even enter boundary-crossing behavior in either form of betrayal. He does this on his own and doesn't need to be told. But even if you do express any concerns, he will take your concerns seriously. Narcissists on the other hand will mock your concerns and punish you for expressing them at all.

High-quality men respect your boundaries; narcissists learn your boundaries in order to violate them.

A high-quality man will respect your boundaries and anticipate what might make you upset to prevent boundary violations from happening in the first place. But unlike narcissists who may use that information against you to violate your boundaries, high-quality men go out of their way to ensure you're comfortable. The narcissist will weaponize any insecurities and traumas you tell them. The high-quality man will soothe your insecurities and be extra sensitive to what you've experienced. To test this ahead of time, drop a red herring: disclose a small insecurity and see if a dating partner uses it against you. The earlier a narcissist shows his true colors, the better.

High-quality men can disagree with you and hold you gently accountable without being demeaning.

High-quality men have a healthy relationship with your boundaries as well as their own. That means they won't tolerate disrespectful behavior from others, but they also won't engage in disrespect when calling you out. High-quality men can disagree with you and have constructive conversations without escalation. Unlike a narcissist who may rage and escalate into violence or verbal and emotional abuse, a high-quality man knows how to hold his own in an argument. He'll hold you accountable or disagree with you without resorting to insults, sarcasm, condescension, or contempt. Narcissists seek out chaos and crazy-making

arguments; high-quality men avoid them entirely.

High-quality men often self-reflect and are introspective.

In a world that often shifts blame onto a woman's emotional reactions rather than what she is reacting *to*, the high-quality man is refreshing in that he often looks within to ensure he is behaving in alignment with his core values and standards for himself. Just like any other human, a high-quality man can have some flaws or shortcomings – the difference is that he actively works toward improving himself in every facet of his life. Unlike the narcissistic man who avoids accountability at all costs and prefers to lash out at the people who they mistreat, the high-quality man holds himself accountable and engages in self-corrective behaviors to make sure he stays on the right track. Yet even so, the high-quality man often has far less to be held accountable for in the first place, because they don't engage in the types of transgressions narcissists do.

High-quality men are stable in all aspects of their lives.

High-quality men are financially and emotionally stable – they never expect you to “build” them up as a person. They take responsibility for their own lives. They won't use your resources for their own gain (in fact, some would feel ashamed of doing so because it goes against their values). They have their own and remain independent. They are in control of their careers, their dreams, and their lives. Much

like the a powerful “alpha” woman, they take charge of the demands of daily life with maturity and healthy positivity. They display a healthy form of masculinity and protectiveness without going overboard.

High-quality men are “woke” to the brutalities women face but in an authentic way.

High-quality men are well aware of the inequalities women face in the world and do not compare or falsely equate their experiences to yours. Unlike narcissists, they do not excessively play the victim in a world that already caters to them. They recognize their male privilege but not in a fake “nice guy” way of donning a faux feminist persona just so they can exploit your resources. Instead, high-quality men often exhibit a genuine “provider” mentality and understand that women have a hard enough time living in a patriarchal society as it is. The last thing they want to do is burden someone who is already oppressed with more burdens.

They truly respect women as multifaceted beings on a fundamental level and support a woman’s goals and career – unlike narcissists who are envious and seek to control women. They admire her independence. However, they still want to give to her and impress her. Unlike a narcissist who is only interested in getting his needs met and misusing “feminism” to ensure he alone benefits, the high-quality man is a *real* feminist who recognizes that we do not yet live in an equal world. As a result, high-quality men strive to be a safe place for the women they love. If you have been in a relationship with a narcissist, whether male or female, you’re not alone and help is out there. You may benefit from processing your

ONLY GO FOR HIGH-QUALITY MEN WITH THESE TRAITS (OTHERWISE,...

traumas with a validating mental health professional. You deserve support and healing.



Women's Horror Stories In The Era of Modern Romance

If you're currently on dating apps or even just in the dating pool, you know how toxic dating has become due to the influences of hookup culture, misogyny, and double standards. There is a growing trend in the dating world and in dating apps: many women are leaving en masse to pursue happier, more independent lives and focus on themselves. That isn't to say that men don't ever meet toxic people or female narcissists - they do, anyone can regardless of gender. But women are experiencing violations on a systemic level every day that have been normalized and weaponized to control and demean them. The disparity of active men and women on dating apps and in the dating world seems to have only increased post-pandemic, with women leaving in droves due to their experiences with hookup culture, rampant misogyny, and a more solid sense of standards and boundaries. Some women are choosing to be celibate altogether and many are open about how their experiences in the dating world have pushed their decision to remain single. In 2023, I asked

hundreds of women from a wide range of age groups and backgrounds what they felt were their biggest reasons for leaving the dating world or quitting dating apps. Here are the main reasons women stated.

Reason #1: The current dating pool is toxic.

It causes far too much trauma and takes too much time, energy, and investment for many women to deal with. Most women are not willing to sacrifice their mental or physical health just to find a partner, are choosing to prioritize themselves and want to protect their peace. Many women also report they have worked intensively on healing and working on themselves through therapy – but they don't feel they receive that same courtesy from their dating partners.

A theme that came up consistently in responses I received from women was the sheer time and energy it took to wade through the toxicity of the current dating pool. Women feel that dating apps are filled with predatory people, and it takes a great deal of time and energy to invest in a potential connection, only to be met with red flags, disrespect, and abuse. They opt instead to choose to protect their well-being. This toxicity, women note, tends to be unequal: while men tend to have a larger pool of potential mates who have done inner work or have gone to therapy, are nurturing, accomplished, thoughtful, and empathetic, women don't feel most men on dating apps (or elsewhere) have done the work to heal or be empathetic. Here is a sample of what women have to say.

“My peace is so valuable to me. I have yet – in my 54 years

– to find a man that has added to my life, instead only men that take. I was exhausted. My life has exponentially changed for the better when I've placed priority on my own happiness and building my own full and abundant life. I am so happy!"

– **Piper**

"Choosing singlehood has taken away the distractions that I felt were a need in life. I've built up so much in a short period of time that I'm so proud of. I did the work and pushed through to be better on my own. I tried dating at one point this year and it took away from my life more than anything. I don't want to date anyone and I feel more comfortable with that decision now than ever before. It's just not for me." –

Amanda

"I am choosing to not care about finding someone at this time. I honestly don't want to find anyone at this point. I am exhausted. I am exhausted from constantly being let down by men who won't choose to do the work and heal themselves...I am now choosing to date myself and give me the attention I've given all these men throughout my entire life since I was 16. I owe this to myself and if the kind of guy I've been looking for comes into my life, I'll welcome him in, but I won't beg for scraps of love ever again. I'm now choosing to give my kids the happy energetic mom they have always deserved. I am able to because I'm not bending over backwards for everyone else." – **Alex**

"I did my healing. I put the effort in for years to learn what my toxic behaviors were and how to recognize and respond to my emotions. I healed from my divorce and from my abuser. Trying to date and centering men in any way, wasted my time and halted my progress and caused me way too much anxiety wondering what else I should do to make it right. Yet none

of these men were ever willing to put as much effort into their own healing (physical or emotional, they always lacked somewhere) and progress as the majority of the women that I knew had, let alone the amount of effort I put into myself. I was not given this One Life to live, simply to move from incompetent man to incompetent man to incompetent man claiming he just needed love. I am here to live life, happily, beautifully and in the manner that I define successfully!" –

Alesha

"Because men are not worth the time due to the low quality presented: noncommittal, no marriage, no children mentality now a days. So why bother? I can go have a baby on my own, raise my child my way and not have to deal with their childish behavior." – **Maru**

"I know so many amazing single, straight women and so very few decent single, straight men. I've tried probably at least a dozen different dating sites in the past decade, and I've found them all incredibly discouraging. There's also no real way to meet organically anymore. I've made some connections here and there and then mostly have gotten ghosted. It's not that I'm closed off from dating – I just haven't come across many men that are worth going on a date with." – **Lauren**

"I've spent over half my life putting my energy into love and men. 7 serious monogamous relationships since I was 15 years old. I was always seeking outside of myself for the love I wanted – not realizing it was within me the whole time. As an 80s baby, growing up in the Disney princess era – we weren't taught that. Finally, my last relationship with an insane narcissist broke me of my love addiction and codependency. Sadly it had to go that far and I had to learn

the hard way. So now I am in my “healing, true self-love, and get the bag” era. I want to focus on me and pouring all the energy I’ve poured into men and love into myself and watch my glow up. I’ve seen what my love can do for others – what can it do for ME? I’m ready to find out! Not to mention, this dating scene is tragic, men got the whole game twisted and desperately need to catch up to our evolution as women before it will be worth the effort. We as women have to raise the bar and stop accepting breadcrumbs as if that’s enough to feed our deep souls. I’m the object of my affection now and it feels so good.” – **Ivory**

“The dating pool is full of immature men who don’t measure up to the accomplishments of these beautiful, smart and hard-working single women. It’s better to be single than it is to be undermined by someone who isn’t nearly as accomplished.” – **Christina**

“I am not sure if I can say I’m leaving dating altogether, but I am certainly taking a break. I find it difficult to manage for many reasons. I think one of the top reasons being that so few men on apps are honest about what they want. They say they want a relationship, but they don’t. They want casual, which is fine, but they don’t say that up front. It becomes draining and heartbreaking. I’m independent in that I own a home, am educated and am not looking for someone to take care of me. I’m starting to wonder if that is intimidating to a lot of men.”

– **Trina**

“Men aren’t competing with each other anymore, they’re competing with my peace, my happiness, my cleanliness and the mental freedom I get while being a single woman.” –

Shannon

“I’m 54, I was married 27 years, dated after and realized

I had a lot of work to do on myself, for myself to be able to be in a healthy relationship. As I've healed myself, I've realized how few people truly "get" me and aren't toxic in some way. So, I'm focusing on myself and my family and life. I'm not interested in taking care of another person ever again. If an emotionally healthy man came along and acted with integrity, I'd be open, but I'm not wasting time looking, I'm okay alone now and actually, I'm really enjoying just being me now in my solitude. I think many women who have worked on themselves just aren't settling anymore." – **Cinamon**

"As the daughter of a narcissist, and the rise of narcissism in general, I have not only been forced, but have chosen to put personal development at the forefront of my journey in order to break generational trauma. I find that most are not interested in "doing the work," and men in particular, are rarely capable of deepening their EQ while at the same time, being a true alpha and holding space for feminine energy. Dating has become exhaustive in a way I never thought possible; integrity is rare, the modern world has made people disposable and generational cycles are becoming impossible to break for those that don't make this a priority." – **Lauren**

"I don't think women are willing to put up with men's shenanigans like they "had" to in the past, holding out and trying to will the relationship they wanted. Women are smart and more resourceful than ever. The power differential is changing. Men have to realize it's a different relationship world and women have no time for nonsense. Men have a whole lot of healing to do to be authentic and effortful in a real relationship or women will turf them." – **Diana**

"I'm tired of the misogyny, abuse and most men being unwilling to grow and heal or having ridiculous expectations

of women. I'm done being traumatized. I can't take any more relational or sexual trauma. No man or relationship has made my life better but has almost seemed to actively work against me. I am healthier in every way on my own so far in life. I'm not closed off to ever being in a relationship again, but I'm not impressed with what I have encountered out there... at all." – **Bethany**

"I realized I was happy and complete on my own. I did a lot of healing to get to this place, and it is a choice every day to acknowledge and embrace my own worth. We are conditioned as a society to believe that our proximity to a man is what gives us our value as women. This narrative is incredibly false and damaging! We are what make ourselves happy and complete. We are enough and always have been. I value the connection with my children and watching this grow and deepen. I greatly treasure the depth of the friendships I share with my girlfriends. I serve in my community and find this fulfilling. And I have found that it is very challenging to find a man who truly understands and practices vulnerability, empathy, and self-reflection in a way that matches the work I have embraced within my life. There is a lot of unhealthiness out there. Once you grow and learn, you have little tolerance for anything other than the peace that self-care and acceptance can bring." – **Lesley B.**

"I now equate celibacy and being single as empowering because I am harnessing my own fortitude, happiness, security, and wisdom. No more second or third or fourth persons forcefully shoving down in my throat their opinions, wants, and needs like those are gospel truth that I must heed." – **VM**

"Any temptation is not worthy of interacting with unawakened and insensitive people. Also, life is beautiful and ought

to be lived with self-respect without any compromise. I am practicing gratitude for what I have.” – **Murshiquaa**

“Because I now place value on my time and protect it fiercely. When someone buys their leisure time off the back of your emotional or physical labor, they’re literally stealing your precious life. I’m not letting anyone do that again.” –

Julia

“I met someone online. He seemed perfect at first! He moved fast, came on strong and I fell in love. He love-bombed me and begged me to marry him! The longer we dated, I found out he wasn’t truthful! It was like an onion and I was peeling the layers. He was married and was living with his wife! He lied about so many things with ease during the two years we dated. It was second nature to lie! Eventually he moved into his own apartment, and we continued to see each other. The longer we dated, the more I learned and the less I wanted to be with him. He was also a serial cheater and when I started to move away from him, he started to cheat. I found out and ended the relationship. You never know what you are getting with online dating! Yes, some relationships are successful. But none of the women I know that have been online have anything positive to say. There are mostly scammers, liars and cheaters in my opinion and that’s just sad. You can’t be faint of heart and be in the dating pool these days! Best of luck to all my sisters out there! My mom would say “there’s a lid for every kettle!” I think I flipped mine.” – **Sharon**

“Men are not worth the high risk for disappointment. I’ve immersed myself in my hobbies and spent more time with friends, and also with my favorite animals (also friends). I feel stronger and happier than ever.” – **Diggy**

“High quality men were already a minority in my 20s. At

50, I've not met one in 7 years. It's not about what they can offer me that's better than my ex. It's whether they can offer me better than what I'm currently supplying to myself. Life is peaceful being single." – **Doula**

"I am choosing celibacy and raising my son so I can focus on my career and provide for myself and my little one. I prefer celibacy. I want to get back to myself after literal years of toxic abuse from family and partners. In order to not repeat these cycles with my child, I must heal myself. Healing can only happen if I'm not distracted. I don't feel that I'm missing out on anything (possibly romantic connection or great sex), and I love great sex. But I love myself and my child more." – **Dev**

"I went on a dating hiatus after years of being mistreated by men. I was in a relationship with an abusive alcoholic, emotionally unavailable men, and a cheater. The common trend amongst the majority of these men, was manipulation and deceit. Ultimately, they were not being true to themselves, and therefore presenting very differently in the beginning, until eventually, they could no longer keep up the facade. I acknowledge that these behaviors likely stemmed from being hurt or from lived trauma – but that doesn't make it right.

It took a while for me to learn how to fill my own cup, set/maintain healthy boundaries, address my lack of self-worth, regulate my nervous system, practice self-regulating when hurt/triggered, and love myself. Once I was at peace with myself, by myself... the second something felt off or I realized I deserved to be treated better, I chose my peace over chaos, and I chose to keep loving myself the way I knew I was capable of loving another. The moment I chose that for myself and EVERY time I make that choice – I know I am doing what's best for me. My experience with dating changed

cataclysmically from that day forward. I feel as though more women are refusing to settle for less than they deserve. That is why I stopped dating. I chose me.” – **Megan**

“I have decided to preserve my soul, worth, intelligence, energy and life youth since self-perseverance is Universal Law and number one at that.” – **Lydia**

“When I was much less self-assured, my lack of self-worth led me to many toxic partners. I can’t believe what I put up with and thought it was love. The peace and self-discovery are so addictive right now that I can’t imagine letting a romantic interest in.” – **Tia**

Reason #2: Misogyny is rampant and so are exploitation, deception, fraud, cheating, and abuse.

Both on and off dating apps, women are experiencing misogyny and various forms of abuse and deception at high levels in the dating world. From unsolicited pictures that violate them to deceitful partners that hide their marital status or criminal records, dating and dating apps have become more of a dangerous game of emotional Russian roulette. Successful and high-achieving women stated they felt the pressure to be providers as well as the primary parent and “mother” to their partners; some experienced pathologically envious men who lashed out at them due to their success. Post-pandemic, more women are leaving hookup culture and dating apps to reclaim their power. Here’s what women have to say about this facet of the dating experience.

Women's Stories: Insights

"For straight women, dating apps are like being thrown into a pool of frenzied piranhas. It's giving their only natural predator, men, easier access to their prey. From sending icky rude remarks and unwanted d*ck pics and verbal abuse to them actually murdering their dates." – **Veronica**

"I once, downloaded one of these so called "dating apps" and 10 minutes later, I immediately uninstalled it. I felt like I was being in a lake of swarming narcissistic, sexaholic, maniac crocodiles. I would never ever do this again in my entire life." – **Mae**

"I tried it twice. One guy had severe mental health issues, and the second guy had 13 sexual assault charges and is on the sex offenders registry! These people aren't vetted and anyone can set up a profile. Online dating is too risky; I'm a single mom and I will never do it again, my children's safety is paramount." – **Jacquie**

"Men's entitlement creates abusiveness and allows for a lack of awareness. I wasn't put on this earth to be powerless and fix the misogyny created by men for men. I'm here to be fully myself, my strong and beautiful self! I don't believe I can do that in a heterosexual relationship." – **Alex**

"I am no longer willing to diminish my worth, or compromise my peace, simply because a man is not willing to learn to be a better person and then consistently act on it. After twenty years of covert abuse, I have zero fucks left to give. Never again will I betray myself as to not hurt a man's feelings. If you can't add to my peace, then leave me alone. If you haven't healed your trauma, go live with your mama. Women need

to stop being so available to these little boys, pretending like they are men. And most importantly, healthy and healed men need to be the ones holding these little boys accountable for their toxic behaviors, entitlement, and misogyny.” – **Rae**

“I am tired of teaching. It’s not my responsibility to teach you emotional intelligence, basic kindness, intersectional feminism, or the direction of the clitoris. I am tired of not knowing. I am tired of latching onto the green flags, only to be knocked upside the head with that red flag they hide so well. And I feel so good, so free and light and happy when it’s just me. I know how to love myself and I truly enjoy my own company. If someone is not adding to my life, they’re simply subtracting and nobody got time for that.” – **Toni**

“I want to be money making! Going back to school for my J.D. I feel that men want women to provide and take care of the home and family, while they just provide. They want us to be feminine but push us into a masculine role. I am going to make bank and travel the world. I don’t want to mix finances at this point in my life, anyway. Many of my female friends agree. We all own our \$650k+ homes and we’re just fine never cohabitating with a significant other. I have done the work to heal, many men claim they have but it never truly appears as though they have. I’ll kick ass, take names, and make my own coin.” – **Lisa**

“I felt like an item on the shelf or an option on these apps. There was no connection. Men were filtering and did not seem serious. Even the ones that got to the point of actually meeting in person could not handle a strong career oriented successful woman. Others mostly wanted a physical relationship, some portrayed themselves as victims of their previous spouses and were recently out of a relationship. It is a very difficult

world out there when it comes to finding someone you can commit to, as I don't think there will be anyone ever that will be perfect." – **Javeria**

"I'm a family therapist that works with teens, adults, and couples. There has been a notable shift in what women are looking for in a partnership, specifically, more mutuality, shared responsibility for making life work at home, and reciprocal encouragement and support for each in the partnership to live an inspired, fulfilling life. Most men of my generation (I am 70) continue to expect their partners to take care of the "heavy-lifting" at home, while they want the last word when it comes to finances and making the "big decisions." Younger women also report inequities in their relationships with men, i.e. when it comes to maintaining the household, even many young men will describe themselves as "helping" if they do laundry or childcare. So more and more, women of all ages are done with the old relationship "script", preferring to go it alone until there is an upgrade. I think women are much more eager to welcome partnerships that are equitable – after all, who wants to go back to being a serf?" – **Linda**

"They have put me off for life. I can't comprehend how they think a pic of their "appendage" is a way of making a connection." – **Tina**

"I refuse to be their banker or their mommy!" – **Rebecca**

"Misogyny is at an all-time high." – **Christy**

"Romance is dead. Men using dating apps are merely looking for a cheap alternative to parting with their hard earned cash and paying a hooker!" – **Mancy**

"Men have – over time – developed the nature of women. They need to be pursued. They have no ability for self-control or focus in this age of instant click and gratify. It's like

children with too many toys – unhealthy and never focused enough to learn a single female. I can't date a man with no plan for where he is leading me. I need safety and safety comes with intentions and a plan – lead protect and provide and pursue. It's harsh out there.” – **Angelica**

“After decades of taking care of others, putting myself last, being the bigger person, compromising to keep the peace, and being unappreciated and taken advantage of and abused by those who claimed to love me, I don't want to share a home, a room or a bed with anyone ever again. I don't want to be needed or depended upon any longer. I enjoy my own company and my own space, and it would take a very rare being to make me give that up just for company's sake. I am now in my late 50's, an empty nester, and I have dated and had long term relationships with men and women. My last relationship was with a woman, and I have been single and celibate for the past 5 years.” – **Mandy**

“I am not necessarily anti-men, I am anti-patriarchy. I'm not necessarily opposed to dating men, but I haven't met anyone yet who I want to date! I guess he would have to be anti-patriarchy as well.” – **Aimee**

“I choose singlehood because the “men” aren't all that! You don't know what type of person they really are and it takes too long to figure it out! At that time, you find they weren't worth the time or energy!” – **Cindi**

“My friend is a fraud investigator. She can pick up on nuances in dating app profiles. For example, she reported many prospects who copied job descriptions from reliable sources. She figured it out when she asked about their jobs, they didn't have the proper response. Trust is a major issue for me and what I learned from her makes dating pools seem

like danger zones. Not to mention the Men Going Their Own Way and red pill movements...creating pick up artists!” –

Cathy

“Because my experience is that men and women are generally looking for different things and have different needs in the modern dating world. These needs and wants simply don’t align. Luckily women are empowered enough nowadays to take care of ourselves and the majority of us are not willing to settle for less than we deserve because we no longer need to as a means for survival and fulfillment.” – **Amy**

“I feel dating apps are a tool favored by toxic men because it’s easy, it takes minimal effort to swipe right and see who bites. On the other side, most of the great men I know in real life, aren’t, and never have been, on dating apps. Considering those two factors, I choose to no longer bother with them. Of course, there’s exceptions to this, but I think it’s just gotten worse over time, so I personally have no more interest in online dating. Ironically, since I’ve made that decision, I’ve been meeting more quality like- minded men in person out at events that are geared toward my interests and values.” –

Amanda

“Me and several of my friends left extremely abusive relationships this year and there’s one main theme in common: these men have been narcissistic abusers who are charming; great to everyone outside of the home, but abusive to us behind closed doors. It seems there is an epidemic of toxically sick men who enable and validate each other to be awful to women and who refuse to take accountability for their behavior and refuse to go to therapy. I am tired of not feeling safe around men and tired of questioning if they have good intentions or not. My girlfriends ALWAYS make me feel

safe. As a long-time preschool teacher, I can attest that I've witnessed it starting very young – with parents telling their boys “boys will be boys” and “aww – he's being mean to you? That means he likes you” – a narrative that needs to stop being taught to young boys.” – **Mandy**

“Dating online has become a traumatizing shit show. You have to be extremely secure and confident to get through it unscathed. For those of us in the over 50 group, 90% of the men are a waste of time or worse. They are scammers, or married, or players, or sociopaths, or 25 year olds saying they like older women, or guys in relationships who go online out of boredom like it was an online poker game swiping for a laugh, or damaged shy introverts who don't have the nerve to meet in person, misogynist old boomer assholes, widowers still grieving whose kids made their profile for them, guys who actually believe online dating is code for free phone/video sex/sex workers. If you are very very lucky to find the needle in a haystack, 10% decent guy you will have dates with him and find he is 10 years older and 50 pounds heavier than his photo or you just won't have any chemistry at all. All this time of 5 years of the same hitting my head against this wall, I decided to throw in the towel.” – **Gillian**

“I know my worth and none of these men live up to that.”
– **Jen**

“I'm in couple with myself. Taking care of my needs, and of my dreams. I tried at one point last year the apps, it felt like a zoo, it's just crazy and unreal. I'd rather spend time reading, learning, dancing, painting, enjoying life with my family, with friends, than wasting time with people who are not committed to anything. This dating world is so bizarre, like “fast food” whereas knowing someone takes time, curiosity,

willingness, effort. It feels more like “shopping” based on extremely superficial criteria.” – **Anne**

Reason #3: Experiences of narcissistic partners tend to be frequent, especially on dating apps but in modern romance in general. Accountability is at an all-time low, and women prefer solitude to “raising” a man.

“I’ve never felt more alone than in the arms of the wrong man. I now stand independently, holding my little boy’s hand, knowing he is safe away from his narcissistic father. He already shows more empathy at 3 years old than most men I know.” – **Charlotte**

“I have had too many issues with attracting the narcissists and sociopaths. It’s easier to be single and save myself from harm. I like my peace and serenity. I love the joy of knowing that I am safe.” – **Daana**

“I don’t need a man. I support myself. I raise my child. I please myself. It seems like more of a pain in the ass to be with one than to be without one.” – **Sara**

“Done with gaslighting, lying, cheating, and two timing.”
– **Wendy**

“Too many frogs, not enough Princes. I just can’t be bothered. I have a lot of friends and great family. I’m never lonely. 35 years with a supreme narcissist took all the fun out of a relationship.” – **Caroline**

“I have loved twice since my precious husband unexpectedly passed away in 2018. My husband and I were high school sweethearts, and I was unfamiliar with the dating scene. I’ve emerged into what appears to be a toxic wasteland of self-involved narcissists, quick to demand physical, yet they reject the emotional. I live on the fumes of the precious love I’ve felt

in my life, secretly always hoping the one who holds my heart returns. In the meantime, I'm taking care of my husband's and my 7 sweet babies alone while conquering law school. No time for the folly associated with modern-day dating. Or in the words of Megan Thee Stallion: "F*** b*****, get money!" – *Scarlet*

"I chose to quit dating apps because I am dedicated to my own life, my goals and my healing. I was in a terrible relationship for almost 2 years. He as an awful person. So, I am taking my time, working on my Master's in social work."

– *Anonymous*

"I have been celibate for 7 months. I entered into a relationship of 2 years with a covert narcissist who also had hidden an alcohol problem from me. I uprooted my life and moved to the city he lived in, to be closer to him and his 3 beautiful children. The first week there, I found out I was pregnant. 2 weeks later I had a miscarriage. He broke up with me for the first time during the miscarriage because, "this isn't bringing me any joy." I stayed with him because I didn't know anyone else. For a year, he broke up with me 2-3 times a month. I finally said, "sure," the last time. He never even checked back in with me and still hasn't. Before I fully realized I needed to move back to my hometown, I went on a few dates with a seemingly nice man. When we had intercourse, he slapped me in the face without my consent. I decided after those episodes that I wanted to be celibate. I have stuck to it (very easily) and haven't entertained dating. Nor do I want to." – *Alex*

"After getting divorced...I'm taking the dating thing extremely slow...through my post-divorce tiptoeing toward possibly loving someone again I've had multiple crushes that basically taught me more about my own boundaries. Hot and

cold... hell no. That's just mind games. I've been hit on twice by guys who had girlfriends. Also hell no, I don't think I'm naive enough to think that won't be me down the line. I got hit on by a guy who wanted to trauma dump about his ex – also no. I don't want to be your nurse or your mommy. Another person I'm genuinely interested in: hints are great but I won't act on them. I was breadcrumbed so intensely in my marriage that I want to see love meet action in order to engage someone romantically again. None of this bare minimum to keep you interested bullshit.” – **Ashley**

“Because nobody wants to be emotionally available or get to know anyone beyond a surface or casual level. I never wanted marriage and I love that the culture is appearing to be more open and moving beyond outdated norms but sometimes it feels like it's gone to the opposite extreme where nobody wants to be accountable at all on any level for how they act in any type of relationship with another person.” – **Aneisha**

“I experienced relationships, most of them with narcissists, hindsight tells me. I just couldn't bother being in a romantic relationship anymore. The only times I miss having someone special by my side is when I'm planning trips (so much to think about and do), or when I'm sick in bed. Otherwise I delight in being on my own, making my own decisions, deciding how to spend my time, what to eat, when to go to sleep, etc. I'm on my own, but I'm not alone. I have many friends, and a few family members I like. I'm significant for myself; I don't feel a need to share every waking moments of my life with someone, to reminisce with anyone about what I saw, heard, experienced. I accept that “my life will end with me” and I'll be forgotten after death. I enjoy life right here, right now. I don't see what a romantic relationship would add

to my life; on the contrary I feel it would shrink it.” – **Gloria**

“Just physically and mentally tired. I’d rather concentrate on getting me and my kids and build and focus on that joy. Tired of being lied to, cheated on, putting energy into someone and finding out they would not do the same for me, scared of dating a narcissistic abuser again. Just trying to enjoy my life and my family and friends.” – **Ewnie**

Reason #4: Singlehood offers freedom, time and space for goals and personal self-development, self-care, raising your standards, other meaningful connections and most importantly, peace.

“After my divorce and a few toxic relationships after, I realized the only constant was me. Thus began my healing journey. I’ve taken the past two years to focus on myself. To focus on self-care and mental health, embracing therapy which helped me understand the generational and childhood trauma that attracted me to unhealthy men and allowed myself to be mistreated. I then fell in love with myself. I’ve learned to love my own company and protect my peace and my energy. I’ve shifted focus to my home, career, finances, children, and physical and mental health. If I find a partner who compliments my life, great. If not, that’s great too. My value and self-worth is no longer defined by a relationship with a man.” – **Lindsay**

“Was my last relationship 6 years ago that was the straw that broke the camel’s back for me, so to speak. To where I finally realized my worth and set boundaries. Where I finally fell in love with myself. Now even thinking of trying to date I just have no interest in – I enjoy taking myself out to dinner, shopping, movies. Just being alone with ME! I used to be the

woman worried what people would think of me, seeing me at a table alone in a restaurant, now I LOVE it and can't get enough of it! After leaving a toxic relationship, you're just over dating completely." – **Kimberly**

"I have broken the generational curses in my family. I am actively healing my childhood trauma and no longer see myself as a survivor. I am in my thriving season, and I am now incompatible with anyone who isn't also actively doing the inner work. I am incompatible with any trauma bonds and low vibrational frequencies. I now emit a different frequency that is attracting/manifesting a specific individual on the same wavelength. I am single because, I am patient, and I deserve an Emperor worthy of me." – **Namhla**

"Unfortunately, our culture continues to condition females at an early age to imagine our prince, dating, boyfriends, then husband! We are further conditioned to yearn and pine for a boy/man's romantic love; which shifts the focus on normal development and curiosity of self to focus on being pretty enough, and sexy and then chosen throughout our formative years. Why are we conditioned to couple at age 3 or 4 when males aren't? I'm happier on my own having tried it all! And most of my married female friends say they wish they had my single life. Takeaway — most women and men don't want the same things and little girls don't need to start looking for princes who care less about princesses until they want to have kids!" – **M.B.**

"I value my life-maintenance labor, my emotional labor and well being, my finances, my pleasure, my safety, stable and independent housing, and compensation for my efforts. Reciprocity is important, unless it's a charitable contribution. In all my relationships. Interaction with cishet men doesn't

align with these priorities. I live in authenticity and liberty.”

– **Bel**

“Men just don’t value women. They want to use and control them. We have to be a slave for them, but not be respected. They have women convinced they should be grateful for the opportunity for being used when it’s actually the men that need them more than the women need them. Men are completely ungrateful. It’s just not something women need when they get everything they want and need out of female friendships and relationships with their children.” – **Belinda**

“While I would love nothing more than to be in a relationship (or my idea of a relationship, I’ve honestly never been in one), I have no desire to date. My day job is teaching elementary students and they (plus the planning and prepping of teaching) take so much of my energy. I don’t have the energy to put forth into going on first/second dates with guys who just aren’t worth my time. Or maybe I’m not worth their time. But the energy I have I would rather put into my friends and family — people I already have a connection with.” – **Alex**

“Spiritually, I need to focus on my relationship with God. My love life is His to manage, not me. My picker is broken, and He has moved stars to try to tell me someone is not the one, but I don’t listen. God is my first love...maybe even my last.” – **Cristina**

“It’s nice after being married (and undervalued) for 20 years, to just “be.” To be: into books, journals, roller skating, yoga, travel, my dogs, my family, my friends, making pottery, taking classes, my job, cooking ... and choosing what I want to watch on tv. I control the remote. I exist as a person, not as an object. I am in charge, solely, of my finances. I am in my power. I am empowered. I am deep. I am also an extroverted

introvert. I was a sharing and caring partner, but not sure if I could be again. I find few men (at my age) share my tastes, passions. I am in my authenticity... I'm happy here. I have peace. I come and go as I please, and am not ever seeking "approval," physically or otherwise. The male ego turns me off. My girlfriends are amazing people – and I save a lot on razors." – **Jana**

"I am on my own for the first time in life. But I no longer "wait" with a tension in my shoulders and a pit in my stomach. I don't wait for validation from someone that I thought loved me. I don't put energy into someone who gives me less than minimum respect and courtesy! I DO self-care, self-love, and take care of my own things! I understand that my satisfaction in completing tasks, is my own validation and appreciation. I now, have learned, to respect MYSELF. I tolerate, nothing less than that, from others!" – **Michelle**

"Because I know my worth and have decided to place my efforts into myself." – Tessa

"I have zero desire to compromise the peace I work hard to achieve every day. After an abusive and toxic marriage of 33 years, I am finally prioritizing myself, my peace of mind, and my overall happiness and well-being. Have not dated and have no desire to do so." – **Lora**

"Boyfriends are a lot of work, and all the sexy ones are players." – **Diane**

"I am choosing me first." – **Melissa**

How To Protect Yourself Long-Term From Narcissists and Toxic People In Dating As A Woman

Decenter incompatible men and relationships from your life and connect with the peace and joy of being single.

If you're a heterosexual single woman looking for a relationship, the idea of "decentering" men and relationships from your life and enjoying the peace of singlehood may seem like counterintuitive dating advice. However, it is actually one of the most powerful pieces of advice women can heed if they want to avoid the danger of settling with a toxic person just for the sake of settling down. As you will learn more—in depth later in this book, research indicates that contrary to popular myth, single women can be just as happy, if not happier than their coupled counterparts. However, society conditions women into believing that having a relationship

is the ultimate goal of their lives from an early age. This brainwashing causes them to believe that having any relationship, no matter how toxic or abusive, is better than having none at all, and trains them to equate their worth with their relationship status.

This social conditioning becomes dangerous because narcissistic abusers will prey on your intense desire for a relationship, can don a false mask and love bombing (excessive flattery, attention, and contact) to lure their victims into an abuse cycle early on.

Women pay a heavy price when they buy into this myth of “relationship superiority” and disregard the benefits of singlehood. This is especially dangerous as society elevates even the most toxic of relationships as a sign that *at least* the woman in question has been “chosen.”

In truth, it is time to reframe this myth to reality: when it comes to toxic relationships with narcissists or even just incompatible partners in general, as a woman you have only been “chosen” to take on more labor in the relationship while enduring countless trials, tribulations, and mistreatment in return. It is important to identify the “costs” of relationships and dating when you’ve been taught only the potential benefits (which you may or may not even experience depending on the particular partner you’re engaging with).

Start deprogramming your mindset today. Make a list answering these questions.

What are the costs of being in a relationship, especially a toxic one? What costs do you incur to your physical health, mental health, energy, goals, self-esteem, resources and your ability to take care of yourself? What do you lose when you're in a relationship that's not right for you? What have you lost in the past? What kind of additional emotional and domestic labor are you expected to do in a relationship with a toxic partner? What kinds of unpaid labor have you performed for people who have only returned your kindness with cruelty?

[illegible]

Then make another list: What are the benefits of being single? What kind of activities can you do when you're freed from any obligations to another person? How much time can you now spend focusing on yourself and manifesting your desires? How does being single free up your mental resources and energy? What kind of goals can you pursue without interference? What kind of communities can you engage with? What kind of worries are you no longer plagued by? How secure and confident will you feel?

Once you begin decentering men and relationships from your life and positioning *yourself* as the focus of your existence, you'll begin to date the way many men are *already* accustomed to dating: by seeing a relationship as a potential bonus to your life rather than the main goal.

Relationships will then become not a necessity but an option, *should* you desire it and if a person who is safe, compatible and has proven their character long-term comes along. Consider that many men only settle down when they think they've found the "best possible choice" for them. It is time you do the same, and do not limit yourself when looking at your options strategically and ruthlessly. You deserve a partner you are both emotionally and physically attracted to and fulfilled by, and you shouldn't settle for anything else.

As you decenter coupledness from your life, you will also be able to focus on creating a fulfilling, joyful life with plenty of ambitions, hobbies, interests, friendships, and exciting career opportunities. You will build a life that only a truly worthy partner would be able to enter in order to add value to your life. This will make it that much more difficult

for narcissists to enter your life or stay, because you will recognize how much they are detracting from the peaceful baseline you've set for your life.

Set limits to contact. Do not treat any dating prospects like a long-term partner until they have proven their genuine interest and character to you long-term.

When in doubt, “cut it out” – your time, effort, and energy, that is. If you notice any red flags, big or small, pull back your attention immediately instead of chasing this person – whether they be a narcissist or an emotionally unavailable partner. Keep in mind all the costs of a toxic relationship that you've listed whenever you're tempted to chase someone who is wrong for you. The trick is withdrawing early on *before* you get attached to toxic individuals. The longer you stay in a toxic relationship, the harder it can get to detach.

There is an exception: if a narcissistic partner comes on strongly with love bombing in the beginning, don't match their energy but rather sit back and observe. Identify whether this is a short-term manipulative strategy or a signal of genuine excitement about you.

Research indicates that narcissistic individuals tend to demonstrate love bombing tendencies, and that these love bombing tendencies are associated with increased text and media usage. However, love bombing often ends abruptly as soon as victims of narcissists are sufficiently invested in the relationship. Regardless of what he promises to you in the future or how much attention he gives you in the beginning, do not give “wife” or “girlfriend” treatment to a man you

just began dating. That means do not pour a majority of your time, energy, resources into a man who has not yet proven they are genuinely interested in you long-term and has not yet shown you sufficient proof of his good character or integrity. Do not forego your other options and do not allow him to consume your mind, thoughts, or future plans. Do not waste your time engaging in attempts to change his behavior; observe his natural behavior and act accordingly based on your boundaries, standards and needs.

Resist their attempts to make excessive contact, do not spend your whole day conversing with them and do not be available whenever they need you. Set a time limit per day of how much time you are willing to spend on any dating partner as you're just beginning to know them, especially through texting. That way, you never get attached to constant contact in the first place.

Stick to getting to know your dating partners and their behavior through in-person dates instead, where you can observe their behavior up close and take note of their non-verbal gestures, tone, and facial microexpressions – subtle cues you can identify if you're trying to understand if there's a discrepancy between their words and actions. Maintain your regular routines and do not sacrifice your goals, hobbies, interests, or time spent with friends and loved ones for them; make sure the dates fit *your* schedule. Do not begin the dating and courting process accustomed to making sacrifices – in a patriarchal society, you are already taking on a lot of the risk dating at all. This initial time is for you to explore, have fun, and to observe any red flags that might arise.

Engage in cost-benefit analyses and start to see your dating experiences in a more “transactional” and practical way in terms of effort, boundaries and standards. Don’t defend your standards and do not lower or negotiate them with potential partners.

As you enjoy the peace and joy of singlehood and identify the costs of relationships, you’ll also become more selective in who you date at all. This will give you more leverage in avoiding and cutting ties with narcissists who demonstrate red flags, even if it’s only later in the relationship, because you’ve already experienced what it is like to feel fulfilled, secure on your own and *not* to have constant chaos in your life.

This mindset will help you maintain a detached perspective and perform the cost-benefit analysis of being in a relationship with anyone at every stage of the dating process and avoid the pitfalls of hookup culture if you’re seeking a relationship. Remind yourself again the costs of being in a relationship and compare it to the potential benefits this person brings to your life – and if those benefits are no longer forthcoming, decide that *your* investment in the relationship is no longer forthcoming either. This detachment early on is also necessary to prevent trauma bonding with toxic individuals.

According to sociological studies, hookup culture has allowed some men to reap sexual benefits with minimal effort and while giving less satisfaction and pleasure to women in general. Women seeking relationships must thus be on the lookout for manipulators who may pretend they want relationships when, in reality, they’re just looking for sex.

This means you have to decide for yourself what constitutes “effort” early on and what you will and won’t accept in the beginning of and throughout the dating process. By identifying those standards and boundaries, you can use it to weed out anyone who’s not willing to give you that bare minimum effort before dating them – and detach *while* dating them if they’re not giving you what you need.

Discerning effort early on in the dating process.

For example, perhaps “effort” to you, at least in the short-term, looks like being taken out and treated to romantic dates early on in dating, consistent phone calls and texts, and a *healthy* amount of attention and affection (rather than love bombing).

Due to the inequality and double standards of hookup culture and the fact that there are male partners out there willing to exploit women for sex, it’s important *not* to feel guilty about setting such standards. See this standard of effort as a form of self-protection against users and manipulators, as many manipulators in the dating world will use low-effort dates to try to date and bed as many women as possible. These standards will help you select dating partners who are willing to invest their time and resources into you – a potential indicator of interest beyond just a hookup. Even if such a show of romance turns out to be just a manipulation tactic, at least you did not waste your own resources or too much of your time and energy in a person looking to waste *your* time.

This will not weed out all narcissistic people, as narcissists are skilled at romancing their targets – however, it will allow you to set a basic standard for how you want to be treated in

dating *before* you choose to date them.

Setting standards for dating in the long-term:

You must also establish what you won't tolerate long-term in terms of boundaries and standards. In the long-term, ongoing effort may look like a certain level of commitment, mutual trust, and respect. This means writing down the behaviors and traits you find unacceptable (e.g. I will not allow someone who talks to me in a condescending manner to have access to my life; I will not allow anyone I am seeing to treat me coldly) and acting accordingly to cut ties if a partner only shows these red flags – whether it's two, three, or six months down the line.

It also means writing down what you *do want* in a partner (e.g. I want someone who is emotionally validating; my partner should feel happy for my success; me and my partner agree on goals regarding marriage and children).

It's important to remember that you are also allowed to have **personal preferences** – if for example, you don't want to date anyone who has close friendships with their exes, or you would prefer a partner who doesn't drink or smoke, or prefer a partner who doesn't engage in shady practices on social media (as narcissists are prone to doing), that is your right. Forego the fear of seeming “insecure” by social conditioning which tells you that you're not allowed to have standards for yourself as a woman. *You* will be the one dating and possibly entering a relationship with this person, so you are more than welcome to look for someone who meets your specific needs, just as men do while dating.

Keep in mind that while it would be wonderful if the world

was equal, it is unfortunately not, and the dating world is no exception. The truth is that women in general face more misogyny, more risk of violence, more mistreatment and less benefits from dating, so you deserve to be *impressed* before you invest in any dating partner, in case they're out to exploit or harm you. Instead of committing to a toxic person, make a commitment to yourself that the way they treat you will determine your investment in them.

Process your traumas and insecurities as much as possible.

Anyone can be traumatized by a narcissist, but women with childhood trauma or trauma from previous relationships may find themselves having an extra layer of difficulty in cutting ties with narcissistic individuals. That is because the “sweet and mean” cycle of abuse can feel all too familiar and addictive to the brain, especially if you’ve experienced it before at a vulnerable stage of development.

Working on your insecurities and processing your traumas, preferably with a trauma-informed mental health professional, can help you to detach from narcissistic people with more fervor in the future. You’ll be able to identify what wounds and triggers they may be deliberately targeting to exploit you. Once you’ve worked substantially on your healing, you will have a much better chance of exiting the relationship rather than staying within it just because you’ve been conditioned to seek a narcissist’s comfort after they trigger you. You will rely instead on your healthy coping skills and ability to process your trauma, instead of avoiding the trauma they put you through or rationalizing it as a survival

mechanism.

Women especially can also find themselves manipulated by the specific tactics narcissists use, such as jealousy induction. This is because there is already a great deal of social conditioning to “compare and compete” and internalized misogyny at play. That is why it is so important to develop a strong self-concept of knowing your worth and irreplaceability, so you do not fall into the trap of vying for a narcissist’s attention and always choose yourself.

Get in touch with what you love and appreciate about yourself and your life – the unique positive traits and qualities that you have that cannot be replicated in another person. This will help you to remember your worth and value, especially when a toxic person is doing something that goes against your core values and standards that you have for your dating partners.

Take charge of your finances, career, and living situation.

Some women who find themselves having an intense longing and desire for romantic partnership may be subconsciously avoiding the work that is needed in other areas of their lives and unknowingly looking for someone to save them. This can create a void that narcissistic partners can pretend to cater to in the beginning in order to get you to see them as your “savior.” Unfortunately, this can escalate into narcissists isolating you and demanding control over you in return. If you find that other areas of your life could benefit from your attention such as your finances, career goals, living situation, physical health and friendships, now is the perfect time to

work on these areas so you don't fall into this trap of becoming dependent on anyone for validation.

Start to “date yourself” by getting to know yourself and your aspirations for your best life.

What do you like to spend your time doing on your own? What are the types of self-care activities that replenish you and how can you engage in more of these? What would your dream life look like regardless of whether or not you're in a relationship? What is the kind of career you'd like to have, or if you already have an established career, what goals are you working on to improve that aspect of your life? What would your dream living situation look like and what steps would you have to take *now* to begin working toward that dream? Are your current friendships, communities and support networks nourishing, or do they need a reevaluation? Are there any fitness goals or goals for your physical health you want to meet?

Learn what aspects of your life need remodeling and take time to “enjoy” the process of pursuing a rewarding life with or without a partner. This will enable you to have plenty of “cushioning” to fall back on regardless of what happens in the dating world and remain centered in yourself rather than your dating partners. It will allow you to stand by your standards with more confidence and knowingness that that you can provide for yourself. It will mitigate any desperate need to be in a relationship at the expense of the abundant, peaceful, fulfilling life you've created for yourself.

Dating a narcissist is tough, but what's even more difficult is having to break a traumatic attachment to them once you're

already invested in a relationship with them. The sooner you exit a toxic situation, the better chance you have of maintaining your freedom and finding the healthy love you do deserve – both within yourself and with others.

Dating Power Moves For Women To Ward Off Narcissists and Toxic People

While it's true both men and women can both be narcissists, women tend to experience specific risks in the dating world due to an increased risk of violence, misogyny, double standards, and the traps of hookup culture. Here's how you can protect yourself from dating narcissists if you're a woman who hopes to have a healthy relationship in the future.

Do not let the narcissist or toxic person know you're onto them. Instead, adjust your behavior toward detachment and withdrawal whenever you see red flags. Use actions and absence, rather than words, to enforce your standards.

It is tempting to call out narcissistic traits and behaviors in a dating partner. Yet most of the time when we are just beginning to know someone, this will not help the situation and will only escalate manipulation. When you play the fool, you allow toxic people to unmask themselves more quickly than when you try to reason with a narcissist. For example, if you start pointing out the narcissist's red flags right away, they get a notice that they need to be on their best behavior to win you over. As a result, they may start love bombing, charming or gaslighting you to ensure you stay bonded to them. You can become tempted by their charm to give them second chances rather than look out for your own best interest. Calling out their behavior and holding them accountable can certainly empower you before you detach during some scenarios, but it can also leave room open for potential retaliation or verbal abuse. It is important to keep your safety in mind, especially with someone you don't know yet.

Be attracted to how he treats you and invests in you long-term, not just how he looks on paper. Match energy and effort. Put attention elsewhere if you sense you're being ignored or neglected.

It's important for all people but especially women who have been socialized to be people-pleasers to have higher standards, boundaries and expectations when it comes to dating. It's vital to reserve your time, energy, attention, and affection for truly serious partners if your goal in dating is a healthy relationship. This is because in hookup culture, women are more likely to be exploited or blindsided by men who are looking for sex but will portray themselves as looking for a relationship. That is why, above all else, you must look at how he treats you and how he invests in you through his actions not just what he *appears* to offer.

A handsome, financially stable, and seemingly empathic man may seem perfect on paper. But the way he treats you is most important. He may be charming and popular with people in society, but is he empathic toward you long-term, or does he just play the role of a good person to whoever benefits him at the moment? Is he consistent with his romantic gestures, or does he love-bomb you only in the beginning and when he wants something? Is he successful yet always "too busy" to communicate? Does he have a generous provider mentality which shows that he wants to genuinely impress and emotionally take care of the woman he loves, or is he stingy and unwilling to take you out on proper dates or give you consistent affection and attention? Remember, it's not necessarily about money: it's about his character. Even a high-value man with more limited financial means will find

ways to romance you and impress the woman he truly loves while a rich partner can still be stingy toward the people he loves. If you're not feeling like your date wants to put in effort to make you feel special, he's not truly serious.

Go into dating with the healthy fear and skepticism of becoming potentially committed to the wrong man so you're geared to protect yourself, rather than the hope of finding "the one" right away so you're incentivized to settle for less.

Men generally tend to decenter their dating lives. It is a "bonus," not the entirety of their existence. Women, on the other hand, are socialized to center men and relationships from a very young age. In this case, it can actually be helpful to "date like a man" when it comes to how much you prioritize relationships. Women are taught that their ultimate goals in life is getting into a relationship (even if it's a toxic one) and getting married at all costs. To effectively counter this habit and deprogram this harmful social programming, consider that one of the happiest demographics of women is single and childfree women, and that research indicates that women tend to experience greater psychological distress after the honeymoon period in marriage.

Think about ways in which relationships in general add stress in your life to curb this conditioning – it's a far healthier and balanced way of viewing commitment and relationships to see both the pros and cons than being hyper-focused on the social status of being in a romantic relationship. Then, recognize the benefits of staying single and not settling until you meet a high-quality partner. Rather

than rushing into toxic relationships with manipulators and marriage to give your life meaning, think about the ways your life is already meaningful and enriching, and brainstorm how to improve other aspects of your life; write down your goals for your career, finances, friendships, hobbies, interests, physical fitness, and self-care routine. Level up in these areas so that any potential dating partner must add value to your life in order to enter it. Take the pressure off getting into a relationship just for the sake of being in a relationship for the social status and focus more on what kind of partner you want to actually have in your life. You can have fun dating without commitment – but even when you do date, make sure you’re vetting your dating partners thoroughly so you are not manipulated or exploited.

Be ruthless about your standards and have a strong cut-off game.

Rather than viewing dating as a one-track route to finding a husband, see it more as a playground where you set the “rules” for yourself. You determine your standards, expectations, and boundaries in the vetting process, and perform the cost-benefits analysis that will determine who is a worthy mate – someone who adds value to your life. Writing a list of qualities you desire in a partner as well as your dealbreakers can be helpful. Women are usually socially conditioned to feel they cannot have preferences like men do and focus solely on personality over physical attraction. Men generally are encouraged to go after what attracts them visually. Rather than necessarily emphasizing one or the other, it’s important to strike a balance and consider both what emotionally and

physically attracts you in a partner. You are just as deserving of finding someone who meets all your needs. Do not “build up” your dating partner or try to change them – observe who they truly are and act accordingly. If they demonstrate red flags that irk you, cut them off. Men do it all the time with very little qualms – they will not usually tolerate a woman disrespecting them or may even cut someone off for not meeting their expectations and standards. You must do the same.

Identify how he treats women who are more successful than him as well as women he cannot control.

Successful, high-achieving, and intelligent women have a built-in advantage when it comes to dating. Numerous studies indicate that generally men tend to feel intimidated or emasculated by them and opt out without knowing anything else about them, even though they were initially attracted to them. This is an automatic “filter” system that chases away men who have not looked carefully at their own misogynistic attitudes, or worse, are narcissistic and pathologically envious. However, it can be helpful to test this throughout the relationship, as some malignant narcissists will deliberately target successful, attractive women just for the purpose of bringing them down. How does he react when you share an accomplishment or achievement he does not have? Does he congratulate you and offer to celebrate your wins? Or does he center himself, lash out in envy, and minimize your achievement? Does he become cold and withdrawn when you talk about your dreams or goals or when you get more

attention than him, whether it's for your achievements, personality, or appearance? This is the type of man you do not want in your life as he will only seek to control and diminish you. You deserve a high-quality partner who is proud of your accomplishments and positive qualities, just as you would be proud of him.

Consider the unique safety risks women take on when dating. Do not try to be "equal" in an unequal world or spoil a dating partner early on without even knowing him. Remember, you're the one who takes on the majority of the risks and burdens.

In modern romance, many women feel empowered being independent and want to show that they value equality. That's a noble gesture, but it dismisses the rampant inequality, violence, and misogyny women experience on a daily basis. The truth is, it does not matter that women now have certain rights, because in dating, you can still be treated as inferior just for being a woman by a man who feels entitled to your company and feels entitled to using you. That's why it's important not to suggest that you are "wife material" to a man by cooking and cleaning for him early on, or offering to be their free therapist, or letting them move in and leech off your resources.

The world is already rigged toward your dating partner's favor and you risk multiple forms of violence any time you go on a date; to reduce the chance of having your emotional and domestic labor or even resources exploited, let *them* persuade you with their actions why you should risk your safety for them instead. As a society, we have gotten it wrong: if

women are the ones taking on most of the burdens and risks in the dating world with far less benefits in marriage and childrearing, *they* should be the one evaluating their partners more heavily before commitment, not working overtime trying to prove their worth for a man.

Keep your options open and never prematurely commit to anyone; never assume exclusivity.

Dating is different from a relationship. Most men generally know this and behave accordingly to this principle by exploring their options – whether that means hooking up or dating different women, or even leading women on to believe they want a relationship just to get what they want. Women, on the other hand, can get hyperfocused on a single dating partner and forget that she has other options easily. This can leave her vulnerable to being played by a narcissist or otherwise toxic partner who can string her along or emotionally abuse her because he knows she's now invested and hooked. Rather than trying to settle down with the first person who impresses you, wait to observe his long-term behavior. Date other people if you need to get less attached. Get acquainted with all the red flags of narcissists *before* you date. Take your time and really enjoy the dating process. This will give you a healthier, more balanced perspective as you look for a potential match.

Why Hookup Culture Harms Women – And Why You Need to Leave Your “Situationship”

Another aspect of what makes women settle for less in dating is the normalization of casual intimacy which has become a way to trap women into situationships and ambiguous romantic situations that don't serve them and have a high risk of harming them emotionally. Hookup culture offered the promise of female sexual liberation, empowerment, and agency, but it may have presented far more risks than benefits. Due to gender inequality, higher health risks for women, the prioritization of male pleasure, and double standards, some aspects of hookup culture may actually be harming women more than freeing them while disproportionately benefiting men. Society marketed hookup culture as sexual freedom for women without actually prioritizing women's health, safety, pleasure, or empowerment. As sociological research shows, there's a big gap in pleasure between men and women in casual encounters so women are taking on far more burdens

and risk (including the threat of assault, violence, retaliation, and disproportionate health risks) for far less pleasure.

Sexual liberation in an unequal society mired in misogyny means men will still prioritize their own pleasure at the expense of women's safety and boundaries and women will also be conditioned to prioritize male pleasure. This is designed to keep women trapped in toxic cycles while catering to men.

Although both men and women can experience dissatisfaction in hookup culture, many doctors, psychologists, researchers, and therapists note that hookup culture presents unique risks for heterosexual women. Here are the main reasons hookup culture may be more harmful to women than men and what the experts have to say.

Physical Safety and Double Standards

In hookup culture, women often risk sexual coercion or assault, misrepresentation of their dating partner's true intentions, stealthing (removal of a condom without consent during sex), violence, numerous health risks (*see section on sexual health below*) and retaliation, especially in the form of revenge porn with less possibility for accountability if their hookup partner is a stranger rather than an acquaintance. These concerns regarding physical safety are not equal for men and women in hookup culture.

A 2026 study of 2,689 male anonymous participants by O'Sullivan and Ronis revealed that 95% of men used a sexually coercive or aggressive strategy to force a woman to have sex when they knew she did not want it and didn't consent. The researchers defined sexual aggression as including assault (i.e.,

nonconsensual sexual acts obtained through force, threats of force, or incapacitation, such as through alcohol or drugs) as well as **sexual coercion (i.e., sexual acts obtained through verbal pressure or manipulation)**. The most common way they had met these women was on either a social event with lots of people they knew, a dating website, or social media.

The most common strategy was telling a woman whatever she wanted to hear and this was used by the majority (78.1%) of the 2,557 men reporting any history of forced sex. The next most common strategy was asking her repeatedly to have sex (48.6%); *having a friend, partner, or group of friends help you get what you want* (46.6%), *having a female friend make the woman feel safe and convince her* (43.8%), telling her you knew she wanted it (39.3%), focusing on a stranger to have sex with (37.9%), *have a female friend bring her to you* (37.6%), and get her away from everyone to somewhere private and under your control (37.5%).

“Gradually pushed verbally or physically until you got what you wanted” (32.1%) was also a common strategy. Other strategies that were less commonly reported but important to note included: stopping her if she tried to leave, getting her drunk or high when she wasn’t already, demanding that she “stop conning” him (projecting the assumption that she was faking her disinterest even if she wasn’t), forcing her to undress before she was ready, forcing her to go to his home, yelling at her for being a “tease,” the use of roofies, targeting a woman who was “unlikely to stop him,” physical force, threats, or even taking advantage when she was sleepy.

When asked if anything positive came out of this, *the male respondents claimed “friendship” and “friends with benefits”* with the same women they had coerced were common “posi-

tive outcomes.” This insinuates they continued patterns of exploitative and coercive behavior with their targets after coercing them into sex acts they were not comfortable with. Survivors of sexual assault or coercion can have self-blame or confusing feelings about their perpetrators. They may feel misplaced guilt or shame about what happened and one of the ways to regain a sense of control is trying to manage a relationship with the perpetrator. This study reminded me of such a phenomenon, as well as the complicity of toxic women who help perpetrators assault or victim shame other women.

The reason manipulative men in modern dating culture looking for casual sex misrepresent their true intentions and knowingly pursue women looking for dating and meaningful relationships is because they want power and emotional leverage over women. They don’t want a woman who is detached from them and only wants sex too because this takes away their perceived power and leverage. They don’t want to pay a worker for services because they know she’s only doing it for the money and would be compensated rather than fully exploited. They want a woman who they think “likes” them, invests in them, and will give them the satisfaction of being chased, using the dangling carrot of promising romantic love to steer them into precarious situationships.

They could easily find a woman who is interested in only a casual encounter just like themselves. Yet some will go out of their way to romance and coerce or persuade a woman they know they have no intention of dating long-term into physical intimacy. This is consent by deception and manipulation. It is also a power play. Consent by deception is not fully informed consent.

As licensed clinical psychologist and therapist Miriam

Koshy, MSc, MPhil, notes, “Due to the inherent physical vulnerabilities associated with casual sexual encounters, women may have heightened concerns about their personal safety.” As a result, Koshy says, “Women are more likely to prioritize safety precautions, such as meeting in public places, informing friends about their whereabouts, or relying on trusted social networks for potential partners. Men, on the other hand, may feel less vulnerable and may be less likely to prioritize these safety measures.”

Another risk is how men and women are still viewed differently in hookup culture and are not treated as equals. “Men tend to view hookup culture more positively than women,” says Joni Ogle, LCSW, a certified sex addiction therapist with over twenty-five years of clinical experience. “Some often perceive it as a chance to explore their sexuality without the responsibility of leading it to a real relationship. On the other hand, some women view hookup culture in a more negative light because they feel like they are being objectified or used for sexual pleasure only.” Research indicates that women who participate in hookup culture are often subjected to double standards and may be vulnerable to slander, gossip, and rumors designed to unfairly shame them and their sexual activities, even as their male partners are praised.



Sexual Health, Double Standards, and The Pleasure Gap – Higher Risks for Women with Less Benefits

The Sexual Health Risks of Hookups Aren't Equal

One of the major reasons hookup culture remains unequal for men and women is the fact that women overall undertake far more health risks when they engage in a hookup than men, with far less pleasure. Dr. Harold Hong, MD, a board-certified psychiatrist and medical director of New Waters Recovery, notes, “There is always risk involved with unprotected sex which could lead to unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) if proper precautions are not taken. There are unique risks for men and women when it comes to STIs such as HPV.” Even with the use of contraceptives and protection, there is still a risk of STIs that can be passed on *despite* condom use and can affect a woman’s fertility or even cause cancer. “HPV can cause cervical cancer in women, which is why the Pap test is important for detecting abnormal cells and early signs of cancer. This is because the virus can be present on skin that the condom does not cover,” says Dr. Hong. “So even if proper precautions are taken, there is still risk for transmission of STIs like HPV. It’s important for people to get screened regularly so any pre-cancerous or precancerous lesions can be caught and treated quickly.” Dr. Hong notes that while men can also contract certain cancers from HPV, they tend to be less likely than women to develop serious health problems due to anatomical differences.

While there are vaccines to prevent HPV, these vaccines only target 9 strains (seven of the most high-risk strains) and not the 40 or so strains that can affect you. Dr. Neil Nedley, MD, a board-certified physician specializing in internal medicine

explains, “HPV can occur even when all precautions are taken, and HPV is much more likely to cause severe life-threatening conditions in a woman than in a man. Men also get HPV, which can be associated with cancer of the penis, but is far less likely to occur than cancer of the cervix in women.”

Unfortunately, this unequal risk is not eliminated by vaccination or disclosure. Research indicates a gender disparity in both the testing and prevention of STIs like cancer-causing strains of HPV. The HPV vaccine only protects against some of these high-risk strains, as there are at least a dozen types that increase the risk of cancer. Men are not routinely screened for HPV, which makes them silent but deadly carriers of high-risk strains that can cause cervical cancer in women. They may not know they have HPV at all, so they usually cannot inform their hookup partners if they have it or not – the burden of disclosure and heightened risk is thus often unfairly placed upon women alone.

Apart from HPV, there are also other STIs that can harm women in life-threatening ways, especially in a hookup culture where unprotected sex is common. “Women also are more prone to undiagnosed gonorrhea, which can cause scar tissue in the fallopian tubes, increasing the risk of ectopic pregnancy and rupture of the tube,” says Dr. Nedley. “This can cause extreme pain and the need for emergency surgery to prevent death. Women are also more likely to obtain HIV during hookups than the other way around (a man getting it from a woman), although that can also occur.” There is also a difference in the rates at which men and women may undergo STI testing in general. Women are also **more likely to be tested** for certain STIs rather than men according to studies, which puts their health at unequal risk any time they have sex with

a man who is not as conscientious about getting tested.

Hookups Have Fewer Benefits and Less Pleasure for Women

Unfortunately, generally speaking, the purported pleasures or benefits of hookup culture are unlikely to outweigh or compensate for these risks for women. Sociologist Dr. Elizabeth Armstrong and her colleagues sought to answer some pressing questions about the nature of hookup culture and situationships. Their studies revealed that hookup culture and situationships for women in a patriarchal society are saturated with inequality and dissatisfaction. While traditional monogamous relationships also present their own problems to women, hookups, and situationships don't generally appear to provide a healthier alternative. In one of their studies on hookup culture using data from a sample of 13,484 women, Armstrong and colleagues found that women tended to have orgasms more often in relationships rather than hookups, partly due to the double standards present in hookup culture where male pleasure is prioritized and expected, but not a woman's. In relationships, a woman's pleasure was more likely to be given attention.

In a hookup, there is much less guarantee that your sexual partner will care about your pleasure as much as you care about his.

This discrepancy in whose pleasure is prioritized in hookups is inevitably gendered. Licensed psychologist Dr. Linda Baggett, PhD, notes, “Women are socialized to be people-pleasers and to put others first, including prioritizing the sexual pleasure of others. Men are socialized to feel entitled to sexual pleasure and to deprioritize women’s needs and pleasure.” Baggett says that while this can also be present in same-sex hookups, in opposite-sex hookups, these dynamics tend to reinforce each other. “As a result, I often see women consenting to activities that they don’t actually feel great about or being afraid to really take up space as an equal, and men are less likely to create an environment that supports women doing this. The result is women often have hookups that do not feel physically or emotionally healthy or satisfying.”

One way to set healthy boundaries in hookup culture is to honor your own needs and check in with your own comfort, Baggett advises. “Listen to your gut and honor your needs, whether that’s asking for more foreplay, insisting on using protection, or saying no to activities and encounters that you don’t like or that don’t feel right to you.”

These inequalities can be present in more traditional monogamous relationships as well, although to a lesser extent. In heterosexual romantic relationships, the orgasm gap still exists – with 95% of heterosexual men saying they almost always had an orgasm during sex versus only 66% of heterosexual women saying they did in a 2016 national study of 52,588 adults. Among women who *do* orgasm during sex,

they also tended to be more satisfied with their relationship outside of the bedroom. This lets us know that whether in hookups or relationships, the orgasm gap and gender inequality need to be addressed. We know from other research that relationships are still affected by gender inequality as well in terms of the division of domestic labor and emotional labor.

It should be emphasized that most of the risks and inequalities mentioned so far still exist in more traditional and monogamous relationships too, albeit in a different way and some to a lesser extent. Yet these risks are often minimized in a way that makes hookup culture appear “equal” and completely safe for both men and women in a way that defies reality. However, it appears hookups aren’t doing anything to alleviate that inequality and may actually be providing even fewer benefits to women while disproportionately catering to and prioritizing male pleasure. Every situation is different, but it can be helpful for women to develop a healthy skepticism about the risks they undertake when it comes to hookups and think about whether the benefits really outweigh the costs when it comes to their casual sex partners on a case-by-case basis.

Emotional Trauma is Still a Risk If You're Pressured To Participate

Women may also experience more emotional distress from hookups and situationships especially if they find themselves feeling pressured into hookups if what they really want is a relationship or dating. For example, some studies show women can experience more depressive symptoms related to hookups than men do and may expect sex to evolve into a relationship. Women can also experience significantly more regret than men after casual sex.

Other studies suggest that for *both* men and women, casual sex was related to psychological distress such as depression and anxiety. Study participants also reported lower levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and happiness than those who had not engaged in casual sex recently. In a dating culture where misrepresentation of one's true self is common, some women may also find themselves being manipulated by a narcissistic partner who insidiously violates their boundaries by pretending to want something more when their only agenda is sex. Or they may be manipulated by a toxic, exploitative partner who causes them to invest in a more long-term "situationship" only for the relationship to be shrouded in ambivalence and a lack of accountability.

Therapists note that, generally, hookup culture appears to have a different effect on women than on men.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Holly Schiff, PsyD, asserts, “In my experience as a therapist, I have found that hookup culture generally does have a different impact for men versus women. Clinically, I have seen that women experience more negative psychological consequences than men. After engaging in hookup culture, women usually feel more lonely, rejected, and unhappy. Usually, they are also worried about being judged by others for their behavior. Men on the other hand usually feel more sexually satisfied, confident and happier.” Therapist Sarah Rollins, LMSW also says, “Taking into account that gender is fluid, I have noticed significant differences in regards to the impact of hookup culture for men and women. Generally speaking, women tend to become more anxiously attached to men during a hookup situation, even if it was made clear at the beginning that a relationship was not on the table.”

A proponent of hookup culture may argue that women who don't like hookup culture can just simply not participate in it. While that may be true, male sexual entitlement is solidified by the fast-paced instant gratification now offered on dating apps. Research indicates that women on dating apps can still be subjected to various forms of sexual offending regardless of *what* they're looking for – everything from unsolicited crude pictures to the promise of “dates” which later turn out to be excuses to violate boundaries. It has become normalized to fast-forward physical intimacy in a way that it hasn't been normalized before. This makes it difficult for people to avoid the potential dangers of hookup culture even if they aren't

active participants.

“When navigating hookup culture, the one piece of advice I would give to women is for them to be honest with themselves about what they want,” says Schiff. “The hookup culture requires some form of emotional detachment, and if you know you are incapable of that, then it is probably healthiest for you to not engage in it. In order to survive today’s hookup culture, know what you are getting yourself into, and be emotionally prepared.”

Rollins advises, “Above all else, listen to your body. In navigating hook up culture, what is going to guide you best is not your intellect, brain, or education. Rather, it is your gut. Your gut sense will tell you when to approach or leave a situation. Your gut sense will guide you towards safety. When you ignore the hints your body gives you, you are no longer having an embodied and therefore conscientious experience.”

With more men expecting hookups and more women treating it like the new normal, women who *don’t* wish to participate in hookups can still feel the pressure of these new dating expectations. On the other end of the spectrum of dangerous “purity culture” lies the shaming of women who are deemed sexually repressed or frigid if they are unwilling to participate in these social norms. As a result, some women may feel subconsciously pressured into experimenting, or they may even be sexually coerced and still face the dangers of hookup culture even if they don’t wish to participate. And when they do participate, there can be unforeseen consequences. Some psychologists have even suggested that since studies show that women may be more sensitive to the effects of oxytocin than men with stronger activity in regions of the brain related to emotion and social bonding, and this may make women

more susceptible to getting attached and bonded to their sexual partners than men do. The question of whether men or women get more attached after sex remains up for debate, but generally speaking, hookups can be emotionally distressing for even those who seek out casual sex but find themselves having more serious feelings for their sexual partners.

The Big Picture

It's wonderful that women have more sexual agency and freedom in the modern dating world – what's *not* wonderful are the double standards, unmitigated risks, and dangers that still come with exercising that freedom. If we actually want to liberate women, we have to work toward building a world where it's safe for them to exercise their options and choices in the first place. We must work toward closing the gender gap when it comes to sexual health and pleasure, holding sexual predators accountable, reducing double standards, and ensuring that men also are doing their part in reducing risks and protecting the sexual and emotional health of their partners. We must also prioritize a woman's pleasure and safety instead of simply catering to men. Instead of a culture of instant gratification and a laissez-faire attitude toward casual sex where men disproportionately benefit, we must build a world based on the principles of mutual respect and pleasure, safety, and consent. In your own life, keep these facts in mind as you navigate modern romance and remember: you are allowed to have your own sexual and emotional boundaries that are not dictated by society or entitled dating partners.

Why Dating Apps Can Be A Hunting Ground for Narcissists and Psychopaths

Is our culture becoming more narcissistic? Research indicates that a higher number of younger people are meeting the clinical criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder and that we are now living in what might be called “the age of entitlement” (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). While there are multiple factors that contribute to the rise of narcissism in our society, access to numerous methods of connecting with others in the digital age undoubtedly exacerbates the need to be seen as “special and unique.” Accompanying this need is a blatant dehumanization of others in the search for attention, popularity and admiration.

The Tinder Generation

“Mobile dating went mainstream about five years ago; by 2012 it was overtaking online dating. In February, one study reported there were nearly 100 million people—perhaps 50 million on Tinder alone—using their phones as a sort of all-day, every-day,

handheld singles club, where they might find a sex partner as easily as they'd find a cheap flight to Florida. 'It's like ordering Seamless,' says Dan, the investment banker, referring to the online food-delivery service. 'But you're ordering a person.'"—Nancy Jo Sales, *Tinder and The Dawn of The Dating Apocalypse*

With the proliferation of online dating apps such as Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, PlentyofFish and OkCupid, there has been a visible rise of instant gratification without emotional intimacy in our dating culture. At the same time, the younger generation of men and women are more likely to encounter narcissists – those without empathy – at an alarming rate in their daily lives. While malignant narcissists can be found anywhere and everywhere and there are certainly decent people on dating websites, the online world of dating provides predators with a platform where they can gain access to multiple victims without accountability. Here are three ways in which we encounter narcissism in the digital age and self-care tips to keep you safe.

Hookup culture along with online dating has made us more desensitized to physical intimacy and instant gratification.

The younger generation is growing up at an exciting yet terrifying time: a time when connections can be made instantaneously, yet meaningful connections are becoming harder and harder to find. We are being conditioned to believe that we are entitled to an unlimited number of choices as we swipe through what is virtually a human meat market. The problem is, the number of choices we have is doing little to assuage the need for fulfilling and meaningful relationships. We are now looking at what some experts have aptly called “the dawn of the dating apocalypse.”

While malignant narcissists can be found anywhere and everywhere and there are certainly decent people on dating websites, the online world of dating provides predators with a platform where they can gain access to multiple victims without accountability. Here are three ways in which we encounter narcissism in the digital age and self-care tips to keep you safe.



Those who are looking for casual dates and sex may be satisfied with the likes of Tinder, one of the most popular dating apps used by singles, but those who are looking for something more meaningful may be traumatized and retraumatized by the number of people who pretend to be looking for a serious relationship while misrepresenting their true intentions. Studies show that deception is common on these apps, with users creating an illusory image of who they are and what they are looking for, resulting in frustrating romantic encounters (i.e. Purvis, 2017).

Self-Care Tip

A digital detox is needed, especially in times like these. Frequent online dating app users may want to take a break from swiping-induced carpal tunnel and spend time alone or with family and friends rather than engaging in serial dating. Find ways to meet people organically without using these apps; attend Meetups based on your hobbies or interests, or join clubs that center on your passions; pursue activities in your local community such as group meditations or yoga with like-minded people. Look up from the screen and engage in face-to-face conversations with the people in front of you; the more we interact with others in real life, the more hope we have for connecting with humanity in more authentic ways. If you're going through a break-up, resist the urge to download an online dating app to 'rush' the healing process. In many cases, it will only delay the natural grieving process and lead to more disappointment.

There might be good people with earnest intentions on dating apps, but there is no doubt that many narcissists and sociopaths infiltrate these apps and use online dating as their virtual playground and hunting ground.

Online dating gives malignant narcissists and sociopaths access to numerous sources of what is known as *narcissistic supply* – people who can provide them with praise, admiration, and resources – without any need for any form of investment, commitment or accountability. These digital platforms also enable narcissists to construct a very convincing and compelling false mask that lures potential targets into various scams. But perhaps the biggest 'scam' is when a narcissistic predator 'cons' his or her target into an abusive relationship, while presenting himself or herself as the ideal partner.

This is easy to do online, as emotional predators can

‘morph’ into whatever identity they need in order to hook new victims and also ‘mirror’ their victims by finding out more about them through social media, as many apps now offer the ability to link to social media profiles. Predators can also adapt their profiles to create an image of themselves that appeal to their potential victims; a majority of online dating users have been shown to have profiles that stray from the truth in some capacity.

Self-Care Tip

Manage your expectations and listen to your intuition when online. Remember, immediate intimacy with someone can be a red flag of fast forwarding to get an agenda met. Always put your safety first and try not divulge too much about your income, your career, your relationship history or any other resource a predator might find appealing before getting to know someone. Build connections slowly and organically so that you have the necessary space to step back and reevaluate when needed. If someone gives you an odd vibe, even through the screen, trust your instincts and don’t go any further. If someone seems to have all of your same hobbies and interests, be wary that they’re not just telling you what you want to hear or love-bombing you to get what they want.

Monogamy and emotional availability are becoming more and more of a rarity.

Our current hookup culture and the rise of online dating apps have made emotional unavailability a new normal. Many people now feel entitled to all the benefits of a relationship without actually being in one, engaging in the real-life equivalent of the ‘it’s complicated’ Facebook relationship status with numerous partners. Needless to say, the effects of hookup culture can be alarming to the psyche and have a

psychological impact on the way that we view relationships and intimacy in the modern age. Both younger and older generations alike are becoming accustomed to the idea of having another date or rebound at their fingertips, without having to do the inner work of healing from past relationships or working on their self-esteem.

People can now latch themselves onto the next partner without taking the time to grieve or learn from past mistakes. And those who *have* done the inner work to heal can find obstacles on their path to finding a fulfilling relationship, with more and more potential mates always on the search for something “better.” The ambiguity of “almost relationships” is also at an all-time high. Emotionally unavailable partners can now reap the benefits of relationships without calling anyone their boyfriend or girlfriend; they can now place numerous partners into “friends with benefits” type situations. For those who are looking for something casual and carefree, this can be empowering and exciting. For those who are looking for a longer-term commitment, however, they may have to sort through many covert manipulators before finding someone who is compatible with their needs and desires. Double standards against women engaging in casual sex also permit emotionally unavailable, narcissistic men to benefit a great deal from these casual arrangements, while punishing women for ‘acting like men’ if they “dare” to also date multiple partners.

Self-Care Tip

Stay true to your standards when dating, whether you’re using an online dating app, meeting people in real life or both. If you’re a person who is interested in a longer-term commitment and you feel unable to engage in sex casually

without developing feelings, don't give into anyone else's sexual demands or expectations for the sake of pleasing them or in the hopes of 'winning' a relationship. A half-hearted relationship that results in more losses than gains is one where no one wins – except, of course, the person who gets all the benefits of your company without the effort. Remember that you are *already* worthy of a great and healthy relationship. You don't have to 'earn' the ability to be treated with respect, honesty and decency. Manage your expectations online and realize that there will be many people in cyberspace who will try to get your maximum investment while putting in the minimum effort. Integrity and transparency are becoming less and less commonplace and is especially rare online. Do not put up with the dwindling standards for human decency. Instead, be very wary of and cut off contact with predators online who attempt to manipulate you into giving them what they want while dismissing your needs. Their actions will always speak louder than words.

The right person who is compatible with you will want what you want – whether you meet them online or in real life. There won't be any 'gray areas' with the right person nor will you ever have to compromise your own standards to be with them. You won't ever have to wonder whether you're just 'hanging out' or going out. It will be clear – and that will be the relationship that will be worth investing in.

Red Flags of Narcissists and Toxic People on Dating Apps

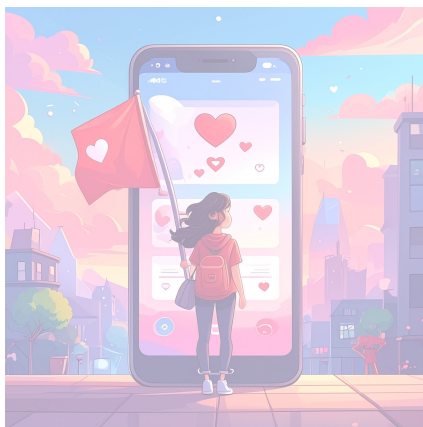
Now that you've learned why online dating can be a hunting ground for narcissists and psychopaths, what are the red flags you should watch out for?

Negging.

Negging is a covert put-down manipulators, pick-up artists, and narcissists on dating apps dish out to make you more susceptible to their advances. While some may use negging as a form of “playful teasing,” it often does not translate that way and is used by abusers to disorient you in hopes you will seek their approval. And sometimes it *does* work: some studies indicate that when someone's self-esteem is lowered, they are more vulnerable to the romantic advances of others and are more compliant to requests and agreeable.

Watch out for off-kilter comments or backhanded “compliments” that detract from your visible strengths.

For example, if you’re a very attractive woman, a person who “negs” you may insinuate that your makeup is doing all the work for you rather than your natural features to detract from your beauty or insult you through a comparison. They could say something like, “Nice makeup. My grandma has that blush.” Or, if they’re jealous of any of the achievements listed on your dating profile, they might say something like, “You’re an engineer? They must be letting anyone enter the field nowadays.” These bizarre insults will be used to put you down, especially if this person senses you are out of their league. You deserve a dating partner who is mature enough to give you healthy praise and doesn’t require these depraved tactics to get ahead.



Numerous pictures with the opposite sex (if they're straight) or even their small children. Multiple selfies if they're a man.

Are they looking for a date or a harem? If a man is featured in numerous photos with another woman or multiple different women for the majority of his photos, he's hoping to set up a silent competition and showcase his desirability. He will do this with shady female best friends, or even past exes. At best, he's insecure and trying to make it seem like he gets more action than he really does, or tactless and unempathetic in the way it might make potential suitors feel. At worst, he's a narcissist who loves to provoke jealousy and dabbles in manufacturing love triangles even before you've gone on a first date.

This kind of behavior will only escalate later on. Watch out for multiple selfies especially in men; research indicates that while selfies are not a significant indicator of narcissism for women (likely because most women have been conditioned to take them and focus on their appearance, narcissistic or not), they *are* significantly associated with narcissism scores in men. If your dating matches feature their young kids on their profile, this is also a major red flag as it indicates he's willing to violate their privacy while attempting to show you he's a "good parent." Some will use their children or pets deliberately to make themselves seem more nurturing; more nefariously, others are looking for a "mother figure" to raise their children *for* them rather than a true partner. Do not fall for this. While it's wonderful to share an occasional picture of a pet or disclose that kids are an important part of one's life, if you get the sense that these images are being used to

portray someone in a specific way, it can be a red flag. People who are authentically nurturing, desirable, and sensitive will reveal this side of themselves organically over time through their personality traits and behavior – they don't need to use their kids, their exes, or their pets as props to make them look good.

They give you preemptive “challenges” to make you feel like you have to win their approval.

Narcissists and manipulators on dating apps try to lure their targets in with a preemptive challenge. They know that if you're an attractive woman, you likely have numerous matches to sort through and want to “stand out” from the crowd. They will attempt to kickstart communication or provoke a response by using this method. They might ask you to prove yourself in some way to them to get you to respond to them. For example, they could say things like, “You're pretty and all, but do you actually know how to hold a conversation?” or “I used to do a lot of romantic gestures for my ex like make them a playlist and write poems. Let's see if you could inspire that” or “So you graduated from Harvard. Is it really as hard as people say it is?” These challenges don't have to be particularly sophisticated – they can even be as simple as a typecasting statement like, “You seem like the type of woman who...” Again, these “challenges” are really just degrading attempts to make you work for their validation and prove your strengths to them.

It's a twisted way for the narcissist to try to position themselves as the “chooser” when they are nobody to you and are likely the one who needs to prove themselves to you.

Remember: you have nothing at all to prove. Most people with healthy boundaries would not rise to this challenge and would simply walk away from these conversations. But if you're a person struggling with self-esteem or trauma, the manipulator knows you might attempt to "prove" them wrong in some way or prove your worth, even though they are fully aware that *they* are the ones unworthy of you. That's the reason narcissists issue preemptive challenges in the first place – to test you to see if you'll take their bait.

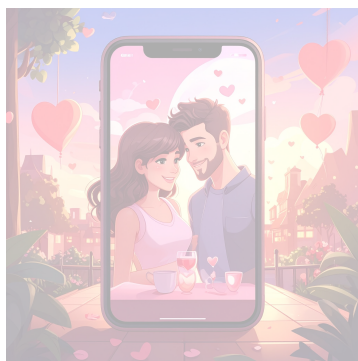
They mention their exes or previous dates in their bio or messages.

It's one thing to disclose past memories to someone you know well in a conversation that warrants it and another to use it as an introduction on a dating app. You should never tolerate a potential dating partner mentioning an ex during your first few conversations with them, whether it's online or in real life. In the best-case scenario, they are emotionally unavailable and not over their past relationship. In the worst-case scenario, they are a narcissist trying to set up a love triangle to get you to compete. If they're degrading previous dates they've been on, you will likely be next on the list to be put down. If they mention, "I was betrayed by my ex," as one of their early messages, be wary. Many narcissists will try to paint their exes as cheaters early on when *they* were the ones who engaged in betrayal. Ask yourself why they feel the need to share this personal information with strangers – there's likely an agenda behind it. This information is simply not needed when first getting to know someone and places the responsibility on you to do emotional labor you're not being

paid for or to provide reassurance that you are nothing like their ex. The narcissist is actually looking for victims who will prove their loyalty to them with this pity ploy.

They treat you like a therapist. They share sob stories that are over the top early on, expecting you to comfort them.

Piggybacking off this, if a dating match is sending you lengthy paragraphs about their life history and trauma especially when you haven't even met (but even in the first few dates), they are treating you as a free therapist, not a dating prospect. Narcissists love to weaponize pity ploys and sob stories which may or may not be true to paint themselves as the victim when they're really the perpetrator. These types rely on your sympathy to manipulate you. **Send an invoice for those billable hours and opt out from these draining conversations early.** Dating is about fun and getting to one another – not about one-sided emotional vampirism.



They mention they need someone who “doesn’t take themselves seriously” or “understands their sense of humor.”

People who are genuinely funny don’t need to beg others to understand their “unique” sense of humor. People who know how to use sarcasm as a spice rather than the whole meal don’t have to brag about or defend being “fluent in sarcasm.” Chronic sarcasm used to bully and taunt others can actually be a red flag of psychopathy. **Cruel remarks disguised as “jokes” are not to be dismissed or minimized.** Watch out for anyone who says they need someone who “doesn’t take themselves seriously.” That means they expect to be able to gaslight you freely and say whatever they want without consequences.

They claim they need a relationship that’s “drama free” on their bio or messages.

It’s always the “no drama” folks who have the most chaos in their lives because they themselves create it. Those who explicitly state they “don’t want drama” are usually the ones manufacturing chaos in the lives of others. If a person can’t handle simple, healthy conflict or even a basic discussion without feeling frustrated, they need a therapist, not a date. This is a red flag as it points to a lack of accountability and inability to engage in introspection.

Sexual come-ons or love bombing to disguise their true motives.

It's a truth universally acknowledged that if a man is fast-forwarding you into imagining kids and marriage with them in the first few messages, they're usually just looking to have sex with you. No one who wants a healthy relationship will start off as strong as messaging you every hour, with praise and compliments that never seem to end. Manipulators and narcissists know that love bombing their victims is a way to get into someone's bed and head early on. On the flip side, if they're starting with the sexual come-ons early on, they are just as interested in hitting it and quitting it – they're just much more forthcoming about their true intentions.

The date plans are dangerous, shady, and a no-go.

If there's something “shady” about the date plans a match proposes, don't go – especially if you're a woman who is facing far more safety risks when meeting a stranger. If they want you to meet them at their place, or pick you up at yours, they're not taking your safety into consideration. You have to date with the idea that *anyone* – especially on an online dating app which is more likely to have narcissists and psychopaths hunting for victims – can become a stalker. Wait until you get to know them better before they have access to where you live or before you forego meeting them in a public place.

If they don't confirm with you the day before the date they're coming, they're not serious about you or the date. If they want to take you on unromantic “hang-outs” or meetings like walks or coffee dates, they're probably looking

to date multiple women cheaply, hook up with many people, and will remain low-effort. As a woman, you're risking your life every time you go out for a date with a stranger: do you really want to do a hike or walk date with someone you barely know? At best, you'll waste your time with a low-effort manipulator who doesn't even care to impress you, and at worst, you may end up buried alive in the woods. Be selective about the dates you accept and vet people thoroughly before you meet with them to figure out whether they can carry a conversation with you online. Go at your own pace. Remember: manipulators are looking to rush the process so you don't catch on and identify their red flags. They may ask you to meet up right away without getting to know you. Resist the temptation to fast-forward the talking stage.

They rage when you set boundaries and try to get you off the app early.

If a dating prospect is trying to get you on the phone with them right away in the first few messages, something is awry. Narcissists require constant attention and they feed off of it. So when you're not replying to them at their pace (especially if they're trying to love bomb you), they might try to take a different route: these manipulators will claim that they "barely use this app" and need to text you instead. That way, they can have your full attention because while you may not always be on the app, you will usually see text messages. This is an audacious request considering they haven't even taken you on a date yet.

Watch out for matches who rage at you for denying their requests or retaliate and insult you for setting any kind of

healthy boundary. **This is narcissistic rage at its “finest.”** You don’t need to give a stranger your phone number or social media handles right away nor do you owe them any personal information. They need to work and earn your trust. Unless you’re using social media to vet the safety of a dating match, it’s not necessary. Always do a full background check on a potential dating mate. Dating matches who want your social media usually just want another follower to add to their harem – they want cheap attention without putting in the work. If they’re not making an effort to take you out on a proper date and have meaningful conversations with you, they’re a waste of time and you should reserve your time and energy for better prospects and matches.



Dating App Messages and Profile Red Flags of Toxic People to Look Out For

If a potential match asks these questions or exhibits the following red flags in their conversations with you or their online profile, take a step back. Synthesize what you just learned by looking for these key questions, phrases, or responses to your dating profile.

What are you looking for?

At first glance, this phrase seems innocuous. After all, doesn't *everyone* want to be transparent about what they're looking for so no one gets led on? **Women who ask this question may assume that men who ask them the same are doing so for the same reasons; unfortunately, that is usually not the case.** When used specifically by emotionally unavailable men on dating apps, it is usually a way of gauging your interest in hooking up, with a few exceptions.

When used by narcissists in general, this phrase can also

be used to identify if you're searching for a relationship so you are more susceptible to manipulation. Once they find out what you're looking for, narcissists can manufacture the "soulmate effect." The narcissist may mirror your hobbies and interests, your deepest desires and what you're looking for in a partner to exploit you for whatever they need. They will create the ideal relationship based on your response only to later devalue you.

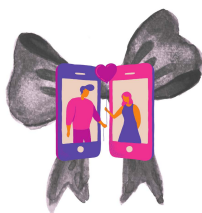
It's fair to assume that most people on a dating app would be looking for dating, so the question is often unnecessary unless you're looking for something else. Whether someone wants a long-term relationship with a specific person or not will usually become clearer further along the dating process. Some men who are looking for anything outside of these parameters are searching for something outside of what they know is the "default," so they're curious if you'd be open to a hookup or something casual instead. Yet instead of saying upfront what they are looking for, they will do something much more devious: they will ask you first in hopes that you are also looking for a hookup. If you say you are looking for a relationship, they will usually mirror your response and pretend they want a relationship too even though they are just looking for sex, or double down hoping they can coerce you into something more casual. Be wary of potential dating partners who tell you they are "not looking for anything serious" or "going with the flow." This is less of a subtle red flag and more of a glaring stop sign. If someone hints that they are not looking for anything serious even if you've established you're here to date, you are not compatible and will only be settling for less.

Never let anyone know what you're looking for right away.

After all, you don't know this person. You don't know yet if you are looking for anything specifically with them. Instead, turn the question back on the person who asked and be mindful that some men will misrepresent what they are looking for. You can also go for a safer reply like, "I am here to go on dates to see if there's a connection."

I am not looking to be pen pals. I am better in person than texting.

In a world that presents numerous safety risks for women, this is a major red flag if presented in someone's dating app bio or messages, especially if they are persistent about meeting up without a conversation. While it's true that no one wants to message each other for weeks or months before meeting up, a person who is unwilling to even engage in a few first conversations with you to see if you're compatible enough to meet is usually only looking for something casual or more sinisterly, they know that if you *do* have a conversation with them, it will reveal immediate red flags that would cause you to opt out ahead of time. This is a low-effort and dangerous attempt to get you to meet them right away without vetting them properly. Avoid potential dating partners who do not care about your safety or comfort.



What's your type?

Why would a person want to know what someone else's "type" is so early on rather than allowing a connection to unfold organically? Some people are just curious if they fit your schema of the ideal partner, but often times this is a set up for manipulation. This phrase is weaponized strategically to figure out the qualities and traits you are searching for so a toxic person or narcissist can temporarily morph into the ideal partner for you. Rather than disclosing what your type is (whether physically or emotionally), simply let the person know that you'll know it when you find it and focus on getting to know the person more.

My ex...

Any phrase that starts with "my ex" is by default *suspect*. Watch out for dating app profiles that also frequently feature pictures of other women. When you're first pursuing a new partner, no exes or current prospects should be mentioned. It is not only inappropriate, but it also shows a level of callousness that doesn't bode well for a potential dating partner. Dates are about the present moment, not the past. Mentions of exes on a first conversation or first date can be a signal of emotional unavailability, tactlessness, or narcissistic game-playing in the form of jealousy induction. Some may be deliberately trying to provoke jealousy in you to make themselves appear desirable because they believe you're out of their league or attempting to get you to compete for them.

Let me cook for you sometime or let's go to this place near me.

This can be a kind gesture with someone you already know well but a low-effort and unsafe first date idea for women. It signals a presumptuousness and erosion of boundaries that doesn't bode well for the future. If a man is asking you to only go to places near him for a first date, chances are he's only looking for a convenient hook-up. This shows a sense of entitlement and disregard for your needs which is a major red flag.

I am not looking for any drama. No drama.

People who state on their profiles or messages that they are not looking for any drama tend to be the *sources* of drama. People who are emotionally stable and calm rarely need to announce that they do not need any drama in their lives. Those who declare they are avoiding "drama" are usually gaslighters who avoid constructive conversations and healthy accountability. These toxic types approach every discussion as a fight and perceive it as a challenge to their sense of entitlement rather than having the emotional maturity to handle it when someone is expressing their valid emotions. Ask yourself: why are they preemptively announcing that they're not looking for drama? Is it because they manufacture chaos on purpose? Or have a lot of chaos in their lives as a result of not being able to handle a basic conversation without resorting to belittling others? Chances are, you're the one who will be subjected to drama if you entertain them.

I would never lie to you. Looking for someone loyal.

Similarly, watch out for other preemptive, unprovoked defenses like, “I am trustworthy and would never lie to you,” as this can be a red flag of a pathological liar who feels the need to establish their trustworthiness early on. Genuinely loyal and honest people do not need to morally grandstand about how honest they are or declare that they are looking for a loyal partner. Loyalty and honesty are the bare minimum in relationships and do not need to be declared, yet disloyal and dishonest partners often speak about these qualities as if they are rare – that’s because these are not qualities they possess, but would like their partners to possess. If a dating partner emphasizes these qualities either in themselves or in terms of what they are searching for, this can be a signal that they have a specific motive. For example, a man who is a serial cheater may declare he wants a loyal partner on their profile because he’s projecting his own disloyalty onto others and expects his partners to remain faithful even if he is not.

I am fluent in sarcasm. I need someone who understands my sense of humor.

While light sarcasm can be fun and mutually enjoyable if both parties are engaged and can possibly be a medium for flirtation, a perpetually sarcastic and condescending demeanor used to bully others can be a major turn-off. People who take pride in being persistently sarcastic or cruel under the guise of a “joke” are rarely compatible with anyone who has a healthy level of sensitivity and empathy. Don’t dismiss

the fact that chronic sarcasm can be a red flag of psychopathy and deeper issues. Remind yourself: if a person is naturally amusing and comedic, would they need to mention their sense of humor? It's clear they're mentioning it because enough people have found their particular brand of "humor" or mockery inappropriate and they did not feel "understood" enough by empathic people with boundaries. Stay away from partners who engage in backhanded compliments or "negging" in an attempt to get you to chase them. You deserve better than the hot and cold tactics of a manipulator.

"Let's go out now."

Women who've been on dating apps often share the following experience: they match with a man whose first message to them urgently declares they should go on a date with them, right away. This person then proceeds to tell them that they like to get to know their dates "in person" and want to avoid being pen-pals. *Red flags galore!* This is the texting equivalent of sex without any foreplay. While no one wants to be messaging back and forth for weeks before meeting up, telling someone they "need" to meet them without even having a proper conversation or a vetting Facetime call communicates three things: this person doesn't care about your sense of safety or empathize with the dangers women face on a daily basis and feels entitled to make you feel unsafe due to what they want; they don't want to put the effort in to even have a conversation with you (less than the bare minimum), and they may even be predatory and aware that if they *do* engage in a conversation with you, you will notice something amiss – that

is why they try to rush and fast-forward the meeting. Watch out for heavily persistent people who continue to pressure you into going out with them even when you've stated your boundaries.

"I want someone who doesn't take themselves so seriously."

If your dating match has this listed on their dating profile, do not take it as a light-hearted cue that he just wants to live, laugh, and love with you forever. Instead, think about why someone would indicate this on their profile. Marriage, dating, childrearing, partnership, romance – this is all very serious business when you think about it. Usually, it's the most intense individuals who create chaos in the lives of others who don't want people who take their heinous transgressions "seriously" enough to call out their red flags.

"Want to meet up for a walk/a hike/a coffee?"

Men and women, generally speaking, view these types of dates very differently. On average, many men on dating apps see coffee as a cheap way to entertain multiple options, while saving money to take out the "dream woman" they truly want to impress. They disguise hike and walk dates as outdoorsy adventures that are a cheap and low-effort way to get to know and even hook up with many women – and some actually use these secluded dates for more sinister purposes (so for your own safety, I would highly recommend staying away from

hike or walk dates).

Some women will swear by coffee dates because they believe it's the safest, get-out-of-jail-free option should the date fail to impress, or turns out to be super creepy and entitled – this is a fair concern, but unfortunately, even a quick date doesn't shield you from creepy entitlement. If a man is the one asking you for these types of dates, not you, consider it a potential red flag.

Remember, there are several options besides wasting energy getting coffee with someone who is likely going to turn out to be low-effort: you can still meet up for lunch, brunch, afternoon tea, go to a nice lounge with cocktails and appetizers (opting for a non-alcoholic beverage if that better suits you), a live music or jazz venue, or if you're more certain you'll like the person and have vetted them through FaceTime, a full dinner and meet-cute. You are likely to attract far more serious candidates who want to invest in you and actually want to romance you this way – or, at the very least, respects the time, effort, and risk you undergo as a woman meeting up with a stranger every time you go on a date. Remember: if you're dating someone who is already low-effort in the beginning, this pattern will only worsen over time.



“So what do you think about me or (insert anything from their dating profile)?”

If a person on a dating app fails to ask you any questions about yourself and only focuses on their own profile and what you think of them, run. At the very least you’re communicating with someone self-centered, and in the worst-case scenario, you’re about to become entangled with a narcissist who’s going to be solely focused on getting their own needs met while foregoing yours.

“I am rarely on here. Add me on Snapchat/Instagram.”

If someone cannot even handle messaging on a dating app, what makes you think they would put the time and effort into getting to know you? It is quite presumptuous to place such a request to strangers to “follow” them on social media. Regardless, this is actually a tactic many manipulators use to get your personal information early on. Alternatively, they may ask you for your social media handles early on without even asking you out on a date, keeping you in limbo as part of their social media “harem.” If you do “follow” them and take the bait, they will use it to gather information on who you are (while this can help women vet potential dates for safety purposes if needed, a woman sending a man her personal social media isn’t usually as necessary). Apart from being low-effort and lazy, this phrase can indicate a sense of entitlement from a partner to “get to know you” without putting in any work to do so.

“Me with my best friend! She’s like a sister to me.”

This one may be a bit more nuanced, but if a man is showing off a shady close female friend or a harem of female friends on their dating profile pictures and declaring they’re like a “sis-ter” to them, they’re usually already setting up a competition and ready to gaslight you about it if you feel uncomfortable. As you will learn more in-depth in another section, a wealth of research indicates that men are more likely than women to have interest in and romantic attraction to their opposite-sex friends and prioritize their attractiveness in choosing opposite-sex friends. Again, those with psychopathic and narcissistic traits tend to make others jealous on purpose for power and control according to studies.

Knowing this, it can be helpful to consider this a tentative red flag – the exception being that sometimes two people really are platonic friends and not attracted to one another, but if they’re showing them off on a dating app, it certainly tells you there may be more reason to be cautious. There’s no real reason someone would need to show off their close “friendships” with other women on dating apps unless they were trying to “flaunt” their supposed desirability or even indicate that in order to date them you must tolerate what could be a shady “friendship.” Stay wary.

How to Outplay the Player and “Beat” The Narcissist In Their Dating Mind Games

Dealing with a narcissistic player in the dating world can be tough. Here are ways you can outplay the narcissistic player in their mind games and protect yourself ahead of time.

Withdraw first if you sense the love bombing is about to dwindle.

In the beginning of any dating courtship phase, the narcissist or player will make extravagant claims and romantic gestures to get you hooked. They will make you believe they're interested in marriage and having children with you, or at least a long-term committed relationship. They will woo you with lavish dates and plenty of attention and affection. All honeymoon stages usually have an expiration date, but narcissists withdraw rather abruptly after making future-faking promises to get you invested. That is why you must

never trust the positive behaviors you see in the first three months. You cannot trust this will last until you’ve gotten a sense of someone’s long-term patterns.

You can certainly enjoy the early chemistry with a dating partner without investing yourself too deeply in what may be a trap. Avoid rushing physical intimacy and observe how they react to your boundaries. **Just as you sense the love bombing is dwindling, don’t try to invest further or work to regain their approval. Instead, match their energy and withdraw so you don’t waste any further time on them.** Likely, they’ll start to chase you again because it’s an affront to their ego whenever a dating partner loses interest – but don’t give in. They showed you who they were the minute they treated you with any kind of disrespect or indifference.

Never show all your cards early on.

Narcissists view love and dating as a chess game. They’re the sadistic cat and you’re their chosen prey. When they ask you what you’re looking for, keep it vague. Don’t give them the explicit instructions on who to morph into or the characteristics they need to adopt in order to win you over. Chances are, when they’re asking you what your ideal partner looks like, they’re trying to understand how to behave so you will sleep with them or cater to them. If they ask you about your traumas or childhood history, do not disclose that either. They are investigating the weaknesses and vulnerabilities they will later weaponize against you.

Have a strong self-concept before you begin dating anyone.

A narcissist devalues you because they are prone to malicious envy and a lack of empathy. They may test you in the beginning by “negging” you with covert insults or backhanded compliments to lower your self-esteem and make you more compliant to their advances. Or, they may begin putting you down as soon as they sense you’re reciprocating their interest and invested. To resist these mind games, you have to know how irreplaceable and incredible you truly are. You have to be in touch with all the qualities that make you special and unique – a catch. Work on your insecurities before you enter the dating scene: whether by improving aspects of yourself you find yourself ruminating about or by building confidence in those areas. That way, you will enter dating with the mindset that you are a prize rather than placing any player on a pedestal. You won’t feel the need to try to convince any dating partner of your worth nor will you feel compelled to chase people who are unworthy of you. You will only look for partners who actively pursue you and add value to your life. You must also be able to internally devalue the narcissist in your mind by recognizing their malicious behavior and unsavory character so you stay in a state of detachment and know you are not missing out on anything if you leave them.

Do your research on a dating partner before you get seriously involved.

Online dating apps have taken over the modern dating world and it's so important to keep your safety in mind. Do a basic background check to ensure they don't have a criminal record, a current marriage or recent divorce, children, or anything important they may not be telling you. Before agreeing to go on a date with someone or at the very least before the date, vet them by exchanging videos or a short Facetime call to get a sense of their mannerisms, tone, demeanor: this helps you gauge any red flags that may not be captured fully over text.

Social media is another great way to vet a potential dating partner.

If their account is public, create a burner account and have a look at their following list and posts to get a sense of what types of accounts they follow and engage with. Keep a lookout for any people who seem to be hugely engaged with their posts. This can be really revealing and can tip you off to whether the person you're dating is a creep who follows shady and salacious accounts or is weirdly obsessed with their ex (or has an ex or “harem” of people obsessed with them). *Remember: if you're a woman in the modern dating world, safety takes precedence. You are not violating anyone's privacy by looking at the information they've already made publicly accessible.* Finding out if someone is married, stuck on an ex, or dating multiple people is key information you need to know if you want to outsmart a player who will likely love-bomb you into believing you're the “only one” they're interested

in.

Keep your options open – always.

Narcissists are masters of manufacturing love triangles to keep you vying for them. Do not be exclusive with someone or give the boyfriend or husband treatment to someone you've just met. They haven't earned that. You don't deserve to be treated as a placeholder or as someone who waits around for someone to choose you. Continue to date others and keep other dating options in mind if you wish. If you get hyper-focused on a charming narcissist during the early dating stages, it's much easier for them to trap you into the cycle of manipulation. Whereas if you're keeping your options open, you know you can do better if they start to act up at any point.

Always lead a fulfilling life outside of dating and relationships and decenter your dating partners.

Narcissists want to create a sense of dependency in you. That's how they gain control and isolate you, especially early on in the courting phase. Never make big sacrifices for a dating partner, such as moving for them or letting them move in with you, or quitting a job because they promised to take care of you. Do not make even small sacrifices early on in dating. Do not give up your weekly yoga class to squeeze in a date or forgo your self-care while waiting for a text back; do not stop hanging out with your friends just because a dating partner wants to spend more time with you. Instead, develop a habit of keeping communication to a minimum in the beginning. Keep your phone off and on airplane mode when

you’re at work, at social events, and when you’re exploring your hobbies and interests. Be fully immersed in your own life so that no player who approaches you can infiltrate your life and take over or become enmeshed with you for the purpose of manipulation.

Why Some Men Disappear Even When They “Want” You

For the most part, a man disappearing or withdrawing attention from you after showing extreme interest and attraction sends a mixed signal but a clear one: they are not the one for you. Are there cases, however, where there are deeper reasons at play than no longer being interested? Without falling into any trap of rationalization or trying to pursue this type of person further, here are some valid reasons a man may withdraw even when they *are* actually interested.

They possess narcissistic tendencies and like to play mind games.

It is easy to claim that any man who disappears is simply not that into you, but we know that people with narcissistic tendencies who weaponize manipulation tactics operate differently. These types can indeed be very “into” you as they love bomb you and shower you with excessive attention, praise, and interest, developing a hyperfixation on you as

their latest romantic prospect and target of obsession. However, much like pick-up artists, narcissists tend to withdraw and disappear as soon as they sense they've gotten you sufficiently invested in them. They make you the center of their world temporarily so they can compel you to center them and reciprocate, only to suddenly withhold affection to maintain power and control over you. After they've gotten your interest, they want you to pursue them. This is all part of a mind game known as intermittent reinforcement, and research indicates this hot and cold behavior can get you even more attached and addicted to them. As they attempt to lower your perceived value by giving you less attention over time after putting you on the pedestal, they expect that you will work that much harder to get back on it.

Avoidant attachment style or severe emotional unavailability.

Many times, you should not prematurely excuse a man's withdrawing behavior as evidence of emotional unavailability or as an avoidant attachment style, because even someone with avoidant and emotionally unavailable tendencies can find ways to navigate their habits to pursue someone they're deeply interested in. Nevertheless, if you are dealing with someone who fears vulnerability and love or is still struggling to heal from a past relationship, there are rare cases where the person you're dealing with may disappear if they feel the relationship is too demanding on their emotional bandwidth and challenges their willingness to develop close bonds. Someone with an avoidant attachment style can opt out of relationships even with people they are interested in because

they sense you are expecting more from them, and they know they cannot give the same amount of attention and closeness you desire. However, you should be cautious not to mistake someone who is narcissistic as “just avoidant,” and you shouldn’t automatically label someone as avoidant if you feel the case has more to do with a lack of long-term interest in a future with you.

You trigger misogynistic beliefs in them and they’re not willing to do the inner work to realize they are the problem.

While this factor isn’t often considered, it should be because it is likely what is occurring in many cases, especially if you are a desirable, successful, and high-achieving woman, or a woman with boundaries and standards in general. Men with misogynistic beliefs and attitudes are unfortunately prevalent in the dating pool, and this is a primary reason why many women are opting to remain single and leaving the dating world en masse. Part of these misogynistic beliefs include the resentment some men may hold toward successful women, smart women, women who are funnier, more personable, and more well-loved than them or women who are considered more conventionally desirable in society than they are — or all of the above. The tendency for men on average to withdraw from women they perceive to have outsmarted them even though they find those women physically attractive, for example, has been noted multiple times in many studies, as you have learned.

As you also learned, researchers surmise that men who feel threatened by a woman’s intelligence even when they

are initially physically attracted to her may rationalize his true emotions by making up excuses that attribute his sudden withdrawal to fabricated faults in the woman that don't exist, rather than owning up to their shortcomings and insecurities. For example, they may call that woman “domineering” when she is anything but just because she has a higher-paying career or is smarter on average, to justify withdrawing from her even though the real reason is that they feel threatened. If you outearn the men you're dating or are perceived to be more intelligent than them, you may just in fact run into men who place their ego over their interest and disappear to protect their own ego. This has little to do with their actual initial desire for you and more to do with social conditioning and an unwillingness to reevaluate discriminatory attitudes toward women.

They sense you're out of their league and they're afraid of rejection, so they reject you first preemptively.

This is another reason you should not cling to automatically when a man disappears because even the men afraid of rejection still “bat” out of the league of women they perceive to be their “dream woman” and overcome this fear to pursue women they're genuinely interested in. However, in rarer cases, someone may have such a high fear of rejection that their automatic habit is to reject women before those women can reject them first. While it doesn't always happen, it is definitely a possibility in some cases, especially if the person also has vulnerable narcissistic traits that make them more hypersensitive to rejection. If they are being deliberately

manipulative, these types of men may even ghost you in hopes that you start chasing them, only to come back around to pursue you again.

You have high standards and expectations for your relationships, and they sense they can't trample over your boundaries.

Although some men will happily marry someone with porous boundaries and use them to exploit them, others can identify when a woman won't be putting up with their manipulation or mistreatment quite easily. If you give off the attitude that you regularly hold people accountable and present healthy consequences to those who mistreat you, men and people in general may not want to risk having a relationship with you because they know there are other women who will put up with more just to expect and receive less in return. This is a good strong quality to have to filter out toxic people in the dating world. If you are causing toxic people to disappear due to this, count yourself lucky to have dodged a bullet.

Why "He's Just Not That Into You" Doesn't Apply to Narcissists

The popular catchphrase "He's just not that into you" has become a useful shorthand for people to communicate to women that a man simply may just not be interested in them. It can serve as an important wake-up call to women who may be wasting time overanalyzing a man's intentions rather than identifying the red flags in his behavior and are in need of detaching from emotionally unavailable people. However,

the usefulness of this phrase is limited when it comes to toxic and manipulative partners and is quite male-centered in its focus.

The intention of this phrase is well-meaning – explicitly, it jolts women awake from pursuing a relationship that may be going nowhere or is riddled with red flags. Yet implicitly, what this phrase covertly communicates to partners who may have been manipulated by narcissists or psychopaths is an inaccurate depiction of their true experiences and borders on condescending. That’s because narcissists and psychopaths can appear to be *extremely* “into you” in the love bombing phase of the romantic relationship, pursuing their victims with ardent longing, excessive attention, lavish dates, and persistent contact. According to research, they also have a habit of staying connected to their exes for access to sex and resources. They may reengage with past partners just when these partners have begun moving on, only to impede their progress, as part of a greater manipulation cycle.

Telling a victim of a narcissist or psychopath – whether male or female – that “they’re just not that into you,” oversimplifies the cycle of manipulation, idealization, and devaluation. “He’s just not that into you” presumes a fair and just world where all people act out of a desire for compatibility and positive qualities in a partner rather than a desire for power and control like narcissists and psychopaths have. We must avoid implicitly equating any narcissist’s actions, whether male or female, to a victim’s worthiness or a narcissist’s supposed desire. Being “chosen” by a low-quality, unempathic, exploitative, manipulative person is not an accomplishment or pursuit we should be condescendingly telling women, or anyone for that matter, to desire, value, or

care about. Nor does a narcissist's choice tell us much about authentic desire.

Narcissists and psychopaths do not “choose” partners for the same reasons as empathic people do. They choose partners based on the narcissistic supply – ego strokes, praise, attention, sex, and resources – they can extract from these people. They also regularly mistreat, exploit, abuse and discard partners who are intelligent, attractive, kind, and empathic. For example, a partner who is sought after by too many suitors or is too independent may be too “threatening” to a narcissist to pursue and they may opt for an easier target. Narcissists habitually devalue people who are out of their league and have many positive qualities to gain power and control and to feel like they “won” or one-upped someone surpassing them. In fact, they can be pathologically envious of the attractive and accomplished victims they pursue, lashing out in malicious envy of those they feel inferior around, according to studies. The cycles of a toxic relationship with a narcissist almost always hold a promise of the future that never quite comes to fruition for each and every victim, regardless of all the positive qualities they bring to the table.

They are also obsessed with and ardently pursue those who reject them as a power play to punish these victims and regain control, rather than due to authentic desire. Their choice of who they pursue is usually about the arbitrary whims of what best props up their ego at the time.

This phrase overemphasizes what is, in reality, the exploitative choices and decisions of a manipulator who deliberately uses initial extreme displays of desire to hook their victims. Rather than identifying the manipulation that is at play, this

phrase implicitly places unwarranted value on the decisions of a manipulator whose choices ultimately don’t matter and whose decisions about their choice of partners hold very little merit.

The more appropriate platitude would be, “If he or she is a manipulative narcissist, their choices and actions are not even worthy of being talked about because they engage in a similar manipulative pattern with all their victims — especially the ones they are most threatened by and envious of. It’s not about who they’re into. It’s about the fact that I deserve better.”

The phrase, “He’s just not that into you” is also incredibly male-centered. Rarely do we ever hear people tell men, “She’s just not that into you,” yet male violence against women in response to rejection remains a significant problem, which should make this phrase just as applicable, if not moreso, to men as to women. Indiscriminate use of this phrase across all contexts toward women inadvertently centers what a man desires and values, placing a man’s arbitrary “choices” rather than what a woman *deserves* on the pedestal. It doesn’t just severely underestimate how much narcissists and psychopaths (male or female) can exhibit an ***extreme desire*** for victims in the beginning stages of romantic relationships – it also gaslights victims into believing that they should care more about what a manipulative person thinks of *them*, rather than recognizing how a person who lacks empathy and chronically exploits others wouldn’t be a compatible, healthy partner for anyone. While this phrase can apply to “normal” interactions with empathic people, it can be oversimplifying and invalidating to partners of narcissistic and psychopathic people, or toxic partners in general.

Narcissists dangle the carrot of future-faking to keep their victims invested in their intermittent kindness. Their reasons and motives for who they pursue and when they stop pursuing are very different from what traditional dating advice tells us about compatibility, romance, and desire. Traditional dating advice also does not consider the trauma bonds that victims develop with an abuser who has used manipulation to make the victim vie for their attention, or how the narcissist often returns to victims they appear to seemingly abandon time and time again to ensnare them back into the cycle. We will talk more about trauma bonds in a later chapter in the third section of this book.

“If He Wanted to, He Would” – But If He’s a Narcissist, He Did

While this reframing can apply to narcissists of any gender, is important to recognize and identify that a majority of dating advice weaponizes language that is usually centered around male desire, needs, and wants. Women regularly hear similar phrases like, “If he wanted to, he would,” which chronically instills in them a sense of falling short or needing to “earn” male approval and affection. However, if he’s a narcissist, he *did* – and he will blow hot and cold to get you addicted to a cycle of intermittent reinforcement. This is another phrase that is well-meaning and meant to wake women up from investing in time-wasters but this type of language has the effect of ultimately centering the narcissistic man’s actions, desires, and choices as more valuable than his actual character and does not account for manipulation.

If he or she is a narcissist, they *will* pursue you with a frenzy but will also periodically devalue and love bomb you to manipulate you. Their actions and choices have very little to do with your worth nor are they even valuable to be considered. We rarely hear, "If she wanted to, she would" or "If a woman wants you, you'll know it" because female agency and desire are rarely prioritized or depicted as some sort of important "decision."

It's important to look closely at the language we use to describe interactions in the modern dating world where one party is a serial manipulator. Not only should we steer away from centering male desire as the primary focus, but we should also encourage victims of manipulation, whether male or female, to identify red flags in a way that focuses on the healthy relationships they *do* deserve, rather than implying that the unhealthy partners they encountered were "just simply not into them." In these cases, the truth is far more convoluted.

Powerful Ways to Deprogram Your Pick-Me Tendencies As A Woman

Pick-me women are the “pick me, love me, choose me” Meredith Grey types that are always tolerating red flags — but worse, they shame and discourage other women from having higher standards because misery loves company. Women who are male-centered tend to be dangerous to themselves and others (as they can throw other women under the bus for the attention of a man), and it is why it’s important to understand the red flags they tolerate that differ from women with high standards.

Start deprogramming your daily habits and mindset and connect to your authentic desires and self so you don't settle for less just to have a partner or a life you don't truly want.

You grew up in a patriarchy and were conditioned since you were young to seek the perfect marriage and one day become a wife and mother. But are these things you would actively choose for yourself, without your conditioning? Think very carefully about it. Read stories about regretful parents and read the research on how women fare in marriage as opposed to men (spoiler alert: women on average do not benefit from marriage unless it's with the right partner and the marriage is a long one). Is this still the life you want and are willing to take the risks of, knowing the costs, and will you actually only settle when you have a compatible partner, versus settling down just for anybody, and that you will have to sacrifice a substantial part of your life to raising your children? If so, amazing. **If not, also amazing.** It's all about coming to terms with what you authentically desire, not what society has trained you to want. Your desires are valid. Your emotions are valid. Your dreams are valid. If you want to live your life traveling and making bread, so be it. If you want to live your best life enjoying yourself, having lovers and no commitments, hell yeah. If you're feeling angry, let yourself feel, honor, and constructively channel that anger into healthy boundaries – don't try to be a “good girl” in a society that seeks to subdue you. Having this talk with your authentic self and cost-benefits analysis of the things you were taught to value as a woman in this society can save you years of heartache, labor, and disillusionment down the

road, and keep your focus on not “getting married” or having children with just anyone, but actually grounded in the desire for only keeping to your standards and who you want to actually be and the ways you authentically want to live.

Develop emotional mastery and build a life you don't want to detract from.

Emotional mastery is the ability to take charge of your emotions and mindfully look at a problem from a bird's eye view, rather than taking action impulsively. Building a high-quality life (filled with exciting dreams, goals, hobbies, friendships, interests, travels) is a vital part of emotional mastery because it gives you a solid foundation no matter what is happening in your dating life or romantic relationships and keeps you self-focused. Self-focused women rarely have the time or energy to chase an emotionally unavailable man, and they attract high-quality suitors to them naturally. You may be tempted to text a man who is offering you less than what you deserve, but with emotional mastery and a high-quality life keeping you booked and busy, you're less likely to act on that impulse because this person is detracting from your quality of life. Emotional mastery also allows you to channel your emotions into your highest good. For example, if you're constantly ruminating about an ex, you're more likely to get out of survival mode and into healing mode when you realize that you can use this opportunity to fuel your emotions into leveling up rather than staying attached to the past, working on your education, fitness, mental health, career, finances, and all facets of your life. Pursue and chase your highest self and put yourself first. When you naturally take your focus off

a man, they start to focus on and prioritize you, and honestly, that's exactly the way nature intended it to be.

Avoid low-effort dates.

Any low-effort date should be avoided especially in the early stages of dating, because women naturally take on higher risks of violence and danger any time they go out on a date with a stranger. For most women in modern romance, dating men is a liability that takes away from their peace and actively places them in danger — yet they are encouraged to go out of their way to meet a stranger for a cup of coffee they could easily make at home or even worse to “go for a walk” with a stranger like a dog. I have dated men who (unbeknownst to me at the time) took me out to lavish restaurants and fancy jazz venues while taking other women to free museums or coffee. If a man wants to take you out for coffee, they're setting the low standard early on that they don't want to impress you. They may still focus their “best” most high-quality dates on certain people they do want to impress. Do you really want to be the woman who settles for crumbs? You deserve better. Remember, most men don't think of coffee dates the way you think they do: they see it as a way to date and even sleep with multiple women without spending as much money or putting in the effort needed to woo you, while concentrating their efforts on women they do want to impress.

Why Do Women Settle For Coffee Dates?

For some women, they assume a coffee date is preferable because it gives them the opportunity to flee quickly should a problem arise. But they forget that if a man wants to verbally abuse you or sexually harass you in some way, it wouldn't matter if you were in a coffee shop or restaurant, on a hike or a flight to Paris— they would find a way to disappoint or threaten you in any setting, and they can *still* think you owe them sex regardless! If you're dealing with an entitled man, he will feel entitled no matter where he takes you. Another comment you regularly hear is, "I don't want to go through a dinner date with a man I might not like." Yet you're still wasting time by getting ready to go get coffee, to a location that may not even be near you, to meet someone who may be treating and spoiling other women to better dates, or using coffee as a way to entertain multiple women for cheap. Why go out with a man you haven't vetted or chatted with thoroughly enough before agreeing to a date or don't have enough information to even enjoy going on a date with? What's the point of wasting this time? If you need to vet them, might as well do a quick FaceTime call through the comfort of your own home to test if you guys would have some chemistry face-to-face – this actually beats the danger of meeting a stranger for coffee without vetting them properly ahead of time while wasting your own time (if he doesn't turn out to be dangerous, he might still misrepresent his intentions for what he's looking for).

The “girl best friend.”

Remember that research that shows that men seek out and choose opposite-sex friends for different reasons than women do with their male friends. To sum up the numerous studies, men are more likely to have sexual interest in their female friends, choose female friends based on their attractiveness, and report sex with female friends as a benefit. If you have a nagging feeling that your dating partner’s “girl best friend” is not a truly platonic connection where neither are attracted to each other, please take heed. Avoid men who have harems of friends who are women or a close “girl best friend” they seem to have a shady relationship with. Trust your intuition.

Weaponized incompetence or going 50/50.

Piggybacking off the first red flag, does he claim he’s not good at planning dates and lack initiative? Does he expect princess treatment? Is he a frontrunner of the sassy man apocalypse, where he devalues women and thinks he’s the prize? Is he only excited about women’s empowerment because he wants to coerce you into 50/50 or premature sexual intimacy when he’s barely even courted you yet? Ask yourself why you insist as a PickMe woman on going 50/50 in a world that isn’t yet equal and where women experience a disproportionate amount of violence, are expected to take on the majority of domestic and emotional labor in relationships, are often led on by men who claim they want relationships but are actually seeking to just “hook up” and are subjected to risk life-threatening STIs or pregnancies, all for statistically less pleasure (hello,

scientifically researched orgasm gap). With all the burdens women face in the dating world, do you really want to be in a so called “50/50” relationship that actually places even more burden on you? The world isn’t equal yet — real women’s empowerment is about looking at the current sociocultural context and realizing you deserve benefits to help offset the risks and burdens you take on as a woman.

Following or liking lewd accounts on social media.

Pick-me women are rabid defenders of men following or liking other women’s lewd pictures and accounts. They claim they are not “insecure” and that any woman that has an issue with it must be crazy. Yet they’re the ones whose partners are announcing to the world, “Hear ye, hear ye, family and friends! I find this other woman attractive! And this one, and this one! Look at that bikini!” while publicly humiliating their partners. Even (high-quality) men have spoken out on this phenomenon and consider it an insult to the woman; some have said, “I would never want another woman to think someone else has something over my partner.” That’s a respectful man right there. The truth is, the most secure women are the ones who see past their social conditioning of accepting the unacceptable from men and what society has taught them to minimize and stand up to disrespect. If you’re a PickMe woman who shames other women for not tolerating such a glaring red flag, that’s your issue. Women with higher standards thank you for keeping the low-quality men away from them, but we hope you one day wake up and choose better for yourself, as well.

Inconsistent treatment or attempts to make you jealous.

One minute he's showering you with attention, flattery, praise. The next he's withholding and withdrawing and pretending to have other women chasing them. Pick-up artists call this the "dread game" and it's used as a way to neg women that are out of their league and get you to lower your standards. Don't fall for this trap. You don't deserve hot and cold behavior or toxic uncertainty. You deserve a partner who's sure about you. You deserve a man who knows your worth and treats you as irreplaceable.

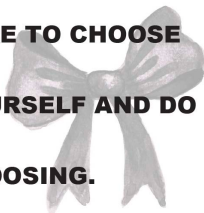
AVOID LOW-EFFORT DATES



**DON'T BE
THIRSTY
FOR A
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MAN**



**YOU ARE NOT HERE TO
BE PICKED. YOU ARE
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YOURSELF AND DO THE
CHOOSING.**



Secrets Men Don't Want Women to Know, Because It Would Give Them Power

They will leave women who have been supporting them for years through law school, graduate school, medical school and residency, building their companies - whatever long-term training and career building path they're on. Don't be with him too long during his "becoming" years as you risk building him up for the next woman to benefit.

They take out women they are most interested in out to dinner as a first date. If they are the ones to suggest coffee, a walk, or "a drink," take it as a sign of his level of interest and investment in you. You may see coffee as a casual and safer way to vet him, but low-effort men use these dates to date multiple women cheaply and save their resources for women they want to spend money on. Vet through a brief video call and make sure you actually want to go through any date with them.

Being nice and generous are signs of weaknesses to them. They exploit women who try to impress them by cooking or cleaning. They pursue women who are genuinely indifferent to them and less easier to access.

Becoming their wife is not a prize unless he is a high quality man. It simply demands more of your labor, energy, and loyalty — and often, that loyalty won't be reciprocated.

Nobody ever gets "chosen" by a misogynistic man, they get targeted. Men who have situationships and dangle the carrot of a relationship to women they intend to mislead don't have high morals or character. Men with character don't date without intention or exploit women for sex. When he "picks" a girlfriend or wife, it's usually for his own interests - she boosts his ego more, does more labor that other women wouldn't, doesn't surpass him in success, doesn't threaten his false sense of superiority, or adds to his "wholesome" image as a family man. But often they are on the endless pursuit of novelty outside of the marriage and still cheat with women they most sexually desire because that's his character.

It doesn't matter what role you play in a misogynist's life, whether wife, situationship, or the new woman he lusts after while in a relationship—if he exploited women before you, he'll exploit them after you. It's just "your turn" now in a different capacity — "picked" women are now waiting at home while he hits on other women. You were not picked if you're with this type of immoral man, you were asked to *endure*.

Essential Questions To Ask Yourself As A Woman Before Getting Married and Having Children

Dating a narcissist is one thing, but what if you become prematurely committed to one through marriage before you know who they really are? Many women discover they find out they've married a narcissist long after a significant milestone such as marriage, cohabitation, and having children. Getting married, choosing who to marry, and deciding whether to have children are some of the most important decisions you can make and can affect the rest of your life. These two decisions can change the trajectory of your entire life and should not be taken lightly. Research is showing it is especially pertinent to consider these questions because of the unequal costs marriage and parenthood has on women. The following questions can help protect you from settling down and settling for less just to say you're married. Be honest with yourself in your responses.

Do I want to be married because I want a wedding and the social status that comes with being married or because I want a marriage with a partner who is truly compatible with me?

Women are taught to idealize the day they get married rather than think strategically about who they marry and what marriage itself will realistically look like. Yet some longitudinal research shows that the benefits of marriage may differ for women and men. Certain mental health and physical health factors stabilize or decline for both men and women after transitioning into marriage, with women showing a sharper decline. While men tend to experience an increase in life satisfaction after getting married, women tend to experience greater psychological distress and a sharper decrease in life satisfaction transitioning into and after getting married; men also tend to reap more health benefits overall.

A review of the research literature by Harvard-trained psychologist Dr. Bella DePaulo showed that for both men and women, getting married only results in a slight increase in life satisfaction after the wedding, then continues to decline; this was shown in a meta-analytic review by Luhmann and colleagues (2012) as well as a 16-year longitudinal study of 11,429 adults by Kalmijn (2017) which captured this “honeymoon effect.” Luhmann and colleagues analyzed studies totaling 65,911 people and discovered that life satisfaction *decreased* over the following months after marriage. Kalmijn also noted this honeymoon effect in their study of 11,429 adults which showed an increase in depressive feelings and a decrease in life satisfaction as the marriage continues, with a surprisingly *negative* effect on health. In addition, their study revealed

that women tended to experience a *less* negative effect from divorce on their life satisfaction than men did, suggesting that women may fare better in their well-being when they do exit the marriage. Another longitudinal study of 12,373 adults did not find that married people became healthier after becoming married unless they were in very long marriages surpassing ten years (Tumin, 2017). In summary, marriage likely won't save you or your relationship if you aren't already happy and healthy to begin with.

Unless you're a man who tends to benefit from the additional domestic and emotional labor that wives are traditionally expected to take on, marriage isn't going to drastically improve your life – in fact, depending on the partner you choose, it may actually add to your stress levels and burdens. You must ask yourself: is the person I am considering a potential lifelong partner someone who shares my core values, is genuinely attentive and generous, and emotionally stable – someone who has proven through their behavior and long-term actions that they are committed to me? Is this a partner who has good character, empathy and respect for me and others? Would they still be a good co-parent and respectful ex-partner even if we got divorced? Unless you are *with* a high-quality man who intends to take on more of the domestic responsibilities or be a provider, the benefits of marriage to men and women remain unequal.

This may be one of the reasons why single and childfree women tend to be one of the happiest, wealthiest and healthiest subgroups in society and can even experience greater psychological growth according to research. You should know that you are not missing out on money, health, or happiness if you choose to take a different route. Social factors matter,

too. If you are evaluating your life satisfaction based on the fact that you are praised by society for being married, you may overestimate your life satisfaction while not taking into account the satisfaction of your relationship or the true nature of your partner. Some women may find that when answering this question, they realize that they're more into the idea of an engagement, the wedding day, and the social status of having a committed relationship rather than marriage itself.



Do I want to be married because I truly intend to choose a high-quality partner for life, or because I require validation from friends and family that I am now a “true” adult and will get married no matter what, even if it means I am settling for less?

Piggybacking off this last question, people may rush into marriage because they feel pressured to complete a traditional milestone they associate with adulthood and feeling “chosen,” even if it means being chosen by a toxic partner who will end up depleting you of your health, energy, and resources. They want to feel validated by their friends and family (especially if they were raised in a culture that emphasizes marriage and children) that they’re not missing out and lagging behind in some way. But being an adult has little to do with your relationship status or childrearing status. You are also an “adult” when you pursue your dreams, build a thriving career, graduate from school, create meaningful friendships, go to therapy, buy a house or apartment, learn to break your unhealthy and destructive patterns, and change the world. *There are many ways to grow in life besides getting married and having children.* In fact, some may feel their life got more stagnant once they were overwhelmed by the additional responsibilities of marriage and parenthood.

Write down what you think marriage and parenthood will allow you to do that you feel you cannot achieve in other ways. Then, next to this list, write down other alternative ways you can fulfill those same needs or what you deem to be the “costs” of parenting and marriage (e.g. *a supportive network of friends can be more nourishing than a toxic partner; I will sacrifice half of my life to raising my children because kids will be my priority*

and I will have to devote enormous amounts of time and energy to them) as well as what you can do more freely if you choose not to get married or have children (e.g. *I can travel the world with more freedom; I can focus on my education and career with more ease*). You'll likely discover that while marriage and parenthood provide unique experiences, they are hardly the only ways to be fulfilled, and there are also many benefits to staying single or childfree. This is a great way to consider all your options before you decide.



Do I want to have children because I genuinely want to be a parent no matter how difficult it is? Or because it is expected of me and because I want to live through my children who I believe are responsible for “fulfilling” me and taking care of me?

People who are on the fence about parenthood may think they’re just “underestimating” how rewarding it will be and overreacting about the potential hardships. In fact, it’s the opposite. Many people feel unprepared for all the responsibilities of parenthood and do not realize everything they are sacrificing until it’s too late because of societal pressures. It’s a myth that parents *never* regret parenthood; they may genuinely love and cherish their children and find aspects of their lives very rewarding, but still acknowledge that it was far harder than they expected and grieve for the life they had before. For example, there are nearly 90,000 people on the subreddit known as “Regretful Parents,” who candidly share their true perspectives and difficulties in their parenting experiences: and these are just the English-speaking people who are willing to admit it.

You may find parenthood rewarding and be fully prepared for the difficulties that are ahead: just ensure you know the true motives for why you want to be a mother or father. It’s wise not to expect to live through your children vicariously. Children are not objects to be raised with the narcissistic idea that they will fulfill or take care of you; the best parents know how to cultivate a child’s autonomy and individuality. Carrying on your legacy shouldn’t be the only reason you bring a child into this world and you should take the steps to ensure your child doesn’t grow up with toxic conditioning

or hostile, chaotic environments that will only carry on generational trauma. You should also be financially and emotionally prepared for childrearing and be able to give your children a loving home (this includes not marrying an abuser).

Am I prepared for the worst when it comes to both marriage and children?

When we think about marriage and children, we are conditioned to think about only the perceived rewards and never the potential costs – or how these costs can be different for men and women. Think of the old adage of a true marriage implying that you will be with one another “through sickness and health.” Unfortunately, this wedding vow doesn’t translate as well in real-life contexts for women as it does for men. Studies show that while women tend to stay by the side of their husbands during illness to help them pull through, men tend to abandon women during life-threatening health issues. Some women get cheated on during or shortly after pregnancy after devoting months of their life and risking their health in bearing a child or after years of being a stay-at-home mom who devotes her whole life to raising her children and being a “good wife.”

The number one risk to pregnant women in the United States according to research is being murdered by their partners – more so than the three leading obstetric causes such as high blood pressure disorders, hemorrhage, or sepsis. You cannot truly know whether the person you marry will turn out to be a narcissistic abuser and serial cheater who puts your life and well-being at risk or whether the children you have will present with health issues that you will assist with

through your entire life. **You have to be prepared for *anything* when it comes to these life decisions.** If you think the potential rewards outweigh the potential costs, have prepared yourself for both the rewards and pitfalls of parenthood and believe you've found a high-quality partner, marriage and parenthood may be fulfilling for you personally. However, if you feel you are rushing into these decisions because of your social conditioning rather than your authentic desires and values, it may be time to slow down and reevaluate.

Therapists, Psychiatrists and Childfree Millennials Explain Why: Childfree, Single Women Are Among the Happiest

According to Harvard-trained psychologist Dr. Bella DePaulo, research indicates that single, childfree women can be just as happy and satisfied with their lives as their coupled counterparts – in some cases, even happier, healthier, and wealthier. Although the reasons for this happiness may seem obvious to anyone who's ever spent any substantial time single or childfree, many in an excessively couple-focused society may be curious about why a single and childfree lifestyle can be so rewarding. I interviewed therapists, doctors, psychiatrists, as well as childfree, single millennial women to shed light on the benefits of being childfree and single, especially as a woman. The main reasons that childfree and single life was seen as fulfilling? Personal and financial freedom, stronger social networks, less stress, and more professional success.

Here's what therapists, doctors, and childfree millennial women had to say about the personal freedom and success this lifestyle offers.

"I am a Professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University and the director of an entrepreneurial mental health clinic based in New York City. Living a childfree and single life can be a liberating experience, especially for millennial women in the age range of 25-40. It offers an unparalleled opportunity for self-discovery, personal growth, and the pursuit of individual passions. Here are some benefits I've observed in my practice and personal life. *First, freedom and flexibility.* Without the responsibilities of parenting, women can explore different career paths, travel extensively, and invest time in hobbies and interests. This flexibility can lead to a rich, fulfilling life that might not be possible with the commitments that come with having children.

Next, self-care and mental health. Being childfree allows for more time to focus on mental health and well-being. Regular exercise, adequate sleep, and time for relaxation and reflection can be more easily prioritized. There's also the benefit of *financial independence.* Without the financial burden of raising children, women can invest in their future, whether that's starting a business, buying a home, or saving for retirement. *Community engagement* is another benefit. Many childfree women I've worked with have found fulfillment in engaging with their communities, whether through volunteering, activism, or mentorship programs. They can also have deeper relationships. Being single and childfree can provide more time and energy to cultivate meaningful

relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners. As a queer man living a childfree life, I can attest to these benefits. The freedom and flexibility have allowed me to focus on my career, contribute to my community, and cultivate deep, meaningful relationships.” — **Dr. Ryan Sultan, Professor at Columbia University**

“As a therapist and someone who fits this demographic, I understand the significance of being a childfree and single millennial woman (age range 25-40). From my professional experience and personal perspective, I can attest to the numerous benefits associated with this lifestyle. Choosing to be childfree and single can provide an incredible sense of freedom and self-discovery. It allows individuals to focus on personal growth, pursue their passions, and establish a strong sense of identity. By prioritizing their own needs and desires, millennial women have the opportunity to create lives that align with their values and aspirations, without the added responsibilities of parenthood.

Through my work with millennial women who are childfree and single, I have observed a remarkable resilience and self-assuredness. They demonstrate a unique sense of empowerment, allowing them to design lives that are fulfilling and meaningful. This lifestyle offers flexibility in pursuing career opportunities, personal growth, and meaningful connections. These women often engage in self-care practices, have more time for self-reflection, and are actively involved in activities that contribute to their overall well-being and happiness. Being childfree and single provides millennial women with the freedom to make decisions based solely on personal preferences and goals. It allows for greater flexibility in

navigating life's challenges and opportunities. With this freedom, these women can focus on building strong relationships, both platonic and romantic, and enjoy the benefits of independence and self-sufficiency." — **Ann Russo, LCSW, Therapist and Clinical Director of AMR Therapy**

"Being a childfree and single millennial woman can provide a multitude of benefits. It offers the freedom to fully focus on personal growth, career advancement, and self-discovery. Without the responsibilities of raising children or being in a committed relationship, one can allocate time, energy, and resources towards pursuing higher education, professional development, and achieving personal goals. It allows for greater flexibility in decision-making, independence, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Additionally, being childfree and single can foster a sense of adventure, exploration, and the opportunity to build a strong support network, meaningful friendships, and engage in self-care practices. Ultimately, it offers the chance to shape one's own life path and priorities according to individual preferences and aspirations." — **Dr. Zeeshan Afzal, MD, Welzo Medical Officer**

"Being child-free allows you the freedom and flexibility in your schedule to cater to your needs and wants. There aren't any immediatedependents that rely on you. You have the liberty to travel whenever your work schedule allows you to. You are free to make independent decisions with respectto your career, money, and passion in life. Since there are no direct dependents relying on you, you can invest money and time into a long-sought passion without risking any sort of familial sacrifice. Such individualsoften have a hard-earned

success story in terms of monetizing their passion.” — *Dr. Joe Gardzina, Psychiatrist and Founder of ADAPT Programs*

“Many of my clients are millennial women who are single, childfree and between 25–40. I have noticed many benefits to choosing to be childfree for this population. First and foremost is that as any mother will tell you, having children makes it exceedingly hard to focus on yourself. It is very difficult to have the time and energy to focus on one’s own hobbies, travel, healing, self-care, leisure, and pursuing interests and relationships in the same way that a childfree woman can. Childfree women can fully explore their own pursuits and can create rich lives by doing so. Childfree women can also engage with the children in their life in a way that is fulfilling and fun, without it completely taking over by having to do it 24/7. This allows these women to really make the most out of the time they do have to connect with kids. It is important that women choose the path that feels right for them without pressure or judgment from others. Having children is not for everyone and nobody is served (especially the children) when women have children they don’t fully want.” — *Dr. Linda Baggett, Ph.D., Licensed Clinical Psychologist*

“As a licensed therapist specializing in women’s issues, I have had the privilege of working with diverse clients, each with their own unique experiences and perspectives. One topic that frequently arises in my sessions is the decision to be child-free and the profound impact it has on women’s lives. I’ll share the general observations I’ve made from serving clients in this demographic and delve into why both my clients and

I embrace the choice of being child-free. The first reason is the empowering autonomy it provides. Many of my clients have expressed a strong desire for personal autonomy and freedom in their lives. Choosing to be child-free allows them to prioritize their individual goals, aspirations, and personal growth. By not becoming parents, they can devote their time, energy, and resources to their own well-being and pursue their passions wholeheartedly. The next is career and professional development. In today's world, women are pursuing careers and achieving professional milestones like never before. Parenthood is undoubtedly a profound and rewarding experience, but it also brings with it significant responsibilities and sacrifices. For some women, maintaining their emotional and mental well-being takes precedence.

Many of my clients have shared their ambitions and the sense of fulfillment they derive from their professional lives. Being child-free provides them with the flexibility and availability to dedicate themselves fully to their careers, taking on new challenges, and making significant contributions in their respective fields. There's also emotional and mental well-being. Parenthood is undoubtedly a profound and rewarding experience, but it also brings with it significant responsibilities and sacrifices. For some women, maintaining their emotional and mental well-being takes precedence. They prioritize self-care, mental health, and nurturing their own emotional stability. Choosing to be child-free allows them to focus on their own healing and personal growth journey.

There's also freedom and lifestyle. Not having children grants women the freedom to craft their own lifestyles and make choices aligned with their preferences. They can travel,

explore new hobbies, engage in spontaneous adventures, and cultivate a fulfilling social life. The absence of parenting responsibilities provides the flexibility to shape their lives according to their values, passions, and changing circumstances. I, too, have made the deliberate choice to be child-free. For me, it is an affirmation of my autonomy, a testament to my commitment to my career, and an avenue for personal growth. By embracing this choice, I can fully devote myself to my clients, continuously expand my knowledge and expertise, and provide the highest level of care.

It allows me to lead a balanced life, nurture my own well-being, and be fully present for my clients. But also, I love being able to sleep in on the weekends, go to fancy dinners with my friends, travel without guilt, and invest in my own continuing education, which can be quite costly. The decision to be child-free is a deeply personal one, influenced by a myriad of factors unique to each individual. My clients' experiences and my own journey have taught me that embracing this choice can lead to a fulfilling and meaningful life. It allows women to explore their passions, prioritize their well-being, and contribute to society in diverse and remarkable ways. Let us celebrate and respect the beauty of being child-free, honoring the diverse paths women choose to follow.” —**Dolly Ferraiuolo, LCSW, Owner and Executive Director of SHARE**

“I am a 27-year old licensed mental health counselor who has chosen to be childfree for the foreseeable future. On a personal level, this decision has afforded me a profound sense of freedom and flexibility that’s empowered my journey of self-discovery and growth. Being childfree has not only allowed me to focus on my career but also on my personal

development and relationships with loved ones. From a professional standpoint, I've observed a sense of lightness and unparalleled self-awareness in my clients who have also chosen a childfree path. There is a notable vibrancy and freedom in their lives that stems from being able to direct their energy towards their personal development, passions, and dreams. Often, societal narratives suggest that fulfillment for women comes with motherhood. However, I witness every day that fulfillment is deeply personal and not tied to a universal role or expectation. It's a joy and an honor to be part of a demographic that redefines fulfillment, celebrates choice, and cherishes personal freedom." — **Hannah Mayderry, M.Ed., Ed.S, Licensed Mental Health Counselor**

"The biggest benefit to being single and childless is happiness. Married women with children often express their frustrations in therapy. They express feeling undervalued and unappreciated. They have sacrificed in both their personal and professional life, caring not only for themselves, but performing the unpaid labor of caring for a husband and children. Although there is the myth of happily ever after in marriage, evidently single women without children are the happiest." — **Sarah Reid, LMHC**

"I work with many women who have chosen this lifestyle. Women who have chosen to be single and childfree often report greater freedom than those who have chosen to have a family. Women who are single and childfree are able to focus on other things that may be important to them whether it be career, artistic pursuits, or simply enjoying one's life. Disposable income and free time come much more easily to single, child-free women. Additionally, it is vitally important that we do not prescribe one way for life to be lived." — **Dr.**

Dana Harron, Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Monarch Wellness

“I am a licensed marriage and family therapist. The choice of being childfree and single seems to be ones that a growing number of the population are choosing. There are many benefits to making these life choices. Being childfree and single provides you with time to focus on yourself. You’re able to pursue your own hobbies, travel, and take on educational or professional pursuits without having to consider the needs of anyone else. As a single person, you have sole control over how you manage your finances; there’s no need to split costs with a partner or account for unexpected expenses related to children. This can give you peace of mind knowing that should anything happen unexpectedly in the future, you won’t be left with financial burdens alone. Finally, being childfree and single gives you a wider array of choices when it comes to deciding what direction your life will take.

There are no obligations or expectations put upon you by anyone else, so you can pick and choose what activities, commitments and relationships you pursue. You have the ability to go about as you please. When you want to travel or go out for anight, you don’t have to scramble to get someone to babysit for you nor do you have to answer to a spouse. You have the freedom to go where you want when you want and how you want. You are able to focus on yourself. You don’t have to sacrifice your dream for your child’s or husbands. You can concentrate on what you want in life and that can be a very liberating and empowering feeling. Although being single and childfree does not mean you’re free from responsibilities, it does provide you with more freedom and flexibility to pursue your personal needs.” — **Kalley Hartman, LMFT, Ocean**

Recovery

“There is a common saying we hear amongst millennial women: you can have it all. Within this saying there is an unspoken (or sometimes spoken) narrative that having it all means that you are married with two and a half kids, a dog and own a house with a white picket fence. Oh, and you also have your dream job. What if having it all looks different to everyone and does not involve kids? What if having it all for me means that I run my own business and get to sleep in as late as I want? Maybe having it all means you travel whenever and wherever you want and do not have to answer to anyone. Why does there have to be a one size fits all definition of having it all? Some women love being parents and would not have it any other way.

Some women love not being parents and would not have it any other way. Sadly, for women who love not being parents, when they enter their mid-twenties, questions start to sneak into family dinners or drinks with friends about why they are single and if they are lonely without kids. What people don't realize are all the amazing benefits of being childfree. More sleep. You control your own time and schedule. Increased freedom. More disposable income. More flexibility in traveling. You can focus on your friends, family and self. More time for professional goals. Research shows that couples without kids are actually happier than those with kids!” — ***Sarah Rollins, LMSW***

“Being a childfree and single millennial woman can have several mental health benefits, as it allows for greater freedom, flexibility, and autonomy in various aspects of life.

Raising children can be demanding and comes with its own set of responsibilities. By choosing to be childfree, you may experience lower levels of stress that are typically associated with parenting such as financial pressures, time constraints, and the emotional toll that can come with raising children. Without the responsibilities of raising children, you have more freedom and flexibility to shape your life according to your own desires and goals. You can make choices based solely on your own needs and preferences, which can contribute to a greater sense of control and personal fulfillment.” — **Haley Riddle, LPCA**

“Kiss traditional traps goodbye. After internalizing stories where the ‘boy next door’ was supposed to be your best friend and the love of your life, the digital age made the world easily accessible, allowing millennial women to not only internationally date, but explore and create their own world. Single millennial women choose to avoid traditional traps with courage and an honest sense of human value and self-trust. Unsurprisingly, this has led to more women like me deciding to trade their baby dolls for airline tickets and postpone having children until they are truly ready to parent a child. As a Black, 33-year-old behavioral health professional (former therapist) who spent almost ten years earning degrees in higher education, it is less about me ‘not having kids’ and more about me prioritizing and clarifying my sense of self and trusting my intuition that will later serve me well in motherhood if that becomes a part of my journey.

Part of my human gift is discovering peace in the present moment and trusting I know what I want and need. The benefit of being childfree and single is that I can make both of

those happen right now without needing to care for someone else first. The benefits are: I can explore and follow my curiosities freely. I can avoid unexpected challenges that only upend my lifestyle and routine. I experience less anxiety with mistakes and recovery. I could have become a parent earlier on in life. It was my choice not to. This is a well-deserved freedom previously inaccessible to women, and I don't see myself trading it anytime soon.” — **Sierra McKissick, MDiv., MA, Behavioral & Spiritual Health Specialist and Development Coach**

“As a millennial who has never been married or had kids, I’ve been able to do so much more, I believe, than if I’d worried about having to do those things. I’ve been able to get two Master’s degrees – one abroad while also getting citizenship. I’ve been able to travel solo and do a lot of archaeology, and have so much freedom to fulfill various dreams, even if they happened later than expected. I’ve talked to so many women who wished they’d waited longer to get married – and the older I get, the less I care about even thinking about marriage in general. I’ve never been super concerned about it to be honest, as I always wanted to be single to experience the world on my own. I might just be atypical, at least in the eyes of society, but why does society have these expectations of people?”

In my experience, there’s a lot of this need that many men have to control women. I can’t understand why more women don’t fight against this more when it comes to relationships (not just laws). There’s so much to experience in the world beyond worrying about what society thinks, in my opinion, whether people choose to get married or have kids or not—

whatever makes people happy, should be totally fine and acceptable (because I know of plenty of couples who travel together and support one another, which is also great for them)! I think striving for equality of men and women should be made a priority above pushing people to get married and have kids. If they want that for themselves, great—if not, why try to control people? We can all do so much for our own lives and the world, if we'd focus on the right things.” — **Sarah Simon, Founder of the Travel Blog, Mukikapup's Travels**

“Being childfree and single has empowered me to reinvent myself daily, pursuing my passions on a budget. It led me to build a startup accelerator and now a skincare brand, Dune Care, where I make a positive impact on people with eczema. This lifestyle taught me the value of self-care, nurturing my well-being and enabling personal growth. Without traditional family responsibilities, I have the freedom to allocate my time, resources, and energy to explore my dreams and make a tangible difference in the world. Creating something meaningful and contributing to others' lives is a thrilling journey I embrace wholeheartedly.” — **Margaux Pagès, Founder of Dune Care**

“Unfortunately, we live in a society in which women who choose to not have children are often seen as selfish. However, neither being a mother or choosing not to have children should be wrong. Choosing to be childfree is not selfish, and a right that every woman should experience. Women without children can not only live fulfilling lives, but also be of incredible service to others by having more time to devote to causes that are important to them. Not having children

provides women with more freedom of time, money, and resources, which can be allocated to other areas of their lives, such as career, travel, and community service.” —**Dr. Sarah F. Spiegelhoff, Ph.D., LMHC, NCC**

“Many of my clients express concern over being viewed as “selfish” for not having children. My first question is: what’s wrong with prioritizing yourself and your needs? Selfish isn’t the same as being self-centered and it doesn’t have to be a dirty word. My second question is: what is selfish about not wanting to subject yourself to a process that has severe physiological, psychological, emotional, social, economic, and financial impacts for the rest of your life? This process can be rewarding for some and devastating for others—the important part is that you make the best choice for YOU. The expectation to become a mother is rooted in patriarchal, heteronormative culture.

From a feminist and humanistic perspective, we know that shame is a universal experience for most women, and many of my clients have expressed feeling shame for not wanting to be mothers. The thing is, though, a woman’s value goes so far beyond her reproductive organs and her contributions to a nuclear family! When my clients deconstruct the origins of their conditioning, it can be really empowering for them to then create space for all the other things they value in their lives. These concerns are incredibly valid and until society chooses to safeguard women, especially women of color who have worse outcomes, it makes sense to opt out of motherhood. Personally, as a high-achieving and career-oriented woman, I’ve never been comfortable with the economic and financial impact that pregnancy and motherhood would likely

have on my career.

What is selfish about not wanting to subject yourself to a process that has severe physiological, psychological, emotional, social, economic, and financial impacts for the rest of your life? When my clients deconstruct the origins of their conditioning, it can be really empowering for them to then create space for all the other things they value in their lives. We know that society continues to have bias toward mothers in the workplace, that mothers are more likely to lose out on years of career advancement, and that our social policies don't support mothers (no universal paid maternal leave, no assistance with childcare, to name a few)... As a childfree adult, I'm able to allocate my time and money toward experiences that align with my values. I get to prioritize international travel and explore new cultures! I get to connect with friends through hobby groups and brunch dates because I'm able to create time for those things. I can decide to sleep in one day because I'm tired! Being childfree is incredibly freeing and I wouldn't have it any other way." —

Laura Sgro, LCSW, Licensed Therapist

"I am a Licensed Professional Counselor with over 7 years in the field. I've worked with both adult and adolescent clients in agency and private practice settings. We often look at the benefits for adults, specifically young adults, in making these decisions. And yet, we often overlook the cost to children today in having parents who were not given the opportunity to explore life, heal emotional wounds and trauma, and find the best version of themselves before taking on the responsibility of shaping another human being. The healing of generational trauma doesn't just come from identifying what our parents were carrying, and how they could have done

better, but by taking a breath and finding our own path free of the generational pipeline.” — **Nicole Depasquale, EDS, LPC**

“The decision to be about 25–40 years old and live independently without any children is often driven by a deliberate choice, guided by sound reasoning and logic, not by their lack of ability to form meaningful connections. There are millennials who actively choose solitude, free from the responsibilities of a family. They make a conscious decision to prioritize their own personal growth and well-being. **Those who understand the weighty burden that comes with starting a family and question their own capabilities choose to refrain from taking that step.** The realization of one’s limitations and the understanding that one may not be able to provide the necessary support and guidance as a parent and a spouse is a sign of maturity and self-awareness. Raising children is a lot of hard work, and the demands and pressures of parenting can take a toll on one’s mental health, as the responsibilities, stress, and emotional challenges involved in raising children can significantly impact one’s well-being and overall psychological state. Some understand that bringing a child into this world just because “one wants kids or continued lineage” is selfish.

They consider the fact that they’re bringing a child into a society that may subject them (the child) to hardships, and they also acknowledge their own limitations as parents. So, most millennials who are childfree and single have done so after carefully considering the potential challenges and negatives associated with starting a family. They understand that romantic notions alone do not guarantee a successful and fulfilling family life. Instead, they prioritize self-awareness

and choose to refrain from engaging in relationships where they may not be able to provide the emotional connection and support that their partner would expect.” —**Stephanie Pawlak, Dating and Relationship Expert at FlingorLove**

“I have a Master’s degree in marriage, family and relationship counseling. I am also a female, childfree millennial business owner—something I pride myself on. As a millennial woman, running my own gig and totally rocking the single and child-free life, it’s not just about being free—it’s about living life on my terms. I mean, who wouldn’t love a little more me time? No shared calendars, no compromises. I set my own goals, dive into my passions, and honestly, it’s a pretty sweet deal. I can put in the extra hours for my business or just decide to take a break and catch a late-night movie without worrying about babysitters or school pickups. One of the coolest things? The freedom to pack my bags and jet off on an adventure whenever I feel like it. Weekends aren’t just for groceries and soccer practice but for conferences, crash courses, gym, and sometimes, a solo trip to somewhere exotic. Being financially independent, without anyone relying on my income, gives me a kick. It’s liberating to know that I can invest in my business, travel, and in my personal growth, without hesitating about providing for others. Stress is mostly work-related. And that’s the way I prefer it. No fretting about parent-teacher meetings or toddler tantrums or school tuitions. My mental space is my focused, creative playground, boosting my entrepreneurial journey.” — **Tina Fey, MA, Relationship Expert at Love Connection**

The Big Picture

If you are single and childfree or considering this lifestyle long-term, rest assured you're in good company and don't have to let societal pressures sway your authentic desires. Even if you do want a relationship or children in the future, recognizing the benefits of being single over settling for a toxic relationship can still benefit you and your life-course trajectory. There are many benefits to being a childfree single woman according to both the experts as well as the women who have lived experiences. Whatever journey you choose and feel is most empowering for you is valid.

Myths About Single People That Need To End

You can't be happy when single. You need marriage and children in order to be a "whole person."

Au contraire, single and childfree women actually make up one of the happiest groups according to research. As you learned, studies reveal that single people can experience numerous benefits of singlehood. They can be just as happy, healthy, and wealthy, in some cases even healthier, wealthier and happier than their coupled counterparts. After the honeymoon period, studies show that marriage generally does not make people substantially happier long-term unless your marriage is a healthy one that lasts a long time (ten years or more). This is especially true for married women, who tend to experience an increase in their psychological distress transitioning into marriage and lower life satisfaction after the honeymoon period, presumably because they're often expected to take on far more emotional and domestic labor in

relationships. A long-lasting marriage only yields consistent benefits when you are with the right partner – when you are not with the right partner (whether an incompatible partner or someone who is toxic or abusive) it can drain your mental health, finances, self-esteem, and derail your entire life.

There's a reason why there is more single people than we've ever seen rising in the general population, even internationally and why so many marriages end in divorce: many people, particularly women who used to marry for survival, now have the financial means to raise their standards for committed partnership. Marriage and childrearing are steep investments to make, especially for working women whose partners do not share the domestic labor. Unless you're with a generous partner who has empathy, emotional availability, and compatible traits, you will find that marriage and children often present a great deal of difficulty and demands additional labor.

Single people are too picky. They should just "settle" so they can be "chosen."

While there are certainly lifelong single people who've chosen to be single for long periods of time, many single people actually begin to enjoy the single life after experiencing numerous relationships. They've been "chosen" many times by different partners. However, they find the single life to be more peaceful, joyful, and rewarding than a long-term relationship where they would have to settle for someone who doesn't meet their standards. They are not too "picky" or choosy – they are selective and have boundaries. They

may have simply learned the hard way that their precious energy cannot be wasted on toxic people who don't add value to their lives. Time isn't running out for them because they know they aren't missing out on anything if they're not with the right partner – they're busy working on themselves, pursuing their dreams, and leading fulfilling lives outside of a relationship. To settle for a partner just to say you are married or to raise children with a person you don't truly love or who mistreats you is not a situation we should wish for anyone. Pressuring single people to lower their standards to make you comfortable will not benefit anyone, least of all future generations.

They're forever alone.

Studies show that single people tend to have stronger social networks than those in relationships, are more likely to value meaningful work, and can experience greater psychological growth. Everyone will experience singlehood in their lives at some point whether they decide to have a long-term relationship or not. It is normal. Single is a current relationship status – not necessarily a permanent state of being unless someone actively chooses to be a lifelong single person, and it doesn't tell you anything aside from whether or not they are currently in a committed relationship. There is a variety of people who have this status. This includes people who have jumped from relationship to relationship and are finally taking time and space to heal. It includes people who have had multiple short-term and long-term relationships and find most peace in being alone.

It includes people who've chosen to leave toxic relation-

ships and are celebrating their freedom. It includes people who are not willing to settle below their standards. It includes divorced people who are happier now that they've left their marriage. It includes people who are focused on their careers and building their finances. It includes people who are deeply connected with their friends and family members. It includes people who are extroverted social butterflies and those who are introverts. It includes people who've had many sexual partners and it includes people who have always been celibate. It includes people raising children and people who are childfree. It includes people who are actively dating but not looking for anything serious. You cannot assume someone is lonely or has been lonely for a long time just because of their relationship status, especially considering that many people feel lonelier when they're in the wrong relationship.

Singlehood is About Desirability

As mentioned previously, you've seen many attractive celebrities and high-ranking professionals who are single. You see intelligent, successful, funny, empathic powerhouses who are single. You have also seen toxic, narcissistic, unsavory people in relationships. Yet the myth of "desirability" still seems to enter the conversation any time the discussion turns to relationship status. While single men aren't often interrogated about why they are single because they are assumed to want to be continual bachelors, single women are constantly poked and prodded about their dating life ruthlessly. It's automatically assumed something "must

be wrong” with single women, though that assumption is rarely ever directed at their male counterparts. However, what we know from research tells a drastically different story: it suggests that people with desirable traits actually tend to be targeted for manipulation and abuse. People with toxic and narcissistic traits tend to be maliciously envious of their partners and devalue their attractive partners to further control them. They choose attractive partners yet end up chasing them away because they cannot sustain healthy partnerships and feel threatened by them. We also know from numerous studies that smart, successful women – and even funny women – tend to be discriminated against in the dating world because of insecurity and misogyny.

Clearly, your relationship status has little to do with your attractiveness or desirable traits. Given that these desirable traits are criticized, exploited, and devalued, especially in women, why are we still asking women why they’re single? At this point, they may be single because they have these desirable traits and are more selective about who they date. Thousands if not millions of women across social media speak out every day about “giving up” on dating and leaving the dating scene because they find the current dating pool toxic yet find themselves under the microscope under society’s scrutinizing gaze. Perhaps it’s time to turn our focus toward why women are finding the dating climate such an inhospitable place to pursue love, rather than shaming single women for their standards.

People who are single hate being alone and are desperate to avoid it, so you should definitely pressure them to have a relationship.

Don't rush to "set up" your single friends with people unless they explicitly ask or ever project pity onto them, especially when you yourself are in a toxic or incompatible relationship. And if you are the single friend who's always being belittled by your coupled friends who seem to be hyperaware of your relationship status, be wary. Genuinely happy couples won't shame you or hyperfocus on your single status, nor will they try to compare their lives to yours or make you feel smaller due to your relationship status. Beware of couples who engage in "public flaunting" to a problematic extent because those are the ones who are likely hiding something. For example, according to research, showing off a relationship **excessively** on social media is actually associated with lower relationship satisfaction and is likely to happen due to overcompensation. Don't trust everything you see and don't trust any of your friends who shame you for being single – they likely just want someone to commiserate with because misery loves company. A relationship on its own is not an accomplishment and people who are happy single don't need to enter a miserable relationship just to please society. There are many single people who enjoy being single and thrive in singlehood. There are also people who don't enjoy it because they can't stand their own company or feel socially pressured to have a relationship.

We have to dispel the myth that single people are one homogenous group where every single person feels the exact same way about relationships. Some are ultimately searching

for their true love yet happily taking the time for personal growth while being single. Others are not focused on a relationship at all because they don't plan to have one, either right now or ever in the future. Some find intense euphoria in solitude and enjoy going out on their own and traveling solo. Others find euphoria in strong friendships. Every single person is different and has their own unique needs and desires. Rather than assuming that every single person is looking for a partner or desperately wants it, learn to decenter relationships more and ask your single friends about their lives outside of dating and learn to celebrate achievements that have nothing to do with having a partner. People are complex and multifaceted and there is more to a life than someone's relationship status.

Creating Healthy “Obsession” In Good Men – The Right Way

Is there a natural, organic way to make a man obsessed with you in healthy ways, *without* playing mind games? We’re not talking about dangerous obsession like stalking – we mean the healthy fixation high-quality men develop when they truly are in awe and reverence of their dating partners. The answer is, yes, but these actions have to come from a grounded and empowered place of knowing you can take him or leave him. Do not try the following strategies on toxic men or men you are fundamentally incompatible with or men who already seem flaky and emotionally unavailable or narcissistic from the onset – they can certainly succeed, but they won’t help you in the long run if you want a high-quality partner. Simply use these to connect more with men who *actually* meet your standards and where there is clear evidence of consistent interest.

Keep your distance naturally at the beginning by focusing on yourself and prioritizing your goals. Be the main character.

It may seem counterintuitive, but ironically the reason people become obsessed with you is because you’re obsessed with *yourself*. That is why naturally self-focused women always have men vying for their attention and double texting them on the daily. You’ve probably experienced this yourself when you’ve forgotten to text a man back while pursuing an activity you love, working on a project, or hanging out with your friends – they will keep reaching out to you because they develop a curiosity about what you’re up to and what could *possibly* be more important than them. Make your energy and effort scarce until he is showing to you he is worth the time and energy, and even then, do not go overboard trying to shower him with affection in return – men don’t like doting people-pleasers, they actually obsess over self-focused women who have their own lives, as much as they complain about those women.

Consider that many men have been socialized to have “Main Character syndrome” – that is why many women report and complain that while they ask men important questions on dates, men rarely reciprocate in the same manner, sometimes even centering themselves when women share details about themselves! *You* can be the “main character” without being as obnoxious, however – simply realize you must deprogram yourself from the belief that men are the center of your existence and decenter them. From now on, *you* are, and you have to think about what you want, desire, and need and redirect your focus any time you start ruminating over a man.

This will ensure that a man has to add value to your life for you to remain interested in him, which is actually what piques his interest.

Master your emotions.

Gaining emotional mastery in the dating world is a must if you want to date high-quality men and also have a fulfilling life overall. Before you take any actions toward a man, get into the habit of asking yourself, “Am I doing this from a place of power, or uncertainty?” If you’re urgently seeking a sense of safety, give it to yourself first. Practice grounding and mindfulness techniques and *then* take aligned action from that place of security. For example, if a man starts texting less and your natural inclination is to keep chasing him, take a breath and refocus on yourself instead. Tend to the tasks you have to get done, find a pleasurable distraction, call a friend, absorb yourself in a hobby, interest, or dream you want to pursue. Then, reassess whether this man is *actually* right for you. It’s from this place of inner peace that you can flourish.

Engage in a cost-benefits analysis throughout the relationship.

Many women in the dating world have a tendency to hold onto incompatible relationships beyond the expiration date of the relationship. Any time you start dating a man, it’s important to start pulling away and withdrawing whenever he exhibits behavior you’re not comfortable with or doesn’t meet your standards or boundaries. For example, if he cancels on a date last-minute or suggests going on a low-effort date, you may

choose not to respond or tell him you have other plans and start detaching from communication to prevent him from getting continued access to you. Do a cost-benefits analysis whenever possible when dating a man – is he benefiting you? Or is he detracting energy and time away from you and your goals, diminishing your peace, and having a detrimental effect on your mental health? Men do all this time and drop women that threaten their self-interest all the time! It's time to adopt this mentality for yourself.

Have other high-quality or at the very least beneficial options.

If you're dating someone and not exclusive yet, you don't owe anyone exclusivity. Men take advantage of their options before they settle down (some even do *after* they settle down – but that's a different story) and are encouraged to be lifelong bachelors. You're allowed to date multiple partners if you want and get to know whomever you wish, and yes, you're allowed to date partners you're both physically and mentally attracted to – don't let society or media convince you otherwise and don't settle for less. Don't feel obligated to stick to just one man or get hyper-focused and fixated on someone you're just getting to know. Explore your options and enjoy yourself. Find out what traits and qualities you like in the men you date, and the ones you'd rather avoid. Dating is about discovery, not fear, obligation, or guilt.

Develop an untouchable self-concept.

Take time to be single and work on your self-concept – this is different from self-esteem, although they can affect each other. Your self-concept contains all the beliefs you have about yourself, including beliefs about your relation to the world and others. Remind yourself of your positive characteristics and why a potential dating partner would be lucky to have you in their life – celebrate your humor, your intelligence, your beauty, your strength, your talents, your gifts, your personality and what people love about you. Appreciate and honor your uniqueness and what you bring to the table. Take inventory of your limiting beliefs about yourself and reprogram these with healthier, more empowering beliefs. “I am important and valuable” and “I deserve the very best in relationships” can be vital beliefs to instill in your self-concept. This untouchable self-concept will always serve you well, whether you’re single, actively dating, or in a romantic relationship with a high-quality man.

Why Smart and Successful Women Often Date Their Biggest “Haters” In The Form of Envious Men

Have you ever dated a man who seemed to be envious or threatened by you? This is actually a common phenomenon in the dating world, especially for smart and successful women. Studies reveal that while men profess they want an intelligent and successful woman, they tend to flee when they actually encounter them in real life. What is it about a powerful woman that bruises so many egos? Here's what the research says, so you can be aware of the red flags of dating this toxic type.

In the fifth annual study on American singles funded by Match.com, anthropologist Dr. Helen Fisher surveyed 5,600 single people and pointed to a “Clooney Effect” of men who expressed interest in marrying an independent and successful woman; in fact, 87% of men claimed they wanted to date a woman who out-earned them, was more educated than them, and was more intelligent. However, this expressed interest often differs from the real-life actions of men toward

smart and successful women in the dating world. While there are certainly men who genuinely support their smart and ambitious partners, it's no secret that smart and successful women tend to frequently run into insecure men in the dating world who are envious of their success. In many studies, researchers have found something astounding: while men generally *claim* they admire intelligent and successful women, they are actually more threatened by these women when they encounter them in real life.

This is not to say that women should ever dial down their intelligence to gain the approval of men; on the contrary, learning about this research can help you to be more aware of and identify which potential mates actually “walk the talk” when it comes to supporting your ambition and intelligence. Researchers Lola Park and colleagues (2015) conducted six studies to determine whether men exhibited attraction to women who outsmarted them on verbal and math tests. The majority of men in one of the studies expressed a preference for the women who outsmarted them when these women were spoken about as a *hypothetical scenario*. However, when men *actually* took the test near a woman sitting next to them in real life and was told she had scored higher than him, he was less likely to express romantic interest to this woman and shift his chair to create more physical distance from her. When a woman was said to have scored lower than a man, he was more likely to bring his seat closer to her and express romantic interest.

Some Men Love Intelligent Women in Theory – But Not in Real Life

In another one of these studies, men were told about

a hypothetical woman down the hall they never met who outperformed them on an intelligence test and told to imagine them romantically. Again, they expressed **hypothetical interest**. But when they were given an intelligence test and presented with a real-life woman who had surpassed them on this exam, they did not pursue her and were more likely to express romantic attraction to the woman who had not exceeded them. *They rated their feelings of masculinity as lower when they felt outsmarted and felt “inferior” in the presence of such a woman and opted for the less intelligent option.*

This previous finding is aligned with a study which showed that more intelligent hypothetical individuals were perceived as more masculine and less feminine, revealing an implicit bias in the way intelligent women may be perceived – even the most “feminine” presenting woman can be seen as more masculine due to their intelligence and achievements. Interestingly, in the same study, men also tended to overestimate their own intelligence more so than women. However, due to a lack of introspection, some men may misattribute their lack of romantic interest to other nonexistent factors in the women that do not identify his ego to be the main problem. Basically, they might tell themselves that the woman who outsmarted them was problematic in a way she wasn’t to convince himself he didn’t feel threatened by her.

In another study by Raymond Fisman and colleagues at Columbia University, single men and women participated in a speed-dating event where they went on dates with each other and then rated the attractiveness, intelligent and ambition of their prospects. Women expressed more interest in going on a second date with men who exhibited intelligence and were twice as likely as men to do so. Unfortunately, men

generally only expressed interest in women they felt were equally intelligent and felt threatened when women were **more** ambitious or intelligent than them. This reveals that while women generally are more than happy to have an intelligent mate, men generally feel less romantic interest when they're face-to-face with a woman who outsmarted them or surpassed them in achievements.

And it's not just intelligence we need to look at either: there's a gender bias in the evaluation of humor too. Studies have shown that while men prefer women who laugh at their jokes and fail to appreciate humorous women, women tend to prefer men who have a good sense of humor and can make them laugh (no wonder so many women are drawn to funny men). Damn! Even the women with comedic genius can't catch a break from the patriarchy.

What to Do With This Information

So what do we do with these findings? It's clear there's a gender bias and pattern of misogyny that can unfairly punish intelligent and successful women for exhibiting admirable and desirable qualities in the dating world. It's also clear that too many men tend to group and objectify women in a way that does not take into account that they are multifaceted, complex human beings just like they are; they tend to box women in one category before getting to know them and do not recognize that smart, successful, attractive women have many sides to them. One important step is not shrinking yourself to please a potential dating partner. Someone who feels insecure about your success and intelligence is not going to be a healthy, compatible partner for you in the long-run.

At best, they have some serious underlying misogyny and

self-esteem issues to work through before they can have the privilege of being with you. Essentially, they need to unpack harmful beliefs and attitudes that make them feel so threatened by women who surpass them and instead admire these women just as they would admire their fellow male colleagues or friends. Instead of competing with a woman, they would have to learn to build a partnership with her. At worst, they are a narcissist with malicious envy who will tear you down, even going so far as to sabotage your accomplishments and deflate your confidence on the daily according to research. Neither is an inviting prospect. To the smart and successful women out there, it's true you may run into additional difficulties, biases, stereotypes, and wounded egos in dating. However, don't confuse your experiences with what you truly deserve. You deserve a partner who is appreciative of your intelligence, unique gifts, sense of humor, multifacetedness, and strengths. You deserve a partner who celebrates your achievements and is your biggest cheerleader – someone who knows how to put their ego aside to tap into their empathy. You'll never need to "dumb" yourself down for a man who is truly worthy of you.

The Signs He's Pretending To Be A “Nice Guy” But Is Actually Narcissistic

Good and kind men do exist, but the seeming “nice guy” who is actually narcissistic isn’t usually one of them. Perhaps the most dangerous type of narcissistic person is the one who doesn’t wear all his red flags on his or her sleeve. This type of manipulator is a covert wolf in sheep’s clothing. While narcissists can be male or female, the way the “nice guy” narcissist weaponizes certain social and cultural norms to fall under the radar and victimize others must be explored. Research indicates that heterosexual narcissistic men lash out with the most hostility and antagonism toward heterosexual women above all other groups. It’s important to take into account the different ways this hostility can be expressed in this particular embodiment of narcissism. Here are three major red flags you should look out for if you suspect you’re dating a narcissist who uses the persona of being a “nice guy” to win public support and gaslight you.

He dons a faux "feminist" persona, pretending to support and empower women but only uses it to meet his own agendas, falling short of actually empowering them.

The man who seems "nice" but is actually narcissistic is all about empowering women – unless it doesn't benefit him, that is. This is the type of narcissistic man who may speak loudly on women's rights to garner approval from women but fails to extend genuine empathy and validation to your lived experiences as a woman navigating a dangerous world. For example, studies indicate that men who have narcissistic traits hold victim-blaming and sexually coercive beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. "Nice guy" narcissists may love bomb you in the beginning with lavish dates and affection, only to rage when you refuse to have sex with them "in return."

A narcissistic man putting on the persona of the "nice guy" may enjoy the attention he gets from being perceived as a "savior" to women while he persistently tries to center himself and his own needs over your safety and well-being. *There is, after all, a distinction between "nice" and "kind." Kind men are genuinely horrified at the inequalities women endure and make a consistent effort to understand the extra risks women face.* "Nice" narcissistic charmers don the persona of understanding but "become" and embody the very danger that women fear. The nice guy acts "nice" so long as it suits him — but when you threaten his sense of entitlement or ego, narcissistic rage ensues, and you are inevitably devalued.

They feel entitled to a woman's attention and body and feel they are "owed" sex (or sometimes, a full-fledged rela-

tionship) if they engage in any kind of romantic or generous gesture in dating. There is a reason the “nice guy” narcissist pretends to be sensitive to the needs and wants of women – he is using this façade so women trust and confide in him. This way, he can better understand their vulnerabilities, manipulate, and exploit them long-term, and have a steady supply of potential victims ready to “serve” him.

The “nice guy” narcissist may pretend he wants a commitment, but he enjoys playing mind games and pitting women against one another to compete over him, especially women who he perceives to be out of his league, as it makes him feel powerful and desirable. This is similar to the way female narcissists create harems of male “friends” to provoke jealousy to maintain power and control. The mask the “nice guy” narcissist wears allows him to gain access to safe spaces designed for women so he can hunt for new targets of manipulation. While these covert “nice guys” may put on a misleading front of being generous to the women they’re pursuing in the beginning, this generosity and romancing are often short-lived.

Genuinely kind men are generous because they *want* to give to others to make them happy and have an authentic desire to impress the women they’re dating. The narcissist who pretends to be a “nice guy” is only generous short-term to get what they want and will often hold anything they gave you willingly against you, making you feel indebted to them as they exhibit resentment. This type of covert narcissist is usually hypersensitive and gung-ho about foregoing chivalry and romance long-term in the name of “fairness and equality” (ignoring the fact that we do not yet live in an equal world) and will punish you if you dare to have any standards or basic

expectations of them – standards that *they themselves* set up for you to expect through their early claims, mind you.

Although this type of person does not believe in romancing women long-term, the “nice guy” narcissistic man is all too eager to engage in hookup culture and sexually exploit numerous women with low effort, use women as free therapy, or emotionally manipulate women to feed their grandiose ego. Women should remember that in this modern dating culture of hookups, dating apps laden with instant gratification and situationships, they also have a higher risk of experiencing exploitation, abuse, and even violence, especially at the hands of sexually coercive narcissists. Having an expectation of consistent, ongoing attention, chivalry, and romance can be one effective way to protect yourself in the dating world. Holding onto these standards can help you vet potential partners and weed out low-effort men and people who are just looking for sex and free emotional labor – so long as you differentiate between love bombing and a genuine desire to impress you.

He is pathologically envious of your accomplishments yet uses them to make themselves look good by association.

“Nice guy” narcissists will initially pretend to be happy for your achievements and success. They may even flaunt and brag about your accomplishments to others if they believe it would make *them* look good to be associated with you. However, as their mask drops, you become privy to their true jealousy and underhanded attempts at sabotage as they constantly begin to center themselves, compete with you, constantly counter your positive qualities, and compare themselves to you. Their goal is to control you so you don’t recognize you deserve better, and to assuage their own sense of perceived inferiority. For example, the “nice guy” narcissist might manufacture chaos and start crazymaking and chaotic arguments before big interviews, exams, events, or celebrations, taking sadistic pleasure in your exhaustion and despair. He may attempt to isolate you from your work and career. He feels threatened by not only your success but the fact that you were able to surpass *him* in your accomplishments because he has been coddled to believe that as a man he is somehow superior to a woman. As a result, he will likely punish you with belittling remarks, condescending contempt, or a withdrawal of emotional support to make you feel less than. He may even financially prey on you and exploit your resources or emotional labor, only to demean you.

He pretends to be "different" from men with a worse reputation and separates himself from them.

The narcissistic man masquerading as a "nice guy" may discuss at length how unethical those "other" men are to separate himself early on from "those" types of misogynistic and aggressive men. In truth, he may be just as manipulative as the men he denigrates – just more covert in his tactics. With his lack of empathy and superficial charm, he will use and abuse women ruthlessly to get what he wants. He often builds a harem of women who give him steady narcissistic supply using his charming "good guy" exterior. He conveys shock and dismay at the behavior of other men even though he himself engages in the same behaviors behind closed doors and often has a long history of victimizing women. Yet he will use the women who *do* believe in his character (usually women he keeps at a distance so they don't see behind his mask) as "props" to attest to his nonexistent integrity and to engage in impression management. This allows him to gaslight both you and the public into believing he's a "good man," despite the ways he's horrifically violated others.

Why Women Who Are Unbothered In Dating Win

The term “black cat energy” has recently made waves on social media as people noticed a specific dynamic between an unbothered, empowered, confident woman and a dotting “golden retriever” man who is drawn to her and will do anything to please her, as well as the more unnatural, people-pleasing “golden retriever” energy some women may approach dating with. But what is “black cat energy,” and how can you harness it to improve your dating and love life, attracting only high-quality partners while warding off toxic and narcissistic manipulators? Here are behaviors you may exhibit if you have empowered and unbothered energy in your dating life.

They naturally create distance between themselves and a dating partner.

Women with unbothered energy treat a potential dating partner like a possible liability, not an automatic benefit, because they know from deep within that co-mingling their lives with another person (especially a potentially toxic person) will take away time and energy from themselves, and they are not willing to make such a sacrifice unless a dating partner comes correct and stays correct long-term. They don't allow their emotions for anyone to dictate their dating decisions and are ready to opt out of the relationship at any point their intuition warns them or their dating partner trespasses their boundaries and falls deep below their standards of being treated with the utmost respect. This differentiates the behavior of high-value women from other women who are desperate for partnership, because they are driven by their own standards and desires, not a need to please others or have a man just to say they have a relationship.



To a woman like this, having just “any” man or relationship is not an accomplishment – their partners must be high-quality, or they’re better off alone. Therefore, they are less likely to try to make it work with a partner that exhibits red flags.

Women with this unbothered, confident and dignified energy not only create space and time away from their significant other and dating partners, but they also actively embrace this space because they want to live their own independent lives. Naturally, this draws high-quality partners to chase them, and frustrates toxic, entitled people who want to consume her schedule. But for these women, this is not a game or a form of manipulation to get a man to chase them – it is simply their ingrained mindset and their default way of life.

They never approach relationships from the standpoint of fear of losing a man. They fear losing themselves and their dignity much more.

For a woman with this kind of captivating, unbothered energy, they do not look at relationships and dating from a place of fear but rather detached curiosity. They see dating more practically in the form of cost-benefits analysis of whether this relationship is actually fulfilling and adding value to their lives or detracting from it and causing stress. Their biggest fear is not in losing a man or relationship, but rather, losing themselves and their self-respect and dignity. That is why it is more difficult for a manipulative narcissist or toxic person to infiltrate such a woman’s life without facing consequences. This is not a woman who will allow you to

escape accountability, and she isn't led by the fear of losing someone who does not truly love or respect her. She won't send long paragraphs pleading and begging a man to treat her well, which is exactly the type of attention narcissists and toxic people prey on – once she has reached this empowered state, she will begin speaking through her actions detaching from the relationship instead.

They play by their own rules and don't submit to the “authority” of the man they're dating. They speak through their actions more than words. They rely on their own inner authority and power, so it's harder for a manipulator to take advantage of them.

Women with femme fatale “black cat energy” do not fall for tactics like love bombing as easily because they already appreciate and validate themselves. Any “validation” a dating partner has to offer is just a cherry on top, and her dating partners have to continue to offer value in order to stay in her life, as they do not trust people easily. Much like a cat, they will be alarmed at sudden incoming affection and dart away – you have to actually earn their respect and win their trust over time for them to even entertain you. These women cannot be controlled or coerced into lowering their standards. In dating, it's important not to settle for low-effort dates, last-minute texts, any kind of ghosting or mixed signals. Confident women have little time for mind games and will become easily bored with a dating partner who does not treat them the way they deserve to be treated. They will withdraw as soon as their dating partner begins withholding attention and affection, and they're not afraid to pursue other options

in dating.

They do what benefits them and not what pleases a man.

A woman who has more desperate and pick-me “golden retriever energy” (*still can’t believe I wrote that sentence*) is eager to please and will put the needs of their dating partners above their own, often making huge sacrifices just to maintain a relationship. It may seem like a silly analogy, but it’s actually pretty apt when you think about how many women are often socialized to bend over backwards trying to cater to their partners, only to feel betrayed when their partner does not reciprocate. Instead, women who have adopted “black cat energy” know that the world is already rigged against women socioculturally speaking, so they don’t feel the need to go overboard trying to benefit those who already have many advantages in this world. They operate from the viewpoint that they do not owe their dating partners anything, especially if their partners have fallen short in pleasing them. They think about their own needs very carefully and do what is best for them – whether that means declining a date that is not suitable, not calling back a dating partner at an inconvenient time, or only making plans when she is well rested. As a result, her dating partners respect her time more and know they have to impress her in order to get her attention.

They “worship” and value themselves and put themselves on a pedestal, so others feel compelled to dote on them.

A femme fatale woman with unbothered energy knows that if anyone should be put on a pedestal, it should be her, not a stranger she’s dating. This is kryptonite to any narcissist in the dating world who hopes that by idealizing her she will make him his entire world in turn. Unlike the pick-me woman, she won’t abandon her friends, loved ones, or dreams for a man. She prioritizes herself and puts herself first. This comes from a place of grounded self-confidence, not hubris. Narcissistic and toxic partners who seek to control this type of woman will be left sorely disappointed. Even the most persuasive of narcissists, even if they love a challenge, will eventually reveal their true entitled selves when they cannot meet her standards, because they’re not capable of making the investment she deserves. She knows her worth and is independent enough to pursue her own goals, ambitions, friendships, and dreams outside of romantic relationships. She invests in herself. This makes her an intriguing catch – someone who is multifaceted and fascinating, who does not rely on someone else to complete her. As a result, high-quality men are drawn to her and want to be part of her exciting life, and the wrong men will struggle to keep up. The right men will want to meet her standards and respect her boundaries long-term, while toxic partners will prove exactly why they are not worthy of her.

Many men may swear up and down they want a docile “sweet” woman who tends to their every need—yet you see them pursuing or obsessing over the so-called high-

maintenance woman who is “mean” to them or leave the “nice girl” for the “bad girl” who simply gives zero fucks. These types of men call such women by many names—“selfish,” “high-maintenance,” “mean,” yet these are the same types of women they obsess over at the end of the day.

“Selfish” women are not truly selfish—they are simply self-focused and put themselves first in a society that teaches them to shrink. This triggers a man’s need for validation and triggers his need to “hunt.”

Most men instinctively love the chase and the pursuit of their romantic prospects. They get bored by pick-me women who serve themselves up on a silver platter with easy access. A woman deemed “selfish” by a man isn’t usually *really* selfish. She doesn’t lack empathy nor is she cruel. She just treats herself the way men always treat themselves — by prioritizing herself, her own dreams, her own goals, her own needs, and her own desires over relationships that could detract from her full potential. As a result, she has no need to be committed to a man unless he brings substantial value to her life or makes life easier for her. She restricts access to herself and her life only to men she takes seriously and who prove themselves to be worthy of her. This gives her an alluring magnetism because she is unwilling to budge on her standards and boundaries just to say she “has a man.”

To a woman who stays grounded in her standards and boundaries, having a man is just a stressor that will potentially interfere with an already fulfilled life. Again, it is a liability—not a benefit, unless she is dealing with a man truly

worthy of her. Thus, a man has to impress her to stay part of her life or get left.

This is not a woman you seek unconditional love from—she can give you heaven or hell, depending on what you bring to her, and she won't give you the wife or girlfriend experience at a discounted rate—she won't negotiate her standards just so you can get a bargain. This means the men she's dating get away with far less bullshit and have to bring their A game, because she won't be present unless she's also benefiting. Because men are used to having women strive to please them and center them without getting anything in return, they're thrown off by unpredictable, self-focused women who put their own needs first. They have a need to “tame” her and to “own” the “selfish” woman, show her he is valuable enough to be chosen by such a woman because women who value themselves and put themselves first show by example how they expect to be treated. Some men will never admit how much they desire these types of women because they want to protect their egos, but it is a hundred percent true, and the fact that they complain about this type of woman to the end of time only showcases this.

The idea of a “selfish” woman is also enticing to men because a woman like that is never going to be boring and is never going to settle down for him. She has her own exciting and fulfilling life that has nothing to do with him. Unlike the pick-me woman who is going overboard trying to cook, clean, and spoil her way into his heart, he must “hunt” the “selfish” woman and seduce her to even get an ounce of her focus. A selfish woman must be pleased — she doesn't go out of her way to please the man she's with. She has a checklist and vetting criteria for who she allows into her life. Any man

who wants to be chosen for the right reasons will appreciate this, and gladly participate in courting her properly, knowing he must provide to her pleasure and relief for her to even entertain his existence. Some men may date or even marry a “nice girl” who does everything to please him, but it is the selfish woman he thinks about as the woman who “got away.” These women are more memorable because he had to put in effort to convince her he was even worthy of an iota of her attention and time.

These women are not easily impressed. He must wine and dine her. He must have a riveting intellect and the ability to have engaging conversations in order to fully stimulate her, because she’s easily bored by partners who bring nothing beyond surface-level attraction (although she’ll also take attraction seriously and never settle for anyone she doesn’t desire). He must actually have top tier lovemaking skills, because she won’t be faking her orgasms. He must come correct, because she’s willing to cut him off at the first red flag. So-called “selfish” women are *boundaried women* and they won’t put up with bullshit or con artistry. He may vent about this type of woman, but it subconsciously raises his respect for her and her value in his eyes. That is why the pick-me woman who settles for cheap low effort coffee dates and showers a man with sex, gifts, and domestic labor out of “love” never benefits — it is the “selfish” woman who is accustomed to being taken out to dinner, who is considered “high-maintenance” and unattainable, who makes a man work for her attention, who ultimately receives princess and queen treatment.

Knowing this, do yourself a favor and do not be a pick-me woman in today’s society. Do not settle for cheap, low-effort

dates by men who do not take you seriously, or toxic relationships just to say you have a relationship. Do not minimize or rationalize the red flags in hopes of being “chosen.” Choose yourself. Do not try to please a man who does not try to please you. Do not be the “cool girl” while bottling up resentment and tolerating anyone’s red flags. It does not and will never serve you. If you’re going to be anything — be a “selfish” woman. Prioritize yourself. Put your own needs first. In a society that does not care about your needs, make sure you do.



A “selfish” woman is deemed a “dangerous” woman — and dangerous, feisty women are inherently more exciting, inspiring both fear and awe. Men are afraid to lose the “selfish” woman because she is not afraid to lose them.

Women who do not conform to the traditional ideals of being “the good girl” inspire both fear and excitement in men. They are the black cats of the dating world, taking time to pamper themselves and expecting to be pampered—and hissing at any man who tries to get in their way or tries to pet them when they’re not in the mood. They come and go as they please. What will they do next? You never know what they’re really up to. One day, they’re traveling the world with their friends. The next, they’re leading a company. And another day, they may be burying a body—just kidding about this last part, of course. But they sure do they have that *je ne sais quoi* and femme fatale energy that would make you believe they could do all three, if needed. Women like this inspire fear and cause the power dynamic to shift. Men fear losing this type of woman, rather than the other way around, because they know these women are not afraid to lose them—they’re booked and busy, and they don’t have time or patience for mind games.

These are the women who cannot be silenced, controlled, or micromanaged. They fight back and they won’t show mercy or compassion to anyone who’s done them wrong—including any man they’re dating. Of course, your average man will be overly simplistic and connect this feistiness to her sexuality, but her feistiness goes way beyond that. Interestingly, some men simultaneously are enraged by women they deem “bad girls” like this because he can easily imagine her sleeping

around and dating multiple men and having the time of her life without him— men who are not him, men who represent a masculine ideal he may fall short of. This infuriates men who fall below her standards, especially if he has misogynistic tendencies and feels entitled to “possessing” such a woman. He resents her, but he also desires her. Getting the “high-maintenance” selfish woman every other man desires is a “trophy” for him and his ego.

“Selfish” women have emotional control and are taken more seriously.

By emotional control, I don’t mean a woman who suppresses her emotions in an unhealthy way or tries to stifle her true feelings just to make a man comfortable. I mean a woman who doesn’t allow her emotions for any man to bypass her own sense of safety, comfort, and pleasure. She speaks out when she wants to. She does not “perform” for a man or pretend. She focuses on what she wants and needs and fills her own cup first before tending to anyone else. This is “unheard of” for women because they are conditioned to do everything but. A woman with emotional control is someone who is not afraid to hold a man accountable makes a man terrified and intrigued. Why doesn’t this woman want him or fear losing him?

These types of women fear losing themselves and abandoning themselves exponentially far more than ever losing a man.

To them, lowering their standards for a lackluster man who doesn’t meet their needs feels violating and appalling. Just like men don’t like to settle below their “standards” when it comes to relationships and dating, this type of woman takes

her desires and needs very seriously. If she's looking for a 6'1 financially stable, faithful, and emotionally validating man with a provider mentality who's good in bed, that's exactly who she'll go for and she will cut off anyone who doesn't meet this criteria — with no apologies. The same misogynists who tell her she should settle for them are the same ones who regularly try to pursue women they desire. But how dare beautiful, smart, funny, interesting, successful women who actually bring a lot to the table themselves not want to settle for less than *their* desires and preferences and settle for just any man? The horror!

To be deemed a “selfish” woman in today's society can be quite the compliment, if you know yourself. It's not about being cruel, or callous, or unempathic. It's about valuing yourself in a society that wants to keep you small. The next time you're called selfish by a toxic man for setting healthy boundaries or keeping to your standards, take it as a compliment.



Strategy: Thriving When Decentering Men

We've all heard the term, "decenter men." But what does that actually mean and require? Decentering men is all about genuinely placing the focus back on you, rather than the men you're dating, and living life with purpose while staying away from pick-me habits that tempt you to cater to a man who has not even proven himself yet to you. Often, women are taught to think about whether the man they're dating likes them, overexert themselves and center their entire lives around the possibility of having a partner, whereas men are taught to think about and prioritize their ambitions, careers, finances, friendships, the possibility of fun or fulfilling their sexual desires, and to see relationships as a "trap" (even though, according to numerous studies, marriage actually benefits them moreso than women).

As a woman, you have the power to do the same. Decentering men is not a strategy to make them chase you – it is actually a powerful self-care method that will transform your entire life, and men will chase you by default when you do it. Start treating being with and dating a man as something that takes up your resources, time, and energy excessively and demands more labor and effort than it's worth – as a huge risk and liability to take on, especially when you're not with the right partner. Start to worry less about how to please other people and begin to honor *your* desires, your emotions, your needs, and wants. Refocus on the parts of your life you've been needing to focus on: whether it's pursuing your education, going after your career, leveling up in your fitness and health, strengthening your friendships, having fun, or all of the above, think about what you would want your life

to look like regardless of your relationship status, and don't wait for a partner to do it. Maybe you want to take that trip to Italy, or pursue that PhD, or go rock climbing. Whatever floats your boat, stay immersed and absorbed in your own life and build a strong self-concept. The high-quality men who are interested (as well as some men who just love a challenge – make sure you know the difference) will gravitate toward you because they're naturally drawn to a woman who is focused on her own needs, and places herself on the pedestal.

It Pays To Be A So-Called “High-Maintenance” Woman – Here’s Why

In a world where we celebrate the bare minimum in relationships, we tend to label women with higher standards “high maintenance.” It’s easier to placate ourselves into thinking that women who ask for less are somehow “more.” In reality, they’re more silent about their needs. More demure about their true desires. More people-pleasing and less tapped into their power. More willing to bend over backwards. More willing to take people’s shit. People assume women with lower standards are easier to deal with and thus “safer” in some way – but they’re only easier to deal with if you’re actively looking for someone to control rather than a compatible partner. The truth is, being “high maintenance” or a woman with high standards is rarely about being rude or abrasive – or entitled. It’s about having higher standards for what you want out of life – and that includes love.

The so-called high maintenance woman with high stan-

dards is stereotyped as a woman who is shrill or domineering. In reality, she's just likely to be healthily assertive and in possession of basic boundaries. For some people, a woman simply existing and daring to speak is "too much." This is gaslighting, not accuracy. For men who "enjoy" a more high-maintenance woman with higher standards, it's because he himself is high-quality and has the emotional capacity to be generous to her and treat her well: he has the capacity and ability to meet her needs on all fronts. The high-maintenance woman is less likely to take mistreatment or pretend you're amazing *just* to be in a relationship. She is less likely to say something pleases her when it doesn't. She expresses her gratitude and appreciation immensely – but that doesn't mean there's no room for constructive growth. This means if she wants to be with you, it's a compliment. She took your actual personality traits and behaviors into account and determined you were a match. This is different from a woman with low boundaries who will settle for whatever and whoever comes her way.

The woman with high standards will gently want more from you because she knows you're capable of it. She has standards to ensure her needs get met because she knows she will go to the moon and back to meet the needs of her partners and friends. She resists exploitation and attempts to demean her. Sometimes, she fights back. This is a good thing – that means she sees herself as worthy and deserving of respect. If you want a woman who will never fight back or stand up for herself, that means you're someone interested in devaluation and control. You're looking to prey on someone vulnerable and "easy." Women with high standards for themselves are often labeled "difficult" because the person on the receiving

end wants to do the bare minimum while receiving the world in return; a woman with lower standards may please these types of manipulators, but a woman with higher standards thrives in relationships with consistency, mutual trust, and reciprocity.

Men who date women with high standards tend to be high quality, respectful men interested in partners who stimulate them not just physically but intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. They love her multifacetedness and truly “see” her for who she is in all her complexity. Unlike a partner who wants women to settle for the bare minimum, he doesn’t see her as an object to fulfill his agendas. High quality men love the fire, ambition, and spark of an healthily assertive woman because they know it means they won’t be able to get away with any schemes or agendas, and she wouldn’t be settling for anything below the bar. That means these men are top-tier and are chosen for a reason. They have to actually raise their own lifestyle, goals, dreams, just to keep up with her. The high-maintenance woman brings them to greater heights – they feel inspired by her and are in awe of her. They exhibit healthy masculinity and know how to take in feedback and learn from it. They grow just by being in the presence of a high-value woman. They love making such women happy because it makes them happy to see their partners shine.

If you’re with a woman with high standards, it’s reflected in her choices of her partners. She knows you’re a man who can provide for her, fulfill her, and satisfy her. High-value men are proud to be with such a woman because it means they’re winning. Manipulators look for women who don’t have high standards because it means they can get away with more while their partners receive less. The next time you’re

called a “high-maintenance woman,” make sure to take it as the compliment that it is – and don’t ever let a bare minimum society convince you to lower your standards.

Why High-Quality Men Love “Difficult Women” – And Why You Need To Become One In Your Dating Life

Have you ever wondered why some men seem to take advantage of “nice” women and chase after women who ignore them? So-called “toxic” women aren’t always actually toxic or difficult. While some certainly are, let’s reevaluate the label a little in the context of the patriarchal society we live in. A woman is *actually* toxic when she lacks empathy, is cruel, is exploitative, manipulative, and deliberately demeaning — that is narcissistic woman, but she is not the true subject of what we’re talking about here. We certainly don’t want to embody true toxicity or encourage those traits or behaviors. But some of the women men usually label as “toxic” and fall in love with may not be any of these things. Some of these women are labeled “toxic” and “difficult” for all the wrong reasons by low quality or misogynistic men — like standing up for themselves or having basic boundaries, not being submissive enough for a controlling man, or fighting back

and defending oneself against mistreatment. Here are the real reasons why men fall in love with so-called “toxic” and “difficult” women, and how you can integrate this knowledge to improve your dating life and protect yourself.



Stop being his peace and start being his problem—and a menace to society. High quality men don’t fall in love with people-pleasing women — they fall in love with “inconvenient” women who make them work hard to earn them. This is part of the dopamine rush for them.

Okay, you don’t *really* have to become a menace to society. We just included that for fun and bonus points. Too often, women are conditioned to center and cater to men in dating and relationships. Studies reveal that people in romantic relationships do not get as much of a dopamine rush from partners who are predictable and consistent – they actually get it from intermittent reinforcement, unpredictability, and hot and cold behavior.

That doesn’t mean you have to deliberately be hot and cold or toxic. It simply means that by holding firmly to your standards and centering yourself rather than a man’s existence, you invest more time on yourself, invest less time on your dating partners and become more selective about who you spend on your energy on *naturally*. Society encourages women in relationships to bend over backwards, spend all their time on chasing men, cook and clean, be the “cool girl,” smile pleasantly while men disrespect you, and sacrifice their dreams and goals all in the pursuit of locking down a man. Once you start decentering men and start centering yourself, your standards, your needs, and your boundaries however, the crucial deprogramming begins — and that is actually when you have the opportunity to draw in high-quality partners who actually respect you and get what you want out of a relationship as well.

You have been told your whole life to be a man's peace — now it's time to teach yourself how to be okay with being a problem when necessary to hold on to your standards and boundaries.

Authentic high-quality men do not fall in love with doting people-pleasers. They fall in love with so-called “inconvenient” women who challenge them to be better men. They want to impress the women they desire, not have one cater to them endlessly. By handing your attention over to a man who has shown you little to no effort, you've already convinced him that you are low value and that he is the prize when in reality, you are, and he falls way below your standards. A high-quality man's dream woman isn't constantly validating them — she's usually not very interested unless he's actually behaved in a manner that meets her needs and shows consistent, respectful, loving investment in her. When you naturally focus on yourself and stick to your standards, you become that dream woman for you and the rest falls into place in terms of the type of man you attract.

As for low-quality and toxic men, they will settle for whatever woman gives them the “easiest” experience in a relationship and does the most for him without sacrificing any of their own time, resources, or energy because that is how *they* get their needs met—but being an easy woman will never give you the relationship you deserve or desire. Even the low-quality men you're trying to please will still pursue and chase more challenging women when they think you're not looking because no one can resist the dopamine rush of a woman with emotional mastery who is grounded in who they are, values themselves, and knows what they deserve, isn't

always around to validate a man and expects the best from her relationships.

Boundaries and healthy emotional reactions to disrespect are sexy, not toxic. Stop demonizing them and start validating yourself and keep your options open until you meet the right man.

Boundaries are supposed to be in place to keep you safe and protect you from unhealthy men who don't have your best interests at heart. Your emotions like anger or disappointment are functional, signal when you're being disrespected, and can be used to fuel you toward cutting off people who don't belong in your life. Boundaries are not just meant to be verbally communicated but actually enforced in your dating life and relationships. For example, when a man brings up last-minute or low-effort dates, or starts to withhold attention or affection from you, this is the perfect time for the “difficult” woman in you to come out and shine. While you may choose to put him in his place, you're not going to continue to negotiate, overexplain your emotions, give him more energy than he deserves or try to make things easier for him by helping him and educating him on how to cosplay being a kind, decent, or generous man.

Women in their power don't commit early to men who haven't shown them the same commitment – they keep their options wide open and make sure they have other suitors to compare them to.

Ever wonder why toxic partners try to provoke the jealousy of their partners? Research shows it's because it works to maintain power and control – and sadly, it's often effective. You don't have to use this strategy for nefarious reasons, however. You can just acknowledge the value of having other options early on in dating and avoiding commitment in circumstances where you're not being treated well. Committing early on to a low-effort man is going to reward him with attention and teach him through classical conditioning that he can get away with bad behavior and still reap the reward of continued access to you no matter what he does. Instead, you're going to present him with healthy consequences and loss of access to you – and now he has to either be as good as your other options or opt out altogether.

You're going to emotionally validate *yourself*, withdraw your investment from him completely, spend your time focusing on your goals and refocusing on better quality men who do know how to treat you well from the very beginning. You are going to be inconvenient and harder to reach once you see the red flags. "Difficult" women know that the way to weed out low-quality partners from their dating pool is by not accepting less than their standards and not giving more effort to a man who isn't giving you effort or being mindful of what would please you. If that makes you "toxic," so be it.

Raise your standards and stop being afraid of being single until you meet your dream match. Use singlehood as a period to level up, become self-focused, and glow up in all parts of your life. Men shoot for the stars, and yet you keep lowering the bar.

Have you ever wondered why toxic men benefit from movies that promote the pretty and high-achieving woman getting together with an aggressive, bare minimum man who may not be as up to par in terms of personality, warmth, finances, looks or whatever other traits you deem important, even though those same men in movies are depicted as criticizing the women clearly out of their league? Be honest, you have noticed these ill-matched couples which often celebrate women settling for far less than they deserve. Or why low-quality men benefit from single-shaming women while praising men for being bachelors? Psychology tells us that “negging” – lowering a woman’s perceived value through backhanded comments – can work to an extent to cause a woman to shed their standards more and become more receptive to romantic advances. It is this double standard that allows *those* men to pursue attractive, intelligent, successful women well out of their league on a regular basis without any qualms, all while making women who fit this category feel obligated to not be as shallow or stringent about their own standards and expectations. Basically, low-quality men and society have been “negging” you for your entire life and trying to convince you to lower your standards by fear-mongering you about being single and not settling. It’s time to change that.

You're not toxic or single because you're too "picky" — you're intelligent enough not to settle just to have a relationship.

It is very easy for the average man to feel entitled to the most beautiful, intelligent, and successful woman in the room because he's been conditioned by society and by the media to feel like he deserves access to her. Meanwhile, you as a woman have been conditioned to feel not enough when you're likely overqualified in all aspects and likely deserve so much better than the man you're settling for just in hopes of a relationship. Take time to enjoy your own company and work on leveling up in other aspects of your life, not just your dating life. Supercharge your health regimen or fitness routine, take charge of your finances, pursue your education, expand your travels, meet like-minded friends, glow up physically and mentally, chase your dreams and chase anything *but* a man. A well-rounded woman who is self-focused in healthy ways is not toxic—she is attractive and alluring, and as a cherry on top, she draws in high-quality men who *want* to pursue her and add pleasure, value, and adventure to her life because these men know they have to work hard to even be a point of focus to her.

Do you want to be an unhappily married woman or a lonely woman in a relationship who settled for less, or do you want to be a peaceful and happy woman with a chance of having healthy love? If you want the latter, it's time to stop being a man's peace just to maintain a toxic relationship and start making peace with not settling for less. Being happily single, prioritizing yourself, and healthily self-focused is not anything to be ashamed of—on the contrary, it means

you should be proud you have standards. It means you're exclusive and not for everyone to access. It means you date high-quality men and reserve your energy and time for partners who are actually compatible, and match you in your core values, strengths, and drive.

What Does Not Settling For Less Mean?

It means you avoided marrying the wrong person just to say you're married, which can have lifelong detrimental effects. It means you did not stay in toxic or unhealthy or even just plain incompatible relationships just to say you have a boyfriend. It means you did not settle just to settle down. It means you were not docile enough to please a controlling man. It means your boundaries are working beautifully to protect you from people who would deter you from achieving your dreams and hold you back from the love you deserve. It means you have more peace and joy in your life than a woman whose life-course trajectory has been shaped and molded by a toxic man. It means you get to become the peace for yourself—and that anyone who wants entry to your life has to add value to it in order to stay. That's not toxic, that's intelligent and discerning. Never let a toxic man or a delusional society negotiate you out of your standards just to settle for a subpar relationship that doesn't meet your needs when there are even low-quality men out there who have loving, doting partners they don't even appreciate. Many men feel entitled to their dream woman—you deserve your dream man and your dream life.

Part II: Knowing The Red Flags

You've learned what it takes to be a woman with emotional mastery in dating, what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like, and how to differentiate high-quality men from low-effort ones. You now know how society has conditioned you and programmed you to have low standards and why toxic men benefit from this conditioning. Now it's time to reacquaint yourself with the red flags you may notice in the dating world so you can better build discernment and free yourself from toxic cycles and incompatible partners. Is it love? Or is it manipulation, love bombing, and mind games? Here are the signs your partner may be playing twisted psychological games to keep you focused on them and to have more power and control over you.

They blow hot and cold, love bombing you one minute and withdrawing the next.

You initially felt like you met your soulmate, yet now you feel caught in the chaos of a toxic relationship. They first mirrored you, making you feel like you two were destined to meet – now they bring destruction to your life by mistreating you. Unpredictable love creates an addiction in the brain, moreso than even the craving we develop when experiencing stable love. You start becoming fixated on them, wondering what they're thinking and doing. This kind of "frustration-attraction" we develop with hot and cold partners is why we find it so difficult to detox from people we know are toxic for us. If your partner is love bombing you one minute, showering you with flattery and praise, only to withhold affection and attention the next, it's not because you're truly in love. It's because you're experiencing an emotional rollercoaster that's affecting your craving for the next dopamine fix.

They take pleasure in making you jealous.

You're dating someone new, and they start mentioning their ex. Or your current partner keeps mentioning how many people have crushes on them. Sound familiar? They may be using a mind game known as jealousy induction to pit you against potential love prospects and get you to compete over them. Usually, such a method is transparent enough to make you detach quickly, but other times, this manipulation can be far more insidious. It's the "girl best friend" who seems suspiciously flirty that you feel you can't call out, or a co-worker who they insist is just platonic. They seem to

take joy in making you squirm and creating a competition for their attention because it makes them feel valuable. These manufactured love triangles are meant to destabilize you. Take heed and trust your instincts.

They “neg” you with backhanded compliments designed to make you feel insecure.

Healthy relationships will make you feel secure. You will feel assured of your irreplaceability and lovability in a healthy relationship. With a narcissistic or otherwise toxic person who is playing mind games, however, you will be made to feel off-kilter and on edge. Even when they’re complimenting you, they may be negging you by minimizing or detracting from their praise. For example, they may say they love your dress and that you’re “brave” for wearing it, implying there’s something wrong with your outfit. These negs are usually targeted toward partners they know are out of their league in order to make you more dependent on their validation and approval. By lowering your perceived value, they get to feel superior in a way they otherwise wouldn’t.

You never know where you stand in the relationship and find yourself walking on eggshells.

A person who plays mind games will make you feel like a girlfriend or boyfriend, but will hide under the, “I don’t do labels” manipulation tactic to avoid commitment. Or they might come on very strongly in the beginning, only to withdraw as soon as they’ve gotten what they’ve wanted (usually sex, but sometimes an ego stroke or just attention in general). Instead of just pursuing partners who want a more casual relationship just like them, they will deliberately exploit you and enjoy your romantic affection without any obligations. That’s because they don’t want someone who just wants sex from them: they want someone who feeds their ego. They want to come and go as they please from your life, while leaving you attached to them and pining for them. They get a special thrill and duping delight from having other people “commit” to them and remain loyal to them while they are off running around doing whatever they desire.

Attempts at holding them accountable lead to diversion tactics meant to confuse and disorient you.

When you try to have a productive discussion with a toxic person about where this relationship is going, they're likely to stonewall you by shutting down the conversation or by gaslighting you into believing you're going crazy. You are blamed for bringing up any issues in the relationship at all and are inevitably silenced. This isn't healthy love: this is emotional abuse.

The intense physical chemistry feels dangerous.

When you're around a magnetic, charismatic manipulator, the spark between you two can feel larger than life. You feel physically drawn to each other by a connection that is not just physical but also emotional from the constant attention you've received from the love bomber. Yet you may experience a great deal of anxiety along with this chemistry – manifesting in heart palpitations, dizziness, stomachaches, and sweaty palms. That's because a narcissistic manipulator has all the tools to get you to feel special and desirable with their tender compliments and extravagant displays of romance, but your intuition is screaming out for help. Love bombing is an adrenaline rush that warns you of danger ahead. Watch out. This type of spark tends to fizzle out quickly as the red flags begin to pop up.

The relationship moves too quickly for your comfort.

If a dating partner is asking for your hand in marriage only after a couple dates as anything other than a flirtatious joke, you should be wary. If they're in constant contact with you, taking up hours of your time each day with texts, phone calls, and long conversations, they're trying to fast-forward the relationship without putting in the time and effort to organically get to know you.

You feel entranced by the promise of the relationship, but not fully connected with them. When you're being love bombed, you'll get the simultaneous sense that you've known your dating partner for decades, but that they're still a stranger to you. That's because they are. In the beginning, the love bomber makes grand promises to love you, take care of you, and build a thriving life of long-lasting marriage and children. But stay aware: this is likely future faking, not future making. If you do not know each other well enough yet to be making such a commitment, the love bomber is probably trying to carry out another agenda altogether: whether it's trying to sleep with you or conning you into an exploitative relationship where they can use your resources and emotional labor.

You develop an addiction to the fantasy of the relationship rather than the person and experience withdrawal symptoms when they start blowing hot and cold.

The honeymoon period with a love bomber rarely lasts or evolves into a long-lasting love. Even when the love bomber starts showing red flags, you feel inclined to dismiss or rationalize them. That's because experiencing the euphoria of love bombing can be akin to drug addiction. This is rooted in the biochemical nature of love. Love lowers an individual's serotonin levels to a similar level as those with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and activates the reward centers of the brain, creating an intense dopamine high that is extremely difficult to detox from. Dr. Helen Fisher discovered that the brains of people in love resemble the brains of cocaine addicts. This is why you may experience a deep withdrawal effect when the object of your affection is not around or when they've withdrawn from you.

The nature of the relationship is turbulent and inconsistent.

One minute they were declaring you the love of their lives, and the next they're trying to provoke jealousy in you. One day they're texting you nonstop and the next, they're giving you the silent treatment. This is emotional manipulation – what psychologists call “intermittent reinforcement” of positive and negative behaviors to draw you in. Studies show it works to create a more addictive attachment to this toxic person than a “regular” healthy relationship. If you feel enmeshed and

overly attached to a romantic partner, it's time to re-evaluate. If you're experiencing love bombing, it's important to seek professional support and set healthy boundaries. You deserve a love that is genuine and fulfilling long-term – not short-term con artistry. You deserve better than mixed signals and mind games. You deserve respect, safety, and security.

Dating Red Flags of Narcissists That Give Them Away On The First Few Dates

Whether on the first date or the one-year anniversary, narcissists eventually exhibit twelve red flags that give away their true nature. More covert manipulators may unmask themselves only after they suspect you're already invested in the relationship. However, it's still good to watch out for any of these behaviors on a first date because it's only downhill from there and these manipulation tactics will only worsen over time. Relationships with narcissists can cause PTSD, which is why it is so important to familiarize yourself with manipulation tactics as soon as you can. Here are the twelve surprising signs you may be dating a narcissist.

They morally grandstand and virtue signal about how honest they are, engaging in impression management to get you to trust them.

It is usually a red flag when manipulators stress to you early on, unsolicited and unprovoked, about how “honest” they are and how they would “never lie to you.” The people who depict themselves this way early on tend to be pathological liars. This is a preemptive defense. It’s a form of moral grandstanding used by manipulators to manage your impression of them so you doubt yourself when you do notice the discrepancies between their actions and their words later in the relationship. Narcissists and psychopaths virtue signal about having high moral values and integrity they do not possess. They may even attack the character of others and claim they would never partake in such “immoral” actions. However, you will soon find out their actions rarely match their words. Remember that trustworthy people normally do not have to emphasize qualities that come naturally to them because, for them, honesty and integrity are their default ways of living and being. Pathological liars use this form of moral grandstanding to preemptively depict themselves as honest and trustworthy when they are anything but.

They try to make you jealous.

As you’ve learned, studies tell us that narcissists provoke jealousy for a number of reasons, namely to gain a sense of power and control over their partners but also to test the relationship and compensate for low self-esteem in the cases of vulnerable narcissists. Whether it’s blatantly checking out

the waitress on the first date (and looking at you to gauge your reaction and make sure you notice them doing this) or bringing up an ex-fling in an excessively fond way, if a narcissist drops this red flag on a first date or before the first date, you're in for a traumatic rollercoaster. Cut ties early and run while you still can. Resist the urge to enter your "raccoon era" and don't fight over trash that isn't worth fighting over. A partner who is truly worthy of you would never make you compete for them.

They bring up their exes when you're not on the topic.

Welcome to red flag central. Would you like a margarita with those manufactured love triangles? The narcissist is notorious for bringing up their exes – whether by devaluing them as crazy, obsessed, and bitter, or idealizing them and putting them on a pedestal in hopes it'll spark your interest and add to their appeal. In reality, all it does is make them appear emotionally unavailable and toxic. On a first date, someone should be focused on impressing you and getting to know you. Get back to the present moment and detach from anyone who appears stuck in the past.

They're heavy on the future faking.

You've only met this person and they're already talking about marriage, vacations, mortgages, and the names of your first-born children. It's one thing to flirt, tease, and make a joke or two about the future, but a whole other affair to plan so far ahead with someone you barely know. They may

get you to imagine romantic dates, lavish vacations, gifts, a peaceful family life, marriage, or children. This future faking can happen within the first few dates and drag out for weeks, months, or even years but it always ends up the same. You begin investing in a dream, only to wake up in a living nightmare with a manipulator who never fulfills the promises they made you. Narcissists and psychopaths future fake for a particular agenda—whether it be for attention, adoration, sex, money, a place to live, a loan, or the momentary thrill of duping you. They may future fake to get you to commit early on and exploit your resources. If someone's running a speeding ticket by promising a future that doesn't exist yet, it's time to hit the brakes as quickly as possible before you crash.

They stage pity plays and seem fascinated by your empathy.

You may experience the narcissist's fascination with your empathy as reminiscent of an extraterrestrial observing human emotions and activities. That's because a narcissist who lacks empathy can only mimic what he or she thinks it looks like without ever actually practicing it. So, they are fascinated with what makes you tick. They want access to your bleeding heart because they love victims who turn the other cheek and are sympathetic to their pity plays. That's why they'll often begin the first date or the chats preceding it with sob stories about their broken heart and their life struggles. They want you to feel sorry for them, so they appear vulnerable. Yet these wounded baby birds operate more like poisonous snakes. They want you to feel a compulsion to

rescue them just so they can have a bite. If someone tries to excessively gain your sympathy on the first date, beware. There are plenty of trauma survivors with genuinely horrific experiences who do not disclose such traumas unless it is warranted or asked about. A person who has authentic respect for your boundaries would be mindful of the information they dump on strangers.

They are a bit too interested in your childhood.

In a similar vein, narcissists and psychopaths don't just get you to fixate on their problems: they want to know about yours as well. That's because it helps them better understand your insecurities and vulnerabilities—the same qualities they will later use against you to entrap you in the abuse cycle. They want to know if you have “daddy issues” or a toxic mother. They want to know if you went through a recent heartbreak or trauma. The reason they scour for this information is quite nefarious: they're looking to see if you're more susceptible to being preyed upon by them. They know that victims who have been harmed in the past may be susceptible to retraumatization. They want to know how resilient you are and how they can take you down. Healthy dating partners don't violate your privacy or needlessly poke at your wounds. Anyone looking for personal information at such an early stage of dating is a red flag.

They seem jealous or envious of you, even though they pretend to support you.

The narcissist likes to surround themselves with people they deem “special and unique” – people who are attractive, successful, talented, popular, and stand out. They enjoy using these people to make themselves look good. The narcissist may be on their best behavior on their first date and pretend to be supportive of you and your achievements. However, if a narcissistic dating partner ever throws a subtle dig, a degrading comparison or a minimizing comment your way—whether on the first date or the fifth—detach immediately and do not pass go. Such envy will only escalate later on in the abuse cycle. Remember: healthy partners will never put down your accomplishments whether overtly or covertly.

They are obsessed with you—they love-bomb and flatter you excessively.

A well-versed and skilled narcissist will love bomb you long before the first date even occurs. They’ll swoop you off your feet with loving words, obsessive attention, and constant contact. By the time the first or second date does come around, they hope you’ll already be besotted with them and overlook their flaws and shortcomings. Love bombing also cuts down on any perceived competition: as the narcissist makes you the center of their world, you begin to center them as your source of validation and forego your other options and plans. If you find that a partner is too fixated on you early on in the relationship in unwarranted ways, it’s time to pull the plug. Slow down, detach, and observe. A healthy partner

isn't interested in fast-forwarding any form of intimacy because they're looking for something long-term—they want a slow-burning and long-lasting romance, not a fire that quickly fizzles out before it's had time to grow.

There is sizzling, over-the-top chemistry. You find yourself too sexually attracted to them even if you may not have been as interested initially.

Speaking of intimacy, narcissists want it in spades. Since love-bombing can create a powerful biochemical bond, you may find yourself having an over-the-top chemistry with a narcissist that you can't quite explain. Some survivors of narcissists note that they weren't initially that interested in the narcissist when they first spoke yet found themselves swinging from the chandeliers after the narcissist charmed them. It's wise to hold off on any kind of physical intimacy with a love-bombing narcissist as this is one of the main ways they get you hooked early on.

They share your exact same hobbies and interests in a way that isn't believable.

Narcissists and psychopaths mirror you in a way that defies reasonable explanation. This means they'll pretend to share the same hobbies, interests, passions, and dreams that you do to manufacture the "soulmate" effect. Enjoy biking in the woods? They recently completed a cycling marathon. Have a dream of being a world-renowned scientist or astronaut? They're suddenly expressing their interest in going to the moon. Some will even go as far as to pretend they're your long-

lost twin flame or a lover from a past life. While it's possible that you have just met someone with similar interests, it's wise to take these claims with a grain of salt until you've learned someone's organic interests over time.

They bring up spirituality for sinister motives.

Narcissists adapt to whatever is popular with each generation. That means a narcissistic “fake nice guy” may feign a passion for “trending” interests like astrology, witchcraft, and tarot just to get women into bed. A narcissistic woman may declare that she is an “empath” early on to ensure you trust her, even though you later find out she is quite callous. Narcissists will also poke and prod about your spiritual beliefs to ensure you believe in forgiveness, morality, and a higher power. This is because they are looking for compassionate victims to prey on. Learn how not to be one of them and set healthy boundaries. Be wary of anyone who emphasizes spirituality to you in inauthentic ways. Healthy partners are not going to be interrogating you about your spiritual beliefs. And remember – a narcissist wants you to believe it is Godly to tolerate abuse and make excuses for them. You'd be far better off honoring your sense of divinity by exercising your right to be safe and respected.

They're superficially charming—yet you notice something “off” about their demeanor.

The narcissists and psychopaths of the world tend to be superficially charming. They can charm the pants off anyone. However, most narcissists have a coldness or awkwardness about them that gives them away. They may appear warm and kind yet show rare moments of callousness, contempt, or microexpressions that display haughtiness early on. For example, recent research shows that narcissists may be more likely than other people to exhibit subtle negative facial expressions, especially in response to negative feedback and frustration. Pay attention to these, especially on a first date. You've just seen the whiskers of a covert wolf in sheep's clothing. You don't want to stick around to find out what happens when that wolf gets hungry for their next meal.

Signs Your Boyfriend Is Toxic

Toxicity exists on a spectrum, but there is a set of tell-tale behaviors that can point to a core lack of empathy, entitlement, and exploitativeness that can be harmful to relationships. Use the red flag items below to assess whether you can identify the following toxic behaviors in your partner. Keep a tally. For every item that applies to your partner, add ten points. Add an extra two points if the behavior is very frequent (twelve points for frequent behaviors instead of just ten). You will see explanations for your partner's total "toxicity" score at the end.

He started off the relationship by giving you constant affection and attention, but his behavior has abruptly changed for no apparent reason. He now emotionally invalidates and neglects you and emotionally withholds from you.

Toxic people start off the relationship at full speed: they fast-forward through emotional and physical intimacy with a manipulation tactic known as love bombing and engage in future-faking to make you believe that they are already planning marriage, children, and the perfect white picket fence life with you. However, as soon as you are sufficiently invested in the relationship, they'll pull the rug from beneath you and act cold and callous, withdrawing attention and affection deliberately to make you chase after them. For this specific behavior, there is no apparent reason why they do this – there is nothing you did or said: it is a pattern of theirs that they use to control and manipulate you. If you bring up your concerns to this partner, he or she invalidates you and acts like you are imagining things or that there has been no change even when there has. They may even call you “crazy,” “distrustful,” “overreacting,” or “dramatic.”

He begins arguments out of thin air just to blame you when you react. You get the sense that he likes provoking you.

Manipulative people thrive on chaos. These are the same people that often claim they do not like drama, yet they are often the *source* of drama. If your partner habitually goes out of his or her way to provoke you with absurd claims, excessive criticism, insults, name-calling, sudden rage attacks, or mischaracterizations of you that are unwarranted and hurtful, you're likely dealing with a toxic and abusive person.

He tries to make you jealous on purpose.

Research shows that certain toxic personality types such as narcissistic and psychopathic personalities provoke jealousy on purpose to control you and establish power over you. If your partner seems to implicitly or explicitly bring up past partners, or current prospects or talk excessively about their exes, beware. A healthy partner will not make you compete for them, nor will they label you “needy and insecure” for bringing up your concerns. The most manipulative partners will feign innocence if you bring up these behaviors but continue to engage in them excessively to further bait you into reacting. They gain fuel from these reactions.

You get the sense that he's envious or jealous of you.

Healthy, high-quality partners support you and cheer you on. Toxic partners tear you down. Your partner may be toxic if he or she minimizes your achievements, dishes out covert put-downs, compares you to others, or deflates your joy during happy and celebratory moments.

He rarely takes accountability for his harmful actions. Instead, he stonewalls or gaslights you when you bring up your concerns.

When you address a concern constructively, you are met with extreme resistance from this partner. They may fly into a rage, shut down the conversation before it begins, or gaslight you into believing that there is something wrong with you and your perception. This person refuses to take responsibility for any of his actions – big or small – that may have hurt you.

He tries to sabotage holidays, your birthday, vacations, educational or career opportunities, and other special occasions.

You do not get peace from this person, even during special occasions. Even though you do everything to celebrate this person's achievements and make holidays, birthdays, or milestones a happy time for *them*, they try to actively sabotage your joyful moments. Whether they're always playing the Grinch during Christmas or depriving you of sleep before important exams and job interviews, it's all about controlling you so that you view them as your only source of happiness and validation.

He abandons you during times of need.

When you are suffering from grief, trauma, an illness, or a stressful situation, your toxic partner is nowhere to be found. The most depraved of toxic people are known for abandoning or abusing their loved ones even during life-threatening illnesses. The most toxic partners actively make things worse by fear-mongering you with remarks that worsen the situation or by kicking you when you're already down.

He's condescending, patronizing, or chronically sarcastic.

If he treats you like you're less than and is contemptuous and condescending in his communication with you, this is emotionally abusive and toxic. If he responds to your emotions as if you don't have a right to your emotions and should be a passive sponge for his cruelty, this is also emotionally abusive and toxic. If he uses chronic sarcasm to belittle and bully you, this can actually be a potential red flag of darker personality traits like psychopathy.

He's unpredictably hot and cold and retaliates when you set boundaries.

You never know where you stand with this person. One minute, they're sweeping you off your feet with grand romantic gestures, especially when they're hoping you forgive them. The next, you're walking on eggshells hoping not to enrage them. They may even try to justify this behavior by pretending they're lashing out due to stress – yet continue engaging in this behavior regardless of how many times you've pleaded with them to stop. If you fear disclosing your basic feelings and thoughts to this person and hesitate to set boundaries because you've encountered retaliation from them for setting boundaries, it is clear you do not feel emotionally safe in this relationship.

He's shady and disrespectful on social media.

If he's following inappropriate and lewd accounts, being flirtatious with shady female friends, sliding into the direct messages or comments sections of other people in a boundary-trespassing manner, or posting suspicious and passive-aggressive captions referencing your relationship, don't believe the minimization that it's "just social media." Social media is simply another platform to showcase pre-existing behaviors and habits, a very public platform at that. If they're being disrespectful to you and your relationship on social media, they're being disrespectful – *period*.

You catch him in white lies and big lies.

You catch your partner lying about minuscule matters that don't seem relevant to lie about. You also catch them in "big" lies as well – about who they were with or where or even who they are. This is likely a sign of a larger pattern of deception and pathological lying or possible emotional and/or physical infidelity that you need to pay attention to. It is especially manipulative if this person claimed they would never lie to you in the beginning but ended up lying about almost everything – this is a sign you're dealing with a pathological personality who wants to engage in impression management.

You go overboard trying to please him, but he's rarely reciprocal. He returns your kindness with cruelty.

Even if you were once ardently pursued by this partner, you now find yourself going to extreme lengths to keep your partner pleased. This may be because you're trauma bonded to them in ways that make the toxic relationship seem addictive and difficult to end. There is very little reciprocity as he returns your generosity with cruel and callous treatment. The kinder and more compassionate you are to him, the more you are degraded and punished by him. He only seems to become kinder to you when you withdraw your attention because he seeks to re-establish control.

He expects you to fix his life and do extra labor.

It's one thing to mutually support and help each other in healthy ways, but a whole other affair if a person is excessively dependent on you to fix his mental stability, finances, career, social life, or take on extra domestic and emotional labor that drains you. In that case, you do not have a healthy partner. You have the full-time job of raising a grown adult.

IS HE OR SHE TOXIC?

Scoring Explanation:

12-36: Has some harmful toxic tendencies. If you find that these behaviors have not improved in the of your relationship with this person. Even a few of these red flags can be indicators of dangerous behaviors that can escalate over time, especially if they are frequent.

46-96: Toxic. This person is displaying too many toxic behaviors which could harm you. It is best to detach as soon as possible. Cut down on your investment in this relationship and begin reality-checking in terms of how this relationship has affected you. Think about how this relationship will continue to harm you and what it will rob you of if you stay in the relationship.

106-156: Extremely toxic (high probability of narcissistic and psychopathic tendencies present and possibility for escalation).

It can be helpful to seek professional support at this time. Create a safety plan and begin breaking the trauma bond so you can free yourself of the dangers ahead.

Questions To Ask Yourself If You Think You're Being Emotionally Abused

It is a common misconception that abuse has to be physical in order to be impactful. Yet some of the most devastating forms of violence do not leave scars. Psychological violence causes us to endure an invisible war zone, one where the battle wounds cannot be seen but are deeply felt nonetheless.

What Is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is a set of behaviors in which a person manipulates, coerces, controls, belittles and terrorizes another person repeatedly. Chronic emotional abuse takes a toll on victims, causing them to struggle with depression, anxiety, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and learned helplessness. In extreme cases, long-term emotional abuse can cause symptoms of PTSD or Complex PTSD.

When one person emotionally abuses another, it can include the following behaviors:

- Calling the victim names.
- Mocking, shaming or humiliating the victim.

- Ignoring the victim and emotionally withdrawing from them.
- Threatening the victim or coercing them into activities they don't want to engage in.
- Making cruel remarks towards the victim regarding their appearance, personality, lifestyle, career choices, friends or any other aspect of the victim's personal, social or professional life.
- Verbally assaulting and insulting the victim, sometimes under the guise of "joking."
- Emotionally invalidating the partner or pathologizing their emotions.
- Subjecting them to overt and covert put-downs as well as rage attacks.
- Using intimidation as a control tactic.
- Controlling the victim's finances.
- Micromanaging the victim's social life.
- Isolating the victim from friends and family.
- Stonewalling the victim during discussions.
- Giving victims the silent treatment for no apparent reason.
- Gaslighting the victim into believing that they are imagining things or are oversensitive when they call out the abuse.
- Repeatedly treating the victim with contempt, scorn and disdain.

There are also many other underhanded and subtle ways in which a victim can be emotionally abused, such as jealousy induction or triangulation (bringing in the presence of a third party to abuse by proxy), smear campaigns (spreading

rumors or gossip to ruin the victim's reputation), and hot and cold behavior (pushing the victim away and emotionally withdrawing, intermittently throwing in periods of affection). Emotionally abusive partners may also lie pathologically and lead double lives, causing their victims to invest in a false partnership that ultimately brings harm and devastation.

Who Are The Culprits of Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse can be committed by toxic people at all points of the spectrum. There are *some* emotionally abusive people who are able to work on their toxic behaviors, but these people tend to be lower on the spectrum of toxicity, demonstrate a willingness to change and possess empathy for others. Most emotionally abusive people who are on the higher end of the spectrum tend to be *incapable* of change because they possess a lack of empathy, an excessive sense of entitlement and a callous disregard for the rights and feelings of others.

Some emotionally abusive people learn these behaviors early in childhood by modeling behavior from their parents and end up perpetuating the cycle. Other emotionally abusive people might possess more hard-wired narcissistic or sociopathic traits or even meet the full-fledged criteria of Narcissistic Personality Disorder or Antisocial Personality Disorder. These predatory individuals tend to abuse behind closed doors in order to escape accountability; their emotional abuse is inflicted upon their partners to deliberately demean and control them.

The Impact of Emotional Abuse on the Survivor

When emotional abuse takes place in childhood, it wreaks havoc on the brain, affecting areas such as the amygdala, the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex. These areas of the brain help with emotional regulation, learning, memory, focus, cognition and planning.

Many survivors of emotional abuse, whether they suffered it in childhood, adulthood or both, struggle with a sense of powerlessness as they are repeatedly put down. As a result of these adverse experiences, they may turn to self-destructive behavior, become trauma-bonded to their abusers and find it difficult to leave the toxic relationship.

How To Tell If You're Being Emotionally Abused

Here are fifty “loaded” questions you should ask yourself if you think you’re being emotionally abused in a relationship. These questions take into account the fact that you already suspect you’re being abused. Your answers to these questions can give you insight regarding the emotionally abusive behaviors you might be currently experiencing, can help you to identify the red flags of abuse and assess the level of toxicity in your relationship.

1. Does your partner enjoy humiliating you in public?
2. What is the worst way in which your partner has used your own insecurities against you?
3. Do you find that the way your partner treated you in the beginning of the relationship is unrecognizable from the way your partner treats you now?
4. How often does your partner make you feel sorry for

them after mistreating you?

5. Are you persistently made to feel guilty for voicing your concerns in the relationship?

6. Does your partner shame you about qualities or traits you have that they once praised?

7. Does your partner shut down conversations about their behavior before they even have a chance to begin?

8. Is your partner nicer and more respectful to others in public than they are to you behind closed doors?

9. When your partner gives you the silent treatment, do they usually explain themselves or do they continue to ignore you and come back only to pretend like nothing ever happened?

10. Does your partner continuously claim that you're too sensitive when you express your emotions?

11. Do you find yourself questioning your own reality on a daily basis?

12. Have you been made to doubt things that you know for a fact your partner has said or done?

13. Does your partner call you names when he or she doesn't get their way?

14. Are you afraid to express your true feelings around your partner because of the way they've reacted to you in the past?

15. Do you feel like your accomplishments are belittled, ignored or minimized by your partner?

16. How often are you made to feel insecure and invisible when your partner engages in conversations with people of the opposite sex?

17. Does your partner frequently compare you to others in a demeaning way in terms of appearance, personality, success or any other aspect of yourself they like to criticize?

18. Do you feel like you're always walking on eggshells

around this person, careful what to say or do just to avoid “offending” them?

19. Does the way your partner looks at or talks about other women or men (whoever they are attracted to) make you feel uncomfortable?

20. Has your partner reminded you of how lucky you are to have them, usually after an outburst?

21. Does your partner have frequent rage attacks when their ego is threatened?

22. If you call out your partner’s behavior, do they become excessively angry?

23. Are you allowed to ever point out your partner’s mistakes, even in a light-hearted manner?

24. How often does your partner make you feel ashamed about qualities and accomplishments you used to be proud of?

25. Do you find yourself apologizing for things you’re not at fault for in the relationship?

26. Has your partner ever compared you to others and made you feel as if you were in ‘competition’ with other people for their attention and love?

27. Do you find yourself apologizing for the mistakes that your partner made but refuses to own up to?

28. How many times has your partner accused you of having flaws that they themselves possess?

29. In what ways has your partner turned the things you used to enjoy doing into things you dread doing?

30. How does your body react when you’re around your partner?

31. Do you feel overly anxious when you think about how your partner treats you?

32. How many ways have you wasted time trying to please your partner, only to learn that they are never satisfied with anything you do?

33. In what ways do you feel you have to ask permission from your partner before you do something?

34. Have you ever gotten the sense that your partner is envious and hateful when you're happy and successful?

35. Does your partner seem happy when you're in pain?

36. Does your partner often comfort you, come to the rescue and 'play the savior' for the pain that they themselves caused?

37. Do you find that your partner gives you more negative feedback and criticism about yourself than they do encouragement?

38. Has your partner punished you for making choices independent of their opinion?

39. Have you ever felt limited in your ability to see your loved ones because of your partner?

40. How frequently does your partner call or text you to "check in" when you're not with them?

41. Has your partner ever coerced you into sexual activities you weren't comfortable with?

42. Has your partner ever made you feel guilty for not having sex with them?

43. Do you fear leaving your partner, out of the fear that they might harm you or harm themselves?

44. Does your partner discourage you from pursuing dreams or goals that would make you independent of them?

45. How often do you feel like you're pleading for your partner's affection or attention?

46. How many times has your partner insulted you and made you feel terrible, all while claiming "it was just a joke"?

47. Have you been told you're too sensitive when you start setting boundaries with your partner?

48. When your partner is acting kind, does it seem out of place with the way they usually act?

49. Does your partner treat you tenderly and affectionately one second, only to pull back and coldly withdraw?

50. When your partner tells you they love you, do you have a hard time believing them because the way they act is anything *but* loving?

50 Devious Habits of Toxic Dating Partners

Toxicity exists on a spectrum. People who engage in a few of these behaviors in certain circumstances are not *always* malignant predators. However, if someone engages in these behaviors chronically with the intent to harm and with little to no admission of their own wrongdoing, there is a high chance you're dealing with a highly manipulative and toxic individual.

Many malignant narcissists, for example, use most, if not all of the behaviors listed and more to diminish their victims. Whether you're dealing with a garden-variety jerk or a predatory psychopath depends on the frequency of the behaviors as well as the ways in which that person approaches accountability. If you find that they are unwilling to change their toxic behaviors and actually take pleasure in engaging in them, you might be dealing with someone who is character-disordered. Here are fifty signs you're dealing with a highly toxic person, whether in dating, relationships, or beyond.

- 1. They criticize to nitpick and demean you, not to**

empower you. Highly toxic people don't give constructive criticism as a way to help you – they throw nuggets of disdain rather than wisdom your way in order to make you double your efforts to please them. They stage personal attacks on your character or develop a hyperfocus on irrelevant things, sometimes even fabricated flaws, to evoke insecurity in you.

2. They give unsolicited advice, especially in situations where it is inappropriate to do so or about matters you've made clear are none of their business. Giving unsolicited advice enables a toxic person to feel in control and smug. Most of their unsolicited advice is usually not even helpful, and is doled out as a way to distract you from your progress.

3. They enjoy raining on your parade. Toxic people like bringing little tempests of debasing comments whenever they see you're that you're proud of yourself or feeling especially happy. It's usually because they're envious.

4. They frequently play devil's advocate especially when it's unnecessary. They tend to do this with regards to issues that are deeply personal to you and touch on your core values, belief systems, life experiences and moral codes. For example, a highly toxic person might try to dismiss a trauma you've gone through by arguing that it's not really a trauma at all. They may get into useless discussions about whether *everyone* should have equal rights and whether proven facts are truly legitimate. This is not done with the intention of adding to the discussion, but to provoke you and warp your sense of security about your perspectives.

5. They copy your mannerisms, your work, your behavior, anything they covet. In this context, imitation is *not* the highest form of flattery, because they do it so often you feel like a part of you is being "stolen." They are identity thieves

in that they steal facets of your personality for their own. They are always “watching” to see what other attribute they can take from you. They have no core sense of self, so they’d prefer to mimic the qualities they know make you likeable and victorious.

6. They rage excessively when challenged. When done by a pathological person, this is what is known as narcissistic rage. It occurs when a person feels slighted or when they feel their sense of superiority is negated in any way. Raging at the perceived offender allows the toxic person to reclaim some measure of control and reaffirms their sense of superiority.

7. They guilt you when they don’t get what they want. Since they feel excessively entitled to everything, they feel they need to coerce you into getting the outcome they desire.

8. After mistreating you, they try to get you to feel sorry for them. These pity ploys are a way for them to skirt responsibility and have you work hard to please them instead.

9. They rarely take accountability for their actions or say sorry. Apologizing would mean sharing in the consequences for their behavior or taking part in evolving from it. That’s why toxic people rarely do it.

10. If they do apologize, it’s usually to get you to forgive them. There’s no change in their behavior accompanying the apology. In fact, they may even continue the same behavior with even more force after you’ve pointed it out.

11. They act superior to you and treat you with contempt, as if you were below them in some way. Toxic people believe that others exist to serve them and that they deserve to be the center of attention. They do not like seeing the success of others nor do they want to feel as if someone could possibly surpass them in any way. When they see someone with

qualities and strengths that threaten to take the attention away from them, they do not hesitate in humiliating, shaming or tearing down that individual to put him or her back in “their place.”

12. They use chronic, vitriolic sarcasm. This form of sarcasm is **not** employed as a way to playfully build rapport as some people use it, but as a way to demean you and make you feel small.

13. They attempt to sabotage you in areas where they know you're flourishing. Whether it's creating chaos before a major job interview or ruining a celebration, toxic people are always on the lookout for how they can prevent you from achieving a level of success and joy that could threaten to overtake their power over you.

14. They call you names and verbally abuse you. These are traumatic shortcuts to control your behavior. Toxic people know that if they repeat something long enough, you'll start to internalize it. Verbal abuse acts as a portal to erode your identity and self-esteem.

15. They attempt to micromanage your life. They may try to control where you go and who you see. They might try to place undue pressures or demands that take up your time so that you're unable to pursue the dreams or support networks that they know are outside of their psychological jurisdiction.

16. They take over your finances, your career and demand a portion of what you've earned for themselves. Agency, independence and the ability to thrive on your own terms is very threatening to a toxic individual. Toxic people require that their victims be isolated; success, economic empowerment and a solid support network all threaten this, so they feel they have to take back the reins on the parts of your life that grant

you a sense of stability and self-actualization.

17. They compete with you rather than celebrate your accomplishments. At first, toxic individuals may exhibit a starry-eyed admiration of your achievements. However, these same achievements come under extreme scrutiny as they work to use them for their own agenda or diminish them as a way to feel superior.

18. They project their own shame into you. If you evoke in them a sense of inadequacy – even without meaning to – they’ll suddenly go into an epic rant and rave, defending themselves with an excessive amount of force. You’re left dumbfounded as to why they’re so invested in proving themselves and why they’re so intent on attacking you, when in reality, their reactions have little to do with you and everything to do with their own egotistical delusions.

19. They project their own malignant qualities onto you. Everything that makes them toxic (their rage, their envy, their selfishness) is assigned to you as they try to paint you as the unhinged one.

20. They gaslight you. They make you believe that you are unable to see your own reality clearly. They deny abusive things they’ve said or done. This sudden “abuse amnesia” works to undercut your perceptions and make you doubt yourself.

21. They engage in pathological lying and infidelity. Lying comes easily to them and so does betrayal. They engage in a number of indiscretions and affairs, all while leading a double life. Their public image and facade rarely match the person they really are behind closed doors.

22. They exaggerate your flaws to the point of absurdity. This is meant to leave you feeling hopeless and worthless so

that you are unable to self-validate. When you're too busy feeling unworthy, you're also too busy to realize that you deserve better.

23. Meanwhile, they dismiss your good qualities and all you've done to help them. You only seem to get “credit” for what the toxic person thinks you've done wrong. You feel as if you can never quite measure up to whatever arbitrary standards or expectations they've set for you. That's because they'd never want you to feel sure of yourself – they want you to keep trying to please them so that you'll never work to please yourself.

24. They don't take ownership over their own problems; they expect you to clean up after them and fix their lives. Highly toxic people never want to be held responsible for being adults; they want to be coddled like children. If they made a mistake, they'll inevitably scapegoat you and claim you're the problem.

25. They blame you for parts of their lives that they are responsible for taking care of. Their various addictions, failures, shortcomings all get served on your plate – along with the check. It's as if they expect you to pay the price for their own omissions and struggles.

26. They are hypersensitive to any feedback you give them, even if it's done gently. Meanwhile, they have no problem giving you plenty of “feedback” in terms of what they perceive is wrong about you.

27. They exhibit hot and cold behavior. One minute they're love-bombing you with excessive praise, and the next they're withdrawing from you as if you were the plague. These intermittent periods of kindness mixed with cruelty are a set-up to get you addicted to the crazy-making cycle of their abuse.

28. They subject you to the silent treatment (and there's no good reason for it). They subject you to unpredictable periods of silence where they do not interact with you at all; it's as if you cease to exist, even if you're in an intimate relationship. The silent treatment is harmful because it affects the same area of the brain that registers physical pain. The silent treatment allows them space to commit whatever treason they're engaging in behind your back while making you feel undesirable – it also helps them to evade any discussions about their unacceptable behavior.

29. They show no empathy for you when you're suffering. These sadistic individuals are indifferent to your suffering; they lack empathy and some even take pleasure in seeing you suffer. The most malignant of narcissists even drive their victims to suicide.

30. They abandon you in times of illness or when you need them – even though you've always been there for them. This is done with a cruel and callous indifference that is unsettling. They show little to no concern for your welfare or your basic needs. They are too inherently selfish to look after you like the way you've looked after them.

31. They attempt to fast-forward intimacy with you without getting to know you – physically and emotionally. Whether it's sex or your deepest secrets, toxic people try to push you to divulge and disclose early on so they can take inventory of your weak spots and exploit you.

32. They're the fair-weather friend who's always there when things are great but never when you need their support. When life is going well and you have everything going for you, they always seem to come around to leech off your newfound resources. When you want them to help out in an emergency

or just need a listening ear, however, they're nowhere to be found.

33. They piggyback on your success and take credit for your ideas. Toxic individuals feel they don't have to work hard for what they want. They'd prefer to take it from others who've already done the work.

34. They judge your life decisions. This is done in a way that is vicious, cruel, unhelpful, excessive and unwarranted. If you feel uncertain about making decisions, you're unable to trust yourself. Negating self-trust acts as leverage for a toxic person to step in and exercise their power over you.

35. They rarely provide emotional validation – every word out of their mouth tends to pick at your emotions. They question why you're feeling the way you are rather than accepting it and creating space for it. By invalidating and pathologizing your emotions, they ensure that you never learn to listen to your inner guidance.

36. They cry crocodile tears when they need something or as faux remorse. Otherwise, they're rarely emotional. In fact, most of the time, you can't even sense fear, anxiety, or empathy from them.

37. They "hoover" you after mistreating you. Like a hoover vacuum, they suck you back into their toxic vortex even after the ending of the relationship, friendship or partnership. They do so by contacting you out of the blue just when you're finally moving on. Once they get what they want from you, they leave and you may not hear from them from quite some time. At least, not unless they need you for something else, in which case, they tend to come crawling back.

38. They use you for your resources but are stingy with

their own. Money, shelter, sex, social networks – they want access to all of yours. However, when it comes to their own resources and connections, they tend to be a lot more reserved.

39. They withhold acknowledgment and appreciation. You could bend over backwards fulfilling each and every one of their requests, and still not feel appreciated by them. They don't appreciate what you do for them, but they keep you around to keep tapping into whatever it is you're providing.

40. They're conversational narcissists, constantly talking about themselves and rarely asking how you're doing. When you finally try to get a word in, suddenly they're cold and unresponsive. Or, they turn the conversation back to themselves.

41. They gossip about people and engage in relational aggression. They enjoy pitting people against one another. They like spreading rumors. They thrive off of excluding people and socially ostracizing those they feel threaten their power or evoke their envy. They assassinate your character both publicly and privately (the latter ensures you don't catch on). They want to feel like they are the ones in control of managing everyone's image so that *they* come out on top.

42. They recruit allies or flying monkeys to enable their behavior and carry out some of their dirty work for them. They wouldn't want to get caught – so they keep their hands clean and allow their harem members to support them instead.

43. They spread misinformation about you and spread smear campaigns to undercut your credibility. This way, if you ever speak out about their behavior, fewer people would believe you.

44. They covertly and overtly insult you. This includes

harsh remarks disguised as “jokes,” backhanded compliments, and needless comparisons that diminish you. Victims of toxic people tend to struggle with self-doubt and ruminations over these insults, and it’s no wonder why. These insults become ingrained in your psyche and lead to self-sabotage.

45. They withhold affection – for no apparent reason. Most people withdraw from being affectionate due to some sort of conflict. Toxic people do it so they can play puppeteer to your emotions.

46. They use sex to degrade, objectify and control you rather than as a way to connect with you. Sex is a power play to them, another instrument to feed their grandiose fantasies.

47. They stonewall you and shut down conversations before they’ve even had the chance to begin. That way, you never get to have a voice in the relationship. Your desires or basic needs never even enter the picture.

48. They idealize you, putting you on a pedestal, only to devalue the same qualities they once praised. Throwing you off the pedestal has the effect of making you work hard to get back on it. Meanwhile, they sit back, relax, and enjoy the show of making you pine for their approval.

49. They discard you once they’re done with you and quickly move onto another replacement, triangulating you with others to make you feel unworthy – and to compel you to compete for their attention.

50. They constantly shift the goal posts so what you do or who you are is perceived to never be enough.

Signs He's Not Emotionally Unavailable - He's A Narcissist

The reasons narcissists get into relationships are different and far more sinister. Emotionally unavailable people may be unavailable because of a recent break-up, past traumas, or because they are lacking in areas that would contribute in healthy ways to their relationships and intimacy. Some emotionally unavailable people subconsciously and unwittingly pursue partners who are also emotionally unavailable or have traits they know ultimately aren't compatible so they can mitigate the risk of getting "too" attached or overestimate their ability to be in a relationship. Some emotionally unavailable people may be so afraid of getting hurt that they distance themselves from relationships altogether.

Narcissists and psychopaths generally have a pattern of purposely getting into a series of relationships to hurt and exploit others to gain power and control.

They do not stop searching for partners regardless of whether they're in a relationship and rarely take a break to "heal" from past relationships because they're the ones doing the hurting and do not develop genuine attachments to *anyone*. Narcissistic and psychopathic individuals enjoy excessively flattering, future-faking, love bombing, and later devaluing their targets. They experience a special euphoric "high" from the sense of superiority they feel by pulling the wool over people's eyes and getting people who would otherwise not pursue them to chase them. They deliberately orchestrate a cycle of idealization and devaluation because they want you to beg for their attention and affection – it makes them feel desirable and superior even if they are not.

Narcissists and psychopaths exploit you without empathy or remorse.

Emotionally unavailable people who are *not* narcissistic will likely feel regret, guilt, and sorrow if they ever hurt others. They will usually understand any mistakes or harm, if any, they caused and will typically not make many excuses for their behavior. They are more likely to self-correct their current course of behavior and prevent more harm from happening. For example, an emotionally unavailable person who realized they were dating someone who was not compatible with them will usually opt out of exploiting you for further agendas

like sex. They will not give you false hope – they will actively avoid circumstances that would give you that hope or situations that would essentially consist of using you. They will take accountability and will not pursue you again once they recognize their mistakes.

Those with narcissistic and psychopathic tendencies will pursue you even after they've harmed you to see whatever resources you can provide: whether it be sex, attention, praise, money, a place to live, or emotional nourishment.

They will keep you as part of their “harem” to tap into these resources whenever they like on *their* terms and their timetable. Unlike someone who is “just” emotionally unavailable, the narcissist or psychopath has no regret and very little empathy or remorse when it comes to using and abusing you (even if they feign remorse or crocodile tears to get back in your good graces). They will keep you around so long as it benefits them even if it results in dire consequences for you. They will not hesitate to profit off your energy, time, and labor under false pretenses, even if it means causing you great harm or distress – in fact, they'll continue repeatedly harming you regardless of the distress you share or disclose to them, and some may even take a sadistic pleasure in witnessing your pain. To identify this key difference, look at their repeating patterns of cruel and callous behavior. Have you communicated and overcommunicated to them how their behavior hurts you? Do they keep doing it regardless? You have your answer: there's something far more devious than emotional unavailability going on here.

To a narcissist or psychopath, your pain makes them feel significant and they will deliberately blow hot and cold to devalue you or make you jealous to keep you under their control. An emotionally unavailable person is usually just trying to avoid pain altogether.

Emotionally unavailable people are all about self-protection. If they're not looking for anything serious, they'll usually tell you outright because being casual in dating is less risky for them than a relationship. They typically won't lead you on unless they're unaware they're emotionally unavailable – and even then, they will withdraw immediately without trying to scam you into further investing in them or sleeping with them. Narcissists and psychopaths, on the other hand, manufacture chaos and cause pain on purpose and will lead you on for as long as they desire just to get what they want – they are notorious for coming back to past partners just to see whether they can still extract fuel from them.

They will also provoke jealousy on purpose and pursue multiple partners at once to deliberately make you compete for them. It gives them a sense of power to be able to control your emotions – so they'll blow hot and cold intermittently to get you addicted to them. These types will neg and belittle you on purpose to make you feel less confident, especially if they recognize that you're out of their league. They may flatter you immensely in the beginning, only to hypercriticize all the positive traits and qualities they once praised. They have no qualms about promising you a dream relationship, marriage, and a happy family life in the beginning – and never fulfilling any of these promises so long as it means they can get in your

bed and inside of your head.

Narcissists are unwilling to change or engage in introspection and self-reflection because their manipulative ways of life meet their needs. Emotionally unavailable people have the capacity to evolve and the ability to work on themselves.

Although emotionally unavailable people may not have all the tools yet to engage in healthy ways in relationships, most are capable of introspection, basic communication, and change. They may reevaluate their relationship patterns in therapy and better identify how to become more emotionally available. Narcissists and psychopaths lack the willingness and capacity for change; these callous traits and manipulative behaviors are usually hardwired in them since they were young, and they have a core lack of empathy and remorse. The more you try to communicate your needs and boundaries to them, the more they'll trample on your rights and violate your boundaries. That is why they gaslight you with a fury whenever you try to hold them accountable – they want to keep you obedient and compliant, servicing their needs. In fact, research shows they become even more manipulative in therapy as they learn new tools to mimic empathy to violate the boundaries of others more underhandedly and covertly. Although they lack the affective empathy to care about the harm they cause to others, these toxic types possess and use “cognitive empathy” to zero in on your desires and needs so they can morph into the ideal partner temporarily, only to traumatize you deeply.

The Big Picture

It's important that you carefully consider the repeated behavioral patterns of people you date or have relationships with. Whether they're emotionally unavailable or narcissistic, the key is discerning whether their behavior has been harmful to you. If someone lacks the capacity for empathy and change, they are not the right partner for you or *anyone*. Narcissistic and psychopathic partners can cause a great deal of emotional distress and trauma. It is wise to spend your time and energy detaching from these types and exiting the relationship rather than attempting to change them.

Red Flags That Narcissists Disguise As Green Flags

There are certain seeming “green flags” that are actually the dating red flags of a narcissist. The last one may surprise you.

Love bombing is viewed as “finally” meeting your soulmate.

Most people see excessive affection, attention, and contact at the onset of dating as a sign that the relationship is making progress. Yet there’s a distinction between the future-faking, mirroring, and fast-forwarding involved in love bombing and authentic desire and interest. The latter is usually more of a slow, organic burn while the former can become an all-consuming fire that fizzles out quickly. People who love-bomb you usually aren’t looking for something authentic and long-term. Some are love-bombing you in hopes of getting you into bed or an exploitative relationship. Stay wary of anyone who contacts you excessively during the early stages of dating, who makes you imagine a future with them early

on, and who seems to share all your hobbies, interests, and dreams in an unbelievable way.

Honesty even when it's brutal and cruel.

“At least they’re honest!” is a regular acknowledgment that we often hear even after a potential dating partner delivers what is obviously a deliberately hurtful message. **“Honesty” without empathy is cruelty – and for narcissists, it’s usually not even that honest.** Narcissistic and psychopathic individuals find a sense of significance and importance in causing you pain. That means they’ll also manufacture lies, distort your true qualities, and project their own misdeeds onto you – all in the name of “just being honest.” Don’t fall for this trap. Be honest with *yourself* when their cruelty is a huge red flag and know that their lack of empathy and callousness will only escalate later on in the relationship.

A “quirky” sense of humor.

We all want a partner who has a good sense of humor – someone we can exchange witty banter with, who makes us laugh and also appreciates our jokes. Yet the normalization of “bullying” humor can make us forget that there are certain types of humor that are more toxic. For example, as noted before in the section on dating app red flags, research shows that sarcasm that is used to chronically bully and demean others can actually be a potential red flag of psychopathy. A little sarcasm here and there as a spice may not be hurtful, but perpetual sarcasm and contempt are major red flags you’re dealing with someone who will make you the butt of their

jokes.

Too much openness and “vulnerability.”

Vulnerability has become normalized in our society to the point where it overrides privacy and healthy boundaries in the dating world. A narcissist that discloses all of their trauma and sob stories (whether real or false) in the beginning does it for far more sinister reasons than someone who is occasionally prone to oversharing or is hoping to find a witness to their pain. If you find yourself on a date with someone who, unsolicited and unprovoked, starts talking about the woes of their childhood or their cheating ex (in a narcissist's case, they were the ones who usually cheated), take heed. They may be trying to paint themselves as the victim early on to manipulate you. They might also pry into your traumas in an eerily mechanical way to identify what wounds they can use against you later on as ammunition. Establishing true intimacy doesn't mean you have to projectile-vomit everything horrific that ever happened to you or feel obligated to share your traumas in turn with a stranger. You can build up to disclosing more personal things when *you* feel most comfortable.

Having many close friendships with the opposite sex (or same sex based on their sexual orientation).

Another aspect of modern romance that has been far too normalized is the prospect that every dating partner is going to have suspiciously close friends of the opposite sex (or same sex depending on their sexual orientation). It should be noted that provoking jealousy or jealousy induction is associated with narcissism and psychopathy. There's nothing wrong with having genuinely platonic friendships, but you might be seeing it as *too much* of a green flag if you ignore blatantly shady behavior between a dating partner and his or her so-called "close friends" for the sake of wanting to seem secure and mature. Remember that this is not about your insecurity – it's about basic respect. If you notice behavior that makes you feel uncomfortable, listen to your gut, and assess your personal boundaries. And remember: you deserve to be comfortable in a relationship where someone's friend's list doesn't consist of ex-partners or potential love interests. If someone you're dating is using his close friends against you to provoke jealousy, run as fast as possible in the other direction. You never have to compete for someone who is truly worthy of you.

An over-the-top interest in spirituality and your spiritual beliefs.

We're in a beautiful era where spirituality has many forms and comes in many faiths. It can seem like a major green flag when someone shares your spiritual beliefs or is at the very least interested in learning more about them. Yet if you find that a potential dating partner is interrogating you about your spiritual beliefs in a way that seems over-the-top and suspicious, be aware that there may be a hidden motive. Narcissists and psychopaths use your empathy, spirituality, and compassion against you: so when they're asking about your spiritual beliefs, they're actually assessing your capacity to forgive them and how willing you are to bend over backwards for them even after they've harmed you. Solution? Make sure that whatever spiritual beliefs you have are still paired with a healthy set of airtight boundaries.

Don't tell potential dating partners things like, "We are all one," "Forgiveness is the way," or offer to sing kumbaya with them. Don't offer to read tarot for them, ask about their birth chart, or excitedly suggest they're your "twin flame" (or buy into their claims that they're yours). Instead, casually mention how you find it empowering that spirituality reminds you of your own divinity and all the good you deserve. If your dating partner is a man, tell them God is a woman and see how they react. In all cases, share stories that showcase that your faith and spirituality won't prevent you from holding someone accountable. After all, standing up to a bully is the most spiritual thing you can do for yourself and others. Dating is no exception.

The Traits Narcissists Look For In Women They're Dating

Narcissistic traits are associated with aggression and bullying behaviors, according to a meta-analysis of over 437 studies, and has been shown to be detrimental to the mental health of the loved ones of narcissistic partners and family members in studies, even causing PTSD. Many women ask, “Why do I keep attracting narcissists and psychopaths?” There is usually nothing wrong with you – in fact, in many cases, there’s a lot *right* with you. Narcissistic people (who can be either male or female) often weaponize not only the weaknesses of their partners but also their strengths. Here is what they search for in a romantic partner, and why you may easily become a target for their manipulative behaviors.

Empathy, compassion, and strong spiritual faith.

A high level of empathy is often one of the first qualities that initially draws a narcissistic or psychopathic person to you. While narcissists don’t experience as much affective

and emotional empathy, research indicates they do possess cognitive empathy and are able to assess how you might feel or react, as well as what your fears and desires might be. They look for emotional empathy in the people they seek as partners because the more their partners experience pain for *their* distress, the more they can weaponize pity plays and sob stories so you're less likely to hold them accountable for their actions and more likely to rationalize their toxic behaviors over time.

Empathy also positions you as someone who is willing to forgive and forget (or at the very least sympathize with the narcissist's plight even when they're harming you, especially if they excuse their behavior with stories of trauma or insecurity, whether real or false). If you are a spiritual person, the narcissist will also gravitate toward you because they assume you have more porous boundaries and will turn the other cheek time and time again in the relationship. They will use your spirituality against you by pretending you two were destined to meet or that you must forgive in order to "prove" your maturity and be the bigger person regardless of their behavior. Rather than spiritually bypassing your emotions or treating the narcissist like a "soulmate" whose behaviors you have to endure in the name of love or God, it's important to recognize that empathy and compassion are not enough to "change" or fix a toxic person. You can practice compassion from a distance.

Success, status, and beauty.

Both narcissists and psychopaths often seek out successful, high-achieving, attractive people with status or reputation. This is because they want to surround themselves with people they deem special and unique – in fact, that is literally part of their diagnostic criteria, but even people with “just” narcissistic traits can look for women with these qualities as well. This allows them to enhance their own self-image by association as they use you as “arm candy” or brag about your achievements as if they were the ones who made them possible. They may even try to piggyback off your success to gain new connections or leech off your resources. This is also especially common with parasitic psychopaths who target wealthy or financially stable partners to exploit.

At the same time, they will be pathologically envious of your success and beauty because narcissistic and psychopathic traits are also associated with malicious envy according to research. They will try to deflate you because it threatens their ego to watch you surpass them without requiring their validation. If you are out of their league in any way, be prepared for attempts to “humble” you so they can better control you. Rather than falling prey into becoming a passive object for the narcissist to benefit from, elevate your success as well as inner and outer beauty for **you** so you get the benefits without allowing them to profit off your labor. Center your life around your dreams and goals and invest in yourself – do not spend your precious time and energy investing in them.

Resilience and grit.

If you have adversity or complex trauma in your history, you likely also have resilience and grit – the psychological resilience and pain tolerance of a sumo wrestler which allows you to take on any obstacle in life with resourcefulness and a take-charge attitude. Childhood trauma can also make you biochemically susceptible to becoming “addicted” to rollercoaster relationships because your body and brain have become accustomed to the stress responses associated with highs and lows. Resilience and grit are beautiful qualities to have when it comes to pursuing your dreams, contributing to your community, or accomplishing your professional career and personal goals.

However, they will be used against you by a narcissist who hopes to keep you catering to them in the long-term while you withstand enormous amounts of pain. Use your resilience and grit to exit the toxic relationship and become victorious during your journey to freedom instead.

A thirst for excitement and challenge.

It might be surprising to learn that if you're an adrenaline junkie, an adventure seeker, a risk-taker, someone who is bold or brave to any extent, you can also be targeted by a narcissist (or even the rarer psychopath). That is because narcissists look for those who will become easily addicted to chaos and are skillful at meeting a challenge. They want someone who is goal-oriented because they can manipulate those victims into trying to meet the absurd standards and expectations for the toxic relationship. As you're forced

to keep up with their unpredictable behavior and moving goal posts, you find yourself subconsciously “rising” to the challenge of trying to please them due to your ingrained habit of wanting to prove yourself or overcome obstacles (***even though this isn’t a challenge that is worth it, at all – and many survivors recognize this challenge is anything but exciting***).

A relationship with a narcissist or psychopath is traumatizing, but it is anything but “boring” which is why people who seek and are adept at overcoming challenges tend to become more easily entangled with these toxic types – they feel fueled by the desire to “win” over the narcissist especially during the devaluation stage. They believe they have the power and strength to withstand adversity – but just because you *can* do something doesn’t mean it will be healthy for you. A key part of the healing journey tends to be detoxing from the chaos and getting off the hamster wheel of trying to prove yourself to a toxic person who wants you walking on eggshells. Save your need for excitement for healthy outlets like competitive races, skydiving, achieving a professional goal, or building financial success.

Perfectionism.

When you are a perfectionist, you are hyperattuned to criticism and any micro-signals of disapproval or potential abandonment. Being over-perfectionistic can stem from childhood trauma or anxiety in general. A narcissist or psychopath takes advantage of your need to go out of your way and above and beyond to “impress.” They find perfectionistic people to be malleable targets because they expect you to go into overdrive trying to win their approval. They may

love bomb and shower you with compliments one minute, only to withdraw that affection and attention and nitpick on a quality or behavior that is irrelevant. For example, they may congratulate you heartily on a promotion, only to tell you that the dinner you cooked was too salty shortly after. This may cause you to go overboard in cooking an even more lavish meal for them next time. Or, they may compliment your dress and make a backhanded remark like, "You're so brave for wearing that," under their breath, causing you to doubt your choices.

The Big Picture

These are all attempts to disorient you throughout the relationship so you never feel like you're reaching their arbitrary high standards – even if they wouldn't meet those standards and expectations themselves. Rather than trying to be a "perfect" partner for the narcissist, turn that idealism back to them: are they in any way your "ideal" in how they treat you and behave? If not, it's time to prepare for detachment and a safe exit.

Signs He's Not Avoidantly Attached, He's A Narcissist

“He or she just has an avoidant personality style!” But do they *really*? We often dismiss more malignant narcissistic behaviors that have been normalized as in our society as an “avoidant attachment style.” It sounds a lot better than admitting there may be toxicity or even narcissistic traits or behaviors afoot, doesn’t it? But how can you tell whether you’re dealing with an avoidantly attached man and whether you’re dealing with a narcissist? And either way, how can you stop making excuses for toxic behaviors these types exhibit so you can move forward from unhealthy relationships?

A Quick Primer on Attachment Styles

First, what is avoidant attachment? In order to better understand attachment styles, we have to look back at one of the most famous studies ever conducted on attachment. This was the experiment known as “The Strange Situation,” where

psychologist Mary Ainsworth as well as researchers Solomon and Main discovered four main attachment styles. In the Strange Situation experiment, infants were separated from their mothers while they were thrust in a new environment with toys and were given the opportunity to interact with a stranger who comes in. They were also left completely alone during one point in the experiment to observe their behavior in the new environment, before they were finally reunited with their mother. Based on their behaviors during and after the separation, four main attachment styles were noted.

Four attachment styles from this study were identified: 1) secure attachment 2) avoidant attachment 3) anxious attachment and, as identified by researchers Solomon and Main in 1986, 4) disorganized attachment. For adult attachment styles, researchers Dr. Cindy Hazan and Dr. Phillip Shafer adapted these four childhood styles of attachment into adult patterns of attachment: *secure, dismissive-avoidant, anxious-preoccupied, and fearful-avoidant*. They noted that much like avoidant children who avoided close contact with their parents upon their return and tended to ignore their mothers, developing hyper-independence likely as a result of receiving unempathic responses to their distress in the past, adults with an avoidant-dismissive attachment style also tend to be distrusting, distance themselves from intimacy and closeness in relationships, and display hyper-independence. They are usually unable or unwilling to reciprocate the same openness and vulnerability as their partners, even if they seek out partners who want to become close to them.

What Are the Signs You May Be Dating A Narcissist, Not An Avoidantly Attached Man?

An avoidantly attached man or woman avoids intimacy and closeness due to fear; narcissists push for physical and emotional intimacy early on to establish power. Avoidantly attached people may avoid getting into relationships altogether, and distance themselves from conflict and vulnerability by refusing to disclose personal details or express their emotions. Narcissists (whether men or women) fast-forward intimacy and closeness in the beginning of the relationship, showering you with excessive contact, attention, and affection, love bombing and promising a future with you, only to callously devalue you and stonewall you, shutting down conversations and gaslighting you as a manipulation method to make you distrust your own perception and reality.

Narcissists weaponize emotions to control you. Avoidantly attached men have difficulty expressing their emotions at all. In the beginning of the relationship, a narcissist may seek to control you by making you feel obligated to them by showering you with romantic grand gestures and faux displays of love and affection, disclosing personal details about themselves (whether these details are true or false remains to be seen) to push you into disclosing insecurities, fears, and vulnerabilities you may not otherwise use against you as ammunition later on. They will only become cold and aloof during the devaluation phase of the relationship when they sense you're already heavily invested in them. An avoidantly attached man will avoid establishing vulnerability altogether and will be less likely to share personal stories about themselves that could reveal too much about their true

fears and desires. They may appear cold and aloof, as well as emotionally distant, from the very beginning.

Avoidantly attached men typically have a childhood marked by emotional neglect, while narcissists may have been spoiled in childhood. Avoidantly attached men may have experienced a childhood where they felt emotionally neglected by their parents which might have caused them to become hyper-independent as an adult. When it comes to childhood trauma for narcissistic people, studies are mixed and longitudinal studies actually show that narcissism as a trait may stem more so from parental overvaluation and spoiling a child rather than childhood maltreatment, contributing to them developing an excessive sense of entitlement. If you notice your partner raging at you for perceived slights, punishing you for standing up to them and setting boundaries, verbally and emotionally abusing you, or if they respond to you not catering to their needs by emotionally withholding and withdrawing from you to “punish” you, you are likely dealing with a narcissistic individual, not “just” an avoidantly attached person.

Both avoidantly attached men and narcissistic men can send mixed signals, but narcissists do so on purpose to manipulate and avoidantly attached men do so to protect themselves. Avoidantly attached men may send mixed signals naturally when they desire closeness but feel that establishing emotional intimacy makes them too fearful, so they shut down such bonding moments and distance themselves from conversations and commitments that lead to such intimacy. Narcissists deliberately engage in a hot-and-cold cycle, shifting between intermittent kindness and cruelty to get your brain “addicted” to the crazy-making cycle of their mistreatment and trauma

bonded to them. They will swoop in again as soon as they sense you are detaching from them, and their ability to connect with you has little to do with fear but their own egotistical needs at the time. They are not afraid of “commitment” – narcissistic partners pursue many long-term and short-term relationships without any fear of committed relationships throughout their lives, but they do have a tendency to emotionally and physically cheat on their partners and engage in infidelity.

Whether you’re dating an avoidantly attached man or a narcissist, however, if they are not taking accountability for changing any of their harmful actions toward you and they are not compatible with what you need and deserve in a romantic relationship, it’s advised for you to stop further attaching yourself to them and find a partner who is more willing to give you the happy relationship you deserve. You deserve to heal from toxic people and have healthy, respectful, and safe relationships.

The Traits Psychopaths Look For In Women They Date

Psychopaths are more extreme than narcissists in their behavior. How do male psychopaths operate, and what kind of traits and behaviors do they seek in a potential romantic partner? Here are the four surprising traits psychopaths look for in women, much of which overlap with what narcissists look for as well. Keep in mind that if you were targeted by a psychopathic person, it was not your fault, as they can use both your strengths and your vulnerabilities against you.



Psychopaths also seek women who are nurturing, compassionate, and caring.

Psychopathic people tend to be superficially charismatic, remorseless, and conscienceless. Psychopathy experts like Dr. Robert Hare tell us that psychopaths look for nurturing women who tend to take care of their partners, those are caring and compassionate to the point of sacrificing themselves for their partners. This is because such women are most susceptible to pity ploys and feeling sympathy even when a psychopathic individual has harmed them. Empathy in others is a beautiful quality, but it can be weaponized by dark personality types for their own agendas. Psychopathic people need romantic partners who are willing to make rationalizations regarding their morally dubious behavior in order to maintain the relationship. They sense that an empathic partner is (usually) less likely to hold them accountable and that they can leech off this partner, using their resources for their own gain.

Women who crave excitement, novelty, and adventure.

This trait may be a bit more surprising to discover, but just like psychopaths are sensation-seeking thrill seekers with a propensity for boredom, they tend to be aligned with women who have a sense of adventure and who crave having a sense of excitement in their lives. Needless to say, no one *actually* wants excitement in the form of an emotional rollercoaster of a relationship with a psychopath, nor is it ever your fault if you were targeted by one, but the chaos of toxic relationships can

be biochemically addictive. That is why women who are drawn to adventure can become easily entangled by a psychopath's charm as well as the euphoria of love bombing, which is the excessive attention and affection the psychopath showers on their victims at the onset of the relationship. Partners of psychopaths may also be entranced by the pursuit of novelty; initially, they share this impulse too, but in healthy ways.

They, too, may want to travel to faraway lands and hike the Appalachian Mountains or go bungee jumping, or party all night, or take an impromptu flight to Paris. However, the psychopathic individual has little fear and very little inhibition. *Their* idea of an adrenaline rush goes far beyond spontaneous romance and enters a more sinister territory: the thrill of leading double lives, deceiving others, running off with someone's money, or conning someone innocent for the sake of duping delight can be just as "fun" for them as skinny dipping in the ocean or getting eloped in France. Their desire for adventure tends to veer into the realm of moral depravity and risk-taking rather than the innocent exploration.

Women who are successful, have resilience, and possess a strong come-back game.

If you were a psychopath, who would you rather date? Someone who leaves promptly at the first red flag, someone who gives up on a relationship quickly when they perceive it won't be beneficial to them, or the person who acts like they're in a wrestling match, about to take on the challenge with the tenacity and determination of a sumo wrestler? As a thrill-seeking psychopath, the third option sounds like a perfect fit and one that will provide high levels of

stimulation for the psychopathic individual — they love seeing their victims get riled up and fight back because it alleviates their perpetual boredom and allows them to stoke their sadistic impulses. Unfortunately, many of the traits that make women so resilient and strong can actually make them prey for psychopathic individuals. It's ironically a bit easier to ensnare a resilient individual into a toxic cycle because they have a "never give up, never quit" mentality, and they are accustomed to taking on challenges and competing for the win.

It's no wonder male psychopaths love successful and beautiful women — not only do they have resources, status, and reputation they can leech off and physical attributes they can use as arm candy, these women also tend to be passionate about holding their own and fighting back. That is what makes a psychopath's pursuit of such a woman so exciting — they want to be able to trap her, overcome her, and dominate her. To have a victim who is *already* submissive is no fun for a psychopath who enjoys playing cat and mouse and making a dominant woman submit to him. They get a secret thrill out of making her comply and breaking her down. Some women stay in the relationship to try to "fix" the psychopath, while others fight back against the psychopath, and some even compete to overcome them. At the end of the day, this is one unique circumstance where you actually "win" the game by seemingly "giving up" and protecting yourself and refocusing on yourself.

Women who either have a background of trauma or women who grew up in happy, loving homes.

Interestingly, psychopaths can target women of either side of the trauma history “spectrum.” That’s because women who grew up in happy, healthy households may not have an acute awareness of manipulative tactics and may not ever suspect they would be manipulated by a romantic partner unless taught explicitly by their parents to have tough boundaries and watch out for wolves in sheep’s clothing. People who are raised to see the good in others and give people the benefit of the doubt, who see their parents as role models of the relationship they desire, may either have high standards for their relationships or they might mistake love bombing for love. They may view love bombing as true “soulmate” love because healthy, exuberant, overflowing love is what they witnessed growing up, and the fast-paced nature of the relationship of a psychopath who swoops you off your feet can feel just the way fairytale romance feels.

On the other hand, traumatized women may be aware and even hypervigilant to these signs but still become entangled with a psychopath because of core unhealed wounds and a fear of abandonment. No matter what your trauma history may be, you can be susceptible to the charm of a psychopath because these dark personality types tend to prey on both the vulnerabilities and strengths of a target as well as their subconscious desire to be loved and chosen, a desire that exists in all human beings. If you were a target, it was not your fault.

That is why psychopaths tend to stay away from people with a strong self-concept and a high level of ego and self-

validation (unless they want to break those people down as a challenge) because they want people who they can charm into feeling special and unique. A person who is deemed too “egotistical” or too confident can be infuriating to a psychopath who requires their victims to be reliant on their validation in order to prey on them. Only the psychopath is allowed to love bomb you, after all — or so they believe. A victim that dares to love themselves and put themselves on the pedestal — well, that’s one of the traits these types just won’t tolerate. If you want to protect yourself from a psychopath, your best bet is to dial down on showcasing your empathy and bleeding heart too soon to potential manipulators and use your resilience to detach from toxic people.

Why The “Girl Best Friend” Can Be A Cover For Shady Men, According to Research

Recently, a video of a happily married woman who said that happily married men don't pursue close friendships with women went viral. Thousands of women then proceeded to share their own stories of how they were inevitably screwed over by trying to play the “cool girl” to their boyfriend or husband having a close shady friendship with another woman. This may be a controversial topic, but there's a reason why you may be having trust issues about the types of people your dating partner surrounds himself with. The “girl best friend” has been normalized to such an extent where women who have valid suspicions and are intuitive about what is really going on are routinely gaslit out of what they are identifying, only to find out that they were right all along. This should come as no surprise to anyone given the millions of stories out there of women who found themselves being betrayed by their boyfriend or husband with a “girl best

friend,” yet there is still controversy around this myth. Here are a few primary reasons you should be wary if you’re dating a man with close and shady friendships with women.

The age-old concern continues to plague us: can men and women really be “just friends?” In cases where there is no form of attraction on either side, it is absolutely possible! The response to this question gets murkier, however, when there is attraction involved on either end. Here’s what the research has to say.

Men and Women View Opposite-Sex Friendships Differently

We know that opposite-sex friendships can still flourish, but usually strong and solid friendships are ones where there is little attraction or romantic interest on either side. First, we have to acknowledge that there is a discrepancy in the ways men and women view opposite-sex friendships in the context of heterosexual relationships. Studies show that men are more likely to report attraction to their female friends than women are to their male friends, regardless of whether or not they themselves or their friend is in a relationship. More recent research also indicates that the physical attractiveness of an opposite-sex friend can predict sexual interest in that friend more strongly for men than women, and that this effect is only affected by relationship satisfaction for *women* and not men. In other words, men are far more likely to be sexually interested in their female friends than women would be in their attractive male friends, regardless of how satisfied they are in their current relationship or their current partner’s attractiveness, whereas those factors *do* affect women’s attraction to their opposite-sex friends.

This makes sense, given the common complaint of women

when they express that on average, they see their male friends as genuinely “just friends” and are shocked when these same “friends” express sexual interest in them, and may have established their friendships with an ulterior motive – hence the popularity of claiming that men are “friend-zoned,” even though these women do not technically owe their opposite-sex friends anything. This discrepancy can also be found in how men *initially* choose their female friends generally speaking as opposed to how women choose their male friends. Research reveals shows that while both men and women prioritize dependability and agreeableness in their choice of opposite-sex friends, men specifically tend to prioritize the attractiveness of their female friends when it came to their choice of opposite-sex friends whereas women prioritized a male’s ability to protect them through physical prowess as well as their ability to provide through economic resources.

Can Women Be Guilty Of This Behavior?

That being said, women are not always innocent in these behaviors either. Women who have psychopathic traits have been shown by studies to exhibit a serial pattern of what is known in the research literature as *partner poaching*, deliberately going after partnered men for thrill-seeking purposes and in some cases as a way to one-up women they may be envious of. The men they successfully “poach” tend to have the same psychopathic tendencies. So, there may also be cases of women who have the same dark personality traits as the men who cheat on their partners. Talk about deserving each other.

Men Don’t Pursue Friendships with Women For the Same

Reasons Women Do With Men

Again, plenty of men complain about being “friend-zoned” but women rarely do – why do you think that is? It’s because women generally really do have friendships with men that are not at all based on physical attraction – usually (unless they’re a female narcissist) they will pick male friends who they feel are protective, empathic, and emotionally supportive in some way. Basically, women on average couldn’t care less if a man looks like a young Michael Vartan from *Alias* or Grant Gustin from *The Flash* (okay, maybe a young Michael Vartan from *Alias* and Grant Gustin would incentivize them *a little*) when it comes to their choice of male friends. We know for a fact that, on the other hand, that men generally on average pursue friendships with women they’re attracted to in hopes of deeper connection whereas women generally can be friends with men they really do only view in a platonic light. Again, this isn’t always the case – but it’s common enough to be a noted phenomenon.

Many women can relate to this. Every close guy friend we’ve ever had hit on us in some form or fashion. Every single one. So why do we continue to create this false equivalency that heterosexual men and women pursue friendships with the opposite sex for the same reason? Generally speaking, with few exceptions, many men will pursue friendships with women they are interested in with the hope of more. If they continue to invest deeply in these friendships while they are in a relationship or enter a marriage, there is always going to be some level of flirtation and interest there. Many women can attest to experiencing a situation where their husband or boyfriend went on to have a romantic relationship with their female best friend they said they looked at “as a sister,” or

a friend they confided in about the relationship. Full-blown emotional affairs if not physical ones often run rampant in these cases.

Pick-Me Women Do Exist, And So Do Men Who Entertain Them

Is your boyfriend or spouse really “oblivious” to the advances of other women or does he just want to keep his options open? Recently, another woman shared a story online about how two of her husband’s “friends” kept complimenting her and telling her that she was way out of her husband’s league. Later, one of those same friends called her husband and claimed she was having an emergency with the other friend and needed their help in her hotel room. The husband rushed to the young woman’s aid – only for the woman to maul and flirt with her husband while the wife was in the other room (according to the husband at least – but we’re not all too sure that’s the full story). Her husband confessed that this young woman had been hitting on him for months, and had even told him that he was out of his wife’s league (the opposite of what she told the wife). Yet that doesn’t explain why he would try to rush to help that same woman late at night rather than finding someone else to do it if he was that concerned about her intentions.

Such stories are common – the “female best friend” or “work wife” pretends to compliment his girlfriend only to pursue him behind the scenes – or he pursues her, and blames the woman as a form of gaslighting – as was illustrated beautifully in the television series *Wilderness*. The man pretends he’s oblivious to her advances yet doesn’t seem at all nervous about coming to her aid, flirting back, or engaging

in late-night phone calls or texts or one-on-one meetings. To believe no woman would ever want to pursue a man in a committed relationship is naive because pick-me women who try to go after men who are in committed relationships do exist, and as you learned, they tend to exhibit psychopathic tendencies if they have a pattern of pursuing men already in committed relationships, and the men who engage in these types of affairs and allow themselves to be “partner poached” also display psychopathic traits too. Both are in the wrong, the partner in a relationship moreso, but both are still responsible for their behavior.

Men With A Harem of Close Female Friends Are Usually Players

Some women think that men who have lots of close female friends must be sensitive and emotionally intelligent (in the words of a viral internet trend, “*someone cooked here*”). They assume that they have a better understanding of what women want and need. But they forget – some men may know they don’t have a realistic opportunity with these women they call friends, but will still keep them around and be caring toward them not out of real compassion but a motive to feel validated by their attention. Men who like to be surrounded by women are often narcissistic players who like having a roster. They want to keep their options open and want to pit women against one another to maintain the power in their primary relationship.

Men with many close female friends are not at all transparent about their motives or true intentions. They want the wife at home and several women they can flirt with or have emotional, even physical affairs with on the side. They want a

“girl best friend” in training that can become the second wife or girlfriend if the first one doesn’t work out. So don’t assume the excitement of dating multiple women is any different for your garden-variety man who requires lots of attention from his female best friends and spends most of his time, energy, and money entertaining other women.

Are There Exceptions?

If you’re reading this thinking, “No! There must be an exception!” With everything in life, there can be rare unicorn situations where this won’t apply. But usually, it is restricted to cases where there is no physical and emotional attraction on either end, and involves a high-quality man with genuine intentions (but even in that case, he likely wouldn’t be pursuing too many close friendships with women at all because he’s focused on his partner). Perhaps your boyfriend has a childhood friend where neither are attracted to each other and the friend is already happily in another relationship and would never have an affair. Or it’s not a friendship at all but a context where strong boundaries are in place – more of an acquaintance situation where nothing can ever happen. In those cases, you may not have any reason to be wary.

What Does This Mean For Opposite-Sex Friendships?

So what does this all mean? While mutual trust is important in a romantic relationship, so are healthy boundaries. If your partner has opposite-sex friendships you are concerned about, it’s important to assess whether stronger boundaries need to be set or if the relationship in general is incompatible with your needs. This is not about engaging in controlling or coercive behaviors, but simply looking at whether the behav-

iors you're experiencing from your partner are disrespectful to you and threaten the health of the relationship. If you are concerned about the way your partner is treating you, it may be time to detach and find a high quality partner who truly respects you, prioritizes you, and understands your needs.

For heterosexual relationships, this means we must stop gaslighting women (and some men) into believing there is nothing going on if they express discomfort over the "friendships" their partners have, especially if there is a reason for suspicion and plenty of evidence to suggest that their partners are romantically interested in their opposite-sex friends. Thousands of women across social media have shared their stories of how they were betrayed by their partners, who soon pursued the woman they called "just a friend" shortly after, so it's not as if we don't have the lived experiences of women that align with this research. As a society, we have gotten far too accustomed to labeling women especially as "insecure" or "crazy" for having healthy, reasonable boundaries and expectations in her relationships rather than encouraging her to listen to her intuition and observations which often prove to be correct.

As you'll learn in the next section, emotional cheating behaviors may still persist in such shady friendships even if a physical affair does not occur – like constantly venting about your partner to your "girl best friend," and establishing emotional intimacy with other women outside of your primary partner. Similarly, if a woman does have a mutual attraction to a male friend, which is rarer, but can certainly happen as well occasionally, healthy boundaries must also be set.

Red Flag Relationship Behaviors You Didn't Realize Were Emotional Cheating

Emotional cheating covers a wide variety of behaviors. In a monogamous romantic relationship, two people can decide what the boundaries of the relationship are based on their own comfort levels. However, there are certain behaviors that can generally fall into the category of emotional cheating and can be disrespectful regardless of whether or not someone considers it cheating. An emotional affair doesn't have to cross physical or sexual boundaries in order to be considered a transgression that violates your boundaries or disrespects you — even in times you feel tempted to rationalize that disrespect. In many ways, our society has encouraged and normalized these behaviors, giving women the shorter end of the stick and limiting what behaviors they are allowed to find inappropriate, and gaslighting them into believing they are “insecure” or “crazy” if they raise an issue with such behaviors. Here are the behaviors you should watch out for.

Disclosing personal information, establishing emotional intimacy, and venting about your relationship with a “girl best friend” or female acquaintance in general. If your boyfriend is spending inordinate amounts of time and energy with a female friend who he also vents to about your relationship, be very cautious and wary. Research indicates that men are more likely than women to have a romantic interest in their opposite-sex friends. While some friendships may be truly platonic, if your boyfriend is confiding in someone else about his emotions, his deepest secrets, his day-to-day struggles, and yet neglects to confide in you or is defensive and secretive about the nature of his “friendships” with other women, that means he is establishing a deeper sense of emotional intimacy with someone else.

If he’s spending large amounts of time and energy on any another woman in a laser-focused way, hiding text messages and phone calls, meeting up with her alone and prioritizing other women over you, even if the excuse seems “innocent,” don’t be so quick to assume it really is innocent. If he becomes defensive when called out and refuses to make you more comfortable in these types of situations by distancing himself, you’re dealing with an emotional cheater who places the emotions of other women over his girlfriend’s needs and feelings. This kind of connection may appear innocuous at first, but if it is interfering with his ability to communicate with and engage with you directly as his girlfriend, it easily enters into the realm of emotional cheating.

Checking out other people frequently. Yes, we will repeat it again: people with dark personality traits often try to make others jealous on purpose. If your boyfriend is constantly ogling at other potential love interests in front of you, or

talking about the physical appearance of others in a way that makes you uncomfortable, run. Even if you don't consider it emotional cheating, it is still downright disrespectful. He is setting up a silent or even blatant competition that you have no business partaking in and placing his attention and desire onto other women. A healthy boyfriend will make you feel irreplaceable – an unhealthy, toxic person will try to demean you to ensure you feel too insecure to leave them.

Stalking other women's social media profiles. If his following list is filled with lewd accounts that make you cringe or his likes and comments often frequent the accounts of women, understand that this too can be a part of emotional cheating behaviors. You can bet that it doesn't stop at just "looking" and he may escalate into sliding into the direct messages of others.

Flirting. Some people don't consider flirting to be emotional cheating, but generally speaking, it can be very disrespectful to one's romantic partner. If your boyfriend is spending his nights out giving other women the impression he is single or bantering with other women in a way that seems a bit too interested and fixated on another woman, it is definitely a case of emotional infidelity — especially if he has a chronic habit of doing so.

Watching "inappropriate" videos and consuming adult content in an excessive manner. Not all women will agree this is emotional cheating, but some women do think it deserves to be placed under this category if the behavior is chronic. If your boyfriend's online "habits" of consuming adult content is interfering with his ability to engage in your sex life and emotional intimacy in healthy ways, it very well should be flagged as emotional cheating. Some couples may

consider such content harmless fantasy, but others may find it inappropriate and objectifying, especially to women.

Constantly complimenting other women in a way that builds a connection with them. High quality men may give occasional warranted and healthy praise to anyone, not just women, but that doesn't mean your boyfriend is automatically off the hook if he's constantly praising other women. If he's hyper-focusing on the beauty of other women, *always* praising their looks, intelligence, personality, talents, success, strengths, or other qualities — especially without regard to you or your feelings — this can definitely be a boundary-violating behavior. There's a difference between giving an occasional compliment and always showering other women with praise or building a connection with them that he doesn't build with you. In the latter case, this can veer into the category of emotional cheating.

Why Men Who Follow Lewd Accounts On Social Media Are Disrespectful

The best way to lose feelings for a toxic man is to go through his following list and see all the women who don't follow him back. No, you're not insecure. He's disrespectful. Society, toxic men, and the pick-me women who enable them have been gaslighting you to believe that you should be okay with some of the blatantly disrespectful behavior of men in modern dating culture. One of us was once acquaintances with a seemingly "perfect" married couple expecting a child. He would often write lengthy and glowing captions dedicated to her. And then one day, through my "Explore" page, I saw her husband "liking" lewd pictures of random women. Society

will tell you that all relationships have problems. That social media means “nothing.” Except your Aunt Carol and best friend from high school can both see your boyfriend Chad following those suspicious OnlyFans accounts, or engaging with other women’s pictures in a way that seems frequent, shady, and callous. How embarrassing. Is this the type of man you want to be seen out with in public? Sure, you can minimize it and say, “He’s just looking,” but you wouldn’t tolerate that same type of ogling behavior let alone public engagement and public humiliation in real life. Social media is an extension of real life and the questionable behaviors we engage in online are not exempt from accountability or consequences. These behaviors are reflective of deeply-rooted attitudes, beliefs, and even toxic personality traits.

The thing is, we know from actual studies that there are men with dark personality traits like narcissism and psychopathy that actually try to make their partners jealous on purpose. It gives them a high to think other women are “competing” for them (even if no one is) and they get off on the power and control. Perhaps in your case it’s not OnlyFans accounts but their ex, or their co-worker who they seem to be too close with. No matter who it is, we need to accept that some men (and women) actually enjoy hurting their partners and social media is their playground. And if they think you’re out of their league, they’ll try to make *you* feel especially insecure so they can feel better about themselves. So, if you’ve been in this situation and the man just escalated this behavior and gaslighted you into thinking you’re crazy instead of hearing how it made you feel, chances are he was trying to make you jealous on purpose and has a sadistic need to establish dominance.

We are going to tell you to do what others won't. Raise hell. Stop dating these types of men. Take a look at what they do on social media before you get too involved with them. Allow it to filter out the men you won't waste your time with. *Don't be so thirsty for a relationship that you get into a relationship with a thirsty man.*

If you've ever confronted this type of disrespectful behavior, chances are you've had society telling you that you should be more "secure," that you need to work on your anxiety and trust issues. And boy, did it work! You want to be seen as the "cool girl" don't you? The kind of woman that doesn't make a fuss over such a "trivial" thing as social media. The kind of woman that swallows her discomfort when you see your boyfriend or God forbid even your *husband* following weird accounts on Instagram and liking scantily clad pictures on the daily. It's "just social media" they say.

But what if the world was run by women and catered to their needs instead? Any man who would be caught red-handed on social media while in a relationship would be shamed, mocked, ridiculed, and laughed at. Instead of vilifying the woman for having a normal reaction to disrespectful behavior, we would be calling out toxic behaviors like this because they inevitably escalate. In some cases, these behaviors are driven by darker, more sadistic motives. Let's bring shame back. If you're dating a man like this, you have to understand that their disrespect will rarely end at social media. It will escalate into sliding into DMs or even IRL cheating. You deserve to have an authentic relationship with a high-quality man, not someone who will be prowling for cheap validation online or in real life.

What It Really Means If He Calls You “Wife Material” If He’s Toxic

Another societal trope that needs to be dismantled is the idea that being a “wife” means you have fulfilled your ultimate purpose in life and means being “chosen.” Being called “wife material” by a high-quality man is usually intended as a compliment (although most high-quality man probably would never utter this phrase) but it means something vastly different than when a toxic or narcissistic man (or narcissistic woman) does it. As you’ll learn, when a high-quality man calls you “wife material” or you call him “husband material” in turn, it means you’ve met someone akin to a soulmate, a partner who feels like home. You’ve met someone who shares your deepest core values, a special person you admire who has the qualities you’ve always wanted in a future spouse, someone you’d love to share the rest of your life with. On the other hand, when a toxic or narcissistic man is calling you “wife material,” it’s less of a compliment and more of a proposed prison sentence.

The narcissistic man sees immense “wife material” in

people they can exploit for their own gain. He (or she, as narcissists can be both male and female) views their partners through a lens colored by, “What can I get from this person?” not “*How can we build a healthy partnership?*” A toxic person who calls their partner “wifey material” isn’t looking for a true partnership – they’re more interested in a power ploy. They’re looking for submission, compliance, and obedience. They’re looking for someone with a vast amount of endless empathy and compassion who is willing to cater to their every whim and need. A spouse who can be trained and conditioned to overlook not just their flaws but their numerous transgressions. They’re identifying whether you’re overly forgiving and prone to turning the other cheek. These – for *them* – are the qualities they seek in a so-called “good” wife. When a toxic person calls you “wife material,” they couldn’t care less about your intelligence, personality, goals, sense of humor, your ambitions, or your individuality. They don’t care about your inner and outer beauty unless it serves them – in fact, it actively threatens them if you get the attention of other suitors.



The truth is, the most captivating women in the world are rarely called "wife material" by toxic men (unless it's part of excessive flattery and love bombing) who don't appreciate these qualities – rather, they're appreciated by the high-quality men who see her for who she is and how valuable she is.

The Difference Between High-Quality Men and Toxic Partners

A high-quality man admires the positive qualities and strengths he sees in a potential partner. He loves when his partner is intelligent, empathic, witty, talented, and driven – not because he can use these qualities against her or for his gain, but rather because he honors and reveres her as a person. He is not threatened by her, her gifts, her beauty (both external and internal), or the attention she gets from others. He doesn't see her as a possession, even if he is protective. On the contrary, he's proud to have such a strong and sought-after partner by his side. He views her as an equal – not an object to boost his own image.

Unlike the toxic man, he sees sex with her as another form of intimacy to further connect with her – not devalue or objectify her. He loves her quirks and her multifacetedness. He falls in love with his future spouse and sees her as his version of the "dream woman" because she is unique in her own right and cannot be replicated. If he wants to raise children with her, he knows he's got the perfect partner co-parenting with him – for him, parenthood is a shared and rewarding "mission," not an obligation he passes off to her. He knows she is so much more than "just" his wife – he respects her as an individual

and a human being, first and foremost.

The Toxic Person's Ideal "Wife Material"

What the toxic person most desires and sees as "wife material" is a potential spouse who is willing to bend over backwards for them – willing to sacrifice their dreams to move in with them and support theirs, more than willing to take on the majority of childrearing and parenting responsibilities, and ready to pick up most if not all the domestic labor without compensation or care. A wife who will wait for them at home while *they* go out and live their lives and pursue their careers (and even other women). A wife who will bear and raise their children to the point of exhaustion without help or appreciation. A woman who will be available for sex whenever he likes – even if she's not up for it. A partner who is willing to move across the country to fulfill *their* preferences. A woman who is okay with shrinking herself or dimming her light – who will hide herself to ensure her husband doesn't get too jealous or envious. Even if he's not contributing financially to the household, the toxic narcissist still wants his wife to take on a traditional role without being generous or entirely traditional himself (some toxic partners, especially parasitic psychopathic partners, may even actively leech off their wife's resources). **There's nothing wrong with being a stay-at-home wife if that's what you want to do – but if so, you should have a high-quality, nurturing, and compassionate partner who is willing to support you, your needs, and all your dreams by your side.**

These toxic types want a wife that does not cause "drama" – in other words, someone who doesn't speak up for herself or think about what *she* wants, needs, and feels. They want a

woman with pick-me tendencies who has porous boundaries and is quick to internalize the toxic person's criticism of her without considering he may be the problematic one in the relationship. The high-quality man, on the other hand, is his partner's biggest cheerleader. He will generously offer emotional validation, resources, and encouragement that will further his wife's passions, mission, and interests. He will use actions to show her how much he values her presence, her energy, and all the good she brings into his life.

The Big Picture

The next time someone is calling you "wife material," resist being too flattered at the onset. Instead, evaluate the source. Is this a high-quality man with empathy who has shown you consistently that he will be there for you, who is interested in being a true "partner" in every sense of the word, who offers healthy praise when he notices your unique and irreplaceable qualities? Or is this a toxic person who compliments you on being "wife material" when he barely knows you and has a sinister agenda – or only when he's impressed by the ways you're serving *him*? The former is more likely to be a high-quality man and true husband material – a man who appreciates your strengths and wants you to be his partner for life; the latter is a toxic man who can't wait to save money on a free live-in maid and caretaker.

When it comes to choosing any partner (male or female) for life, it's important to slow down. Resist the love-bombing of toxic people and evaluate whether this is a healthy partner or a hindrance to your freedom and joy.

What “Wife Material” Means for The High-Quality Man

As you’ve learned, when certain men share exactly what makes a woman wife material, it’s always focused on what the woman can do *for* him rather than who she actually is – whether it be cooking, cleaning, putting her needs aside selflessly for him, and sacrificing her entire life to cater to him and support his dreams and raise their kids, the term “wife material” has become seriously misused to encourage self-sacrifice in women rather than true partnership. Unless you’re watching an episode from *Bridgerton*, rarely will you hear a low-quality man say, “I knew she was my wife not only because she was breathtakingly beautiful, she was also the most intelligent woman I had ever met and my best friend,” or, “Her dreams and ambitions inspired me to be a better, more determined man” or even, “She was so quick-witted and kept me on my toes, I knew life with her would always be an adventure.” Only high-quality men profess such admiration. Here are the five things that *actually* make a woman “wife” material – that only high-quality men will understand.

Intelligence and wit. In any relationship, both physical and mental attraction are important. One without the other leaves the romance flat. Women (and people in general) who are mentally stimulating and intellectually adept make life more exciting. It is boring to be with a partner who does not think as deeply as you do or doesn’t challenge you in any way. If you can’t have captivating conversations or meaningful late-night talks with your life-long partner, whether you’re a man or woman, what exactly are you doing? If you can’t

banter with your spouse in a light-hearted yet clever way that always ends in laughter, where's the fun in that? The couple that playfully banters and laughs together often thrive together.

Kindness moderated by boundaries and standards. A woman who is kind is not someone who is necessarily a people-pleaser. Feisty women with boundaries and who stand up for themselves are the sexiest, and high-quality men know that. This mix of genuine kindness and ferocious dignity is what builds true emotional attraction. In her ferocity, a high-quality man sees and appreciates that this is a woman who has standards and core values she lives up to and believes in. This makes her an incredible long-term partner in his eyes because she has integrity, and she respects and values herself. He knows she is choosing him not because she "has" to and will put up with anything, because she wants marriage with just any man and is willing to settle – it is because he met her high standards, and this gives him a sense of pride.

Ambition. A partner who has her own dreams and life outside of a marriage and partnership is inevitably someone who excels at her relationships precisely because she doesn't make it her main focus. She doesn't rely solely on her partner for validation or fulfillment, and her husband usually has to seek her out and "chase" her to get her attention, because she's busy focused on her own goals. Marriages where a man loves a woman a little bit more than she loves him tend to thrive exactly for that reason. High-quality men are the ones who deeply admire and respect a woman's strengths, gifts, talents, and drive (without exploiting her, and still remaining generous themselves), and they love cheering her on and supporting her.

A sense of adventure and boldness. There's a reason why the old adage "Men love crazy women" exists. It's true, in a way. Women who are bold and adventurous think outside of the box and who are just a little more sassy and "unhinged" than the rest always stand out. They are vibrant and unique, and bring joy and enthusiasm into every room they walk in. Plus, you'd never want to cross them, and they keep you on your toes. They love introducing new ideas, travel plans, ventures into the mix. They're the ones suggesting a spontaneous trip to Paris, dancing with you until 4 a.m. in a nightclub and the ones who are snuggling up to you for a movie marathon: they can do all three. Life with them is just a tad unpredictable, and that's just the right amount of romance and thrill that is needed to keep the spark in a marriage alive.

Honesty, not unconditional love. Many people assume marriage best thrives on unconditional love. But a woman who easily forgives and forgets, or one who doesn't expect anything out of you is not the one you want to spend the rest of your life with. A woman who holds you accountable for being a better man and inspires to be the highest version of yourself is. If you can't take in healthy feedback, you shouldn't be in a marriage. Healthy marriages thrive on open communication, mutual respect, and transparency – not coddling and stagnancy, and high-quality men know this, which is why they go out of their way to fulfill the desires of the women they most desire. They seek out women who they know will hold them accountable for being the best version of themselves, and they strive to be the best partner they can to the women they love. That's what makes *them* "husband material."

Why Women Leave Marriages (And Signs You Should Leave Yours)

Anyone can destroy a marriage or relationship, whether you're a man or woman. However, it seems that married women are increasingly becoming frustrated with the way their husbands have treated them and are initiating divorce more often. Here are six circumstances when women feel their marriages have been destroyed and when they feel ready to leave.

Weaponized Incompetence.

One of the top complaints about men in marriage from women remains the unequal division of labor in the home, which studies indicate tends to burden women with more of the household and domestic responsibilities and childrearing responsibilities, even if women are the ones who are making significant financial contributions to the household. In fact, research shows us that women are earning more yet are still expected to take up most of the domestic labor in addition

to their career responsibilities. Weaponized incompetence is the act of pretending you are unable to perform a task, so you won't be asked to do it. For example, spouses who pretend they don't know how to "handle the baby" or pick up groceries so they can engage in leisurely activities and leave all childrearing or shopping responsibilities to the mother are exercising weaponized incompetence. Women are sharing that they are dissatisfied with this tactic, as it feels like having to take care of an additional child in the home even though their husband is a grown adult.

Abandoning their partners in times of crisis or need.

Research indicates that men are more likely than women to abandon their partners when they are critically ill or facing life-threatening conditions. This phenomenon is so pervasive that some medical professionals report warning women of this risk of being abandoned when they are diagnosed. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be by their partner's side and tend to be compelled to care for their partners in times of illness, possibly also due to the way they are socialized to be caretakers.

Emotionally or even physically cheating.

Cheating isn't just physical, it can be emotional too. Whether it's flirting excessively at work, having "close" and shady friendships with the opposite sex, sliding into the direct messages of women on social media, or following lewd accounts, men can cheat even when they're not physically engaging in an affair. Such transgressions and violations may

not be as explicit as a full-fledged affair, but they are deeply harmful and disrespectful. In addition, women have reported being cheated on whether it's after bearing multiple children, building up their husband's businesses, or going overboard to maintain a perfect physique. It seems there is nothing to be done to prevent a man's disloyalty: if they want to cheat, they will, regardless of how much their wives do for them.

Lack of appreciation and devaluation.

The best husbands are the ones who shower their wives with appreciation, kindness, and loving words of affirmation every day of the marriage, keeping the spark alive. Unfortunately, for many women in marriages today, such verbal reassurance and emotional attentiveness are lacking, and women feel like they are begging for the bare minimum, which may be why so more women than men tend to initiate and be the ones to file for divorce.

Going 50/50 in a world that isn't equal.

Piggybacking off the point about weaponized incompetence, women aren't truly "equal" yet in a world that diminishes them and subjects them to double standards and a disproportionately larger risk of harm, discrimination, and violence. Yet despite not being a traditional "provider" man, many husbands are still demanding that women be both "traditional" and "modern," by going 50/50 financially and doing all the housework and childcare. If we look at this carefully, it looks like some men expect women, the oppressed sex, to do even *more* labor for them despite the fact that men have

more access and privilege to opportunities and resources on average!

Not supporting their partner's success.

As women move up the corporate ladder in a patriarchal society and fight against structural inequalities, they are reporting backlash from the men they date. Paradoxically, even though their husbands and boyfriends might still expect to leech off their resources, they tend to be envious and threatened by successful women, according to a wealth of research, as you'll learn in a later chapter. It appears the pool of high-quality men who support a woman's success while still being fair to the inequalities she faces in society is quite rare these days, and there's a reason why movies like *Fair Play* that comment on this double standard are so popular – they represent women's lived experiences quite accurately. If you're thinking of getting married, make sure to listen to the stories of women who've experienced the struggles, who understand the risks, and ask yourself whether the costs of being married outweigh the benefits when choosing your spouse.

Women Have Been Speaking Out About Their Toxic Marriages More Than Ever

Many of us are lucky as we live in a society that still allows women to speak up regarding the violations they endure in their marriages. Sadly, not every woman has this privilege, so we should take the time to listen to what women in marriages are telling us. Recently, a woman on TikTok asked other women whether living with men would be something she could look forward to in her life. Amidst over eight thousand comments, all the top and most endorsed comments overwhelmingly said, “Absolutely not!” But the most surprising part of this? Many of the commenters saying “No” were none other than currently married women themselves! See below for some of what married women had to say about marriage and cohabiting with men below.

“Happily married here. And I say this without weirdness — but if he dies first (and he knows this) — I will not do it again.”

“Absolutely not!!! No! Partnership can be lovely but I would strongly recommend keeping your own personal space and keeping your finances separate.”

“He needs to be incredibly amazing, loves you more than you love him and always wants to make you happy... other than that it’s a hard NO.”

“I love my husband with my whole heart but he will be the last man in my life.”

“I’m not joking when I say every friend of mine that is married, even “happily” says they would NEVER do it again.”

“No! Don’t do it. Stay single and childless. Enjoy your life and financial freedom.”

“NOPE!!! [I am] living alone for the first time ever. The peace

is glorious.”

“Not worth it. I love my husband but I wish we could afford separate residences.”

“12 years into marriage and I’d NEVER do it again. I’m not unhappy in the relationship but [please] leave my house.”

“At the beginning of my relationship, I would have said “Yes!! It’s the best.” Now 10 years in, I say “Keep everything separate. Do not live with a man no matter how in love you think you are.”

“Getting married was single worst decision of my lifetime, by a landslide. Totally obliterated my life beyond repair.”

“No. A great handyman that comes and fixes things and you give him money and he leaves is top-tier.”

Other commenters who were also previously married jumped in with agreement, stating that they felt more peace living alone than they ever did cohabiting with a man or being married. Some commenters advised the TikToker to get separate residences and keep finances separate. A few said they loved their husband and enjoyed living with him but would never marry again if it had to be with a different man, reflecting the current state of the dating pool.

It is clear women on average have not been having a good time in marriage or cohabitation, likely due to the disparity in the emotional and domestic labor they are expected to provide in marriage. As you learned, many studies that women fare worse on average in marriage than men, often becoming more psychologically distressed and not happier or healthier as the marriage continues, contrary to popular myth. Social media has allowed us to peer through the veil and hear married women share their stories fearlessly to help other women prevent the same mistakes. The lesson here? Marry a high quality man if you do want to marry and don’t settle for

less. Many women are much happier single than in a toxic or incompatible relationship. Otherwise, you're far better off sticking to your standards and living peacefully on your own or in separate residences from your partner until you're absolutely certain this is the person you want to spend the rest of your life with.

What Makes A Man Husband Material

So we know the risks of getting married to the wrong man far outweigh the benefits. But what if marriage is a goal of yours and you want to find the right husband? What actually makes a man husband or boyfriend material? These four traits are astoundingly rare, yet these are exactly the traits you want to look for if you're looking for a high-quality man.



A genuine provider mindset that stems from an authentic desire to see you happy, rather than love bombing or entitlement.

There's nothing sexier than a guy who says, "I've got this," when it comes to paying the bill, or offering a solution to your problems, from a place of genuine generosity and wanting to make his girlfriend or wife happy, rather than to love bomb you or due to a sense of, "You owe me." In fact, high-quality men would be ashamed *not* to give to the women they're courting, and often practice this provider mindset throughout marriage. ***This is not just about money or materialism: genuine generosity can signal whether a man will be emotionally stingy in the relationship.*** The entitled man who practices a "50-50" mindset pays for dinner or romances a woman expecting sex in return (this type of man is the real "gold digger" of society, given that we live in a patriarchal one where women take a risk any time they go out on a date) has skewed values, while the genuinely generous man can't wait to see you enjoying yourself as he romances you. When you're with an authentically generous man, you'll never have to see the bill and you'll never have to worry about small inconveniences.

They anticipate your problems even before you've thought about how to solve them. If you tell a generous man that you're having trouble starting your car, they're already on their way to you as your special form of Triple A. If you tell them you're sick, they're already having everything you need delivered to you without you asking. This generosity extends to how he treats you emotionally too: men who are authentically generous are giving in other aspects of their lives, affectionate, attentive, good in bed, and they make the

best fathers.

He is laser-focused on you in healthy ways, and his loyalty is driven by who he is, not a lack of options.

The high-quality man is not a man without options – he often has it in spades. The difference is, unlike a low-quality man, he’s not chasing after validation outside of the relationship nor does he indulge in having a wandering eye, because he already knows his wife or girlfriend is the one for him and appreciates how irreplaceable and remarkable you are. Yet it’s not just his love for you that prevents him from cheating – it’s his core character as a trustworthy man. He simply doesn’t care to cheat on anyone or hurt *anyone*. He respects women on a deep level and does not engage in activities that may seem shady, such as emotional affairs, social media indiscretions, “girl best friends,” flirtations, or attempts to make you jealous. He cares about what makes you comfortable and will opt out of interactions he senses you feel tense about. He will never gaslight or invalidate you about your gut instincts, anxiety, or emotions in general. He cherishes your beauty, humor, intelligence, multifacetedness, and uniqueness. To him, his wife or girlfriend is his “number one,” and he’s never going to make you compete or compare. Low-quality men fail to appreciate magnificent women; high-quality men are their biggest fans.

Curiosity about what sparks joy in you and support of your dreams and interests.

The most insecure, low-quality, underachieving men are often the ones professing, “I don’t care about a woman’s achievements,” loudly and proudly because they know the women they date easily surpass them in success and they don’t want to feel emasculated. A curious man is a deeply interested and thoughtful man, one who carefully takes the time to get to know your passions, ambitions, goals, hobbies, interests, personality, likes, dislikes – not to use that information against you, but to better understand how to bring greater joy into your life. They give you healthy praise about your achievements and demonstrate genuine awe and admiration of your talents and strengths. They are your biggest cheerleader, and that is exactly how a loving husband should be. Celebrating that new promotion? They’ll take you out to dinner to celebrate or bring you flowers. They’ll plan thoughtful gifts and gestures based on your interests and hobbies. Told them you love running outdoors, but can’t stand the heat? They’ve already packed a backpack filled with all the essentials for your next morning run. High-quality men take in what you tell them carefully, and they actually apply it to strengthen the relationship and uplift you on a consistent basis.

Empathy, integrity, and open communication.

Society often tells women to communicate openly about their needs, but it never takes into consideration that many women often over-communicate with their husbands and boyfriends,

often to no avail. That's because a man doesn't listen to words, he listens to actions. With a high-quality man, there will never be the need to over-explain because he already understands immediately what needs to be done to fix any problem, being the natural problem-solver that he is. In fact, he doesn't create problems in the first place to have to discuss because he has integrity and acts with good character. A man who is open and empathic with just the right amount of tact is a special unicorn. He is consistently loving and respectful beyond the honeymoon stage of the relationship. He cares about your feelings and knows how to treat you well even during times of potential conflict.

He is open to talking things out rather than letting things fester; he is emotionally intelligent and mature. His words match his actions, and he never becomes a different person just because he didn't get what he wanted; his dignity and integrity remain intact. His communication never veers on cruelty, contempt, or a need to downplay or diminish you – he anticipates what will hurt you and goes out of his way to avoid it. His ego is not easily bruised by healthy feedback and thus he does not lash out when he is presented with being held accountable. He is willing to look at his own flaws and shortcomings honestly and with a willingness to always become a higher version of himself. This is a man who holds himself accountable for being a better man, even when he is already the best of the best.

“Crazy” Women Aren’t Always Crazy – Sometimes, They’re Gaslit

We are going to tell you a secret: in order to find the right man, or to even find yourself, you have to be willing to be seen as “crazy” to the wrong people. For centuries, women have been gaslit into believing they are “hysterical,” “emotional,” “crazy” and “needy” for having basic needs. That is why whenever you hear a man prematurely call his ex crazy, you have to ask yourself, “Was she really crazy or was she driven there? Was she always reactive or did he poke and prod at her a million times before she finally reacted in a valid way to a pattern of outrageous behavior?”

While it’s true that some women may have emotional regulation issues, most of the time, when a man calls a woman “crazy,” “mean,” “domineering,” “confrontational,” what he really means is, “She had basic boundaries and stood up for herself assertively.” A high quality man knows the difference between someone who is actually emotionally unstable and a woman who is simply acquainted with her rights.

These specific so-called “crazy women” are usually secure

women. They are secure in their boundaries and their standards, their expectations, and their self-respect. They stand up for themselves when they're mistreated and know how to align and enforce their boundaries with their actions.

So what is it about an assertive woman, a “mean” woman as a low quality man may call her, that attracts high quality men? And why aren’t the “cool girl” PickMes who stay silent about their needs ever chosen by this type of man? Here are four secrets you should know about men in general in dating and how to hold tight to your standards to only invite high quality men into your dating life.



Men love and get obsessed with so-called "mean" otherwise known as assertive women and high quality men are especially attracted to these women. Low quality men take advantage of the "nice girls."

You may think being a pick-me woman and being overly nice and spoiling a man will win him over, but the truth is that men in general whether high quality or low quality get addicted to chasing women who reject them. They want validation and approval from the woman who doesn't give this to them that easily. Deep down they get turned on by a woman with high standards, airtight boundaries, and a woman who doesn't think they're shit. They get a hard-on for a woman who is hard to please. They may complain about these women and deny it with fury all they want, but all you have to do is observe how they exploit and use the women who bend over backwards for them and bend the knee for the women who put them in their place. These women value themselves, take pride in themselves, and never sacrifice their self-respect settling for crumbs.

Toxic men especially take for granted the women who care about them because they believe you'll always be around; they pursue and compete for the women who date other men (or at the very least seem to have options). If you don't believe me, look at any chat history of a man you have ever ignored – they'll be double texting and triple texting you trying to regain your attention and fearing that you've moved on. **This isn't to say you should be actually mean to anyone – it's just to remind you that you need to stop wasting all that effort centering men.** Don't spoil him, don't talk to him, and don't

entertain him unless he's benefiting you. Be authentically so "into" your life that you are no longer into any man who doesn't go out of his way to please you. Chances are, he's busy chasing a woman who gives no fucks. Now get busy chasing your dream life and only settle for a dream partner who will treat you right.

Men can and will spend money on the things that matter to them. Don't waste time with a man who's not generous or romantic.

If he's not taking you out to nice and meaningful dates, or being thoughtful about what you would like, he's not valuing you the way you deserve to be valued. "But I am a feminist and can hold my own!" you might say. A real feminist knows the world hasn't achieved equality yet, so trying to impose "equality" on unequal circumstances only leads to more adversity for you. High-quality men are more than happy to go out of their way to please and impress women they're interested in, so you should never feel like you need to settle and play the "cool girl" who is low-maintenance and "easy" to date. With all the burdens, inequality, and safety issues women confront even going on a date with a man who might assault or murder her, why should you settle for less? A woman who is used to being taken out and properly "courted" will feel a natural "ick" toward any man who approaches her and doesn't have some sort of solid and romantic date plan. Some women may think that going 50-50 is "equality," but a man who's okay with not impressing you from the beginning isn't going to try to impress you down the road either and is

likely to be emotionally stingy.

Set the standard early on for how you want to be treated and deserve to be treated. At the very least, even if the man turns out to be toxic, you're not going to be wasting your time and resources on someone who can't even meet the bare minimum. I've known men who have taken me out to fancy romantic restaurants who I found out later took other women to free museums or "walk" dates because they felt they could get away with it with those women (*what the hell even is a walk date? Get a dog*). One of these sordid players called me his "favorite." Cue major ick. But that kind of scenario opens your eyes to how men know very well how to treat a woman right – some just choose not to do so at all, or only do it for certain women. Remember: some men date multiple women at a time and will be looking for a way to do it cheaply with women they're not serious about or who they feel they can get away with treating worse – don't ever be that woman. Don't ever settle for coffee or low-effort dates when there's a high-quality man out there who can't wait to spoil you (yes, there are ways to keep yourself safe before meeting someone besides settling for a coffee date: FaceTime and get to know them first before agreeing to a date!). Many women are getting spoiled every day by their partner with amazing dates, gifts, lavish vacations, romantic gestures – you deserve nothing less. If you're afraid of being called "materialistic," ask yourself why you feel you don't deserve to be impressed by the man who supposedly loves you.

Most men in the dating pool are looking to waste your time. So make sure the time you spend on them will be worth it and don't spend time on people who aren't worth it.

The best way to ward off a covert fuckboy? *When he inevitably tells you his love language is physical touch, smile, giggle, bat your eyelashes and tell him your love language is money. Then, measure his running speed as he flees.* Consider this: too many men in the dating world are just hoping to use you for sex and will waste your time, while accusing you of wasting theirs if you don't have sex with them. So why do you feel badly about ensuring they invest in you while they're potentially wasting your time? Men will expect sex regardless of whether or not they take you out to dinner and whether they spend time getting to know you. So, if you're unsure of someone's true intentions, you might as well make sure the dates they take you on and the conversations you have are actually worth your time.

The message you will send to the toxic men in the dating world will be clear through your actions: *I do not accept less. If you're trying to play me, you'll be wasting your own time on your dime while I evaluate you.* Raise your standards and don't allow toxic people in the dating world make you settle for less than the bare minimum. There are high-quality men out there who will show their genuine interest consistently – if you're not dealing with one, protect your singlehood and freedom. Find a man with a genuine provider mindset you're both physically and emotionally attracted to (yes, women are allowed to date hot, physically attractive men without being called “shallow” – if you don't think so, that's because

the media and romance movies have brainwashed you into believing in double standards). Men “protect” their freedom all the time. They explore their options. They prioritize their own happiness in dating. They opt out quickly out of situations that don’t meet their own needs and interests. They look for their physical and emotional “type” to mate with. If you want a high quality man, so should you.

Red Flags You're Dating a Guy With "Mommy Issues"

Another toxic personality type women need to watch out for in dating are unhealed partners with "mommy issues." We often hear people talking about "daddy issues" in women but not much has been said about men with mommy issues. Here are five red flags you're dating a man whose villain origin story — or sassy spoiled man story — began with his issues around his mama that he never bothered to look at or heal closely. There's no shame in having mother wounds — but if you're dealing with a man like this who doesn't hold himself accountable for getting help or healing (or grew up spoiled and coddled) like many women do when confronting their own childhood conditioning, it's time to detach and reading the signs may just help you do so.

He has a shady enmeshment with his mother who takes pride in being a "boy mom" and who is jealous of any woman who comes into the picture.

Creepy territorial mom alert! If you are dating a man whose mother seems to be his shadow and needs to be consulted in every decision he makes, he's probably a mama's boy and has mommy issues. Think Trey and Bunny MacDougal's strange infantilizing relationship in *Sex and the City*. This type of man is likely to have Peter Pan syndrome because he never really grew up, was enabled to have women cater to him and will always choose his mama over his own wife and children, even in matters where it harms his significant other. Watch out. This future mother-in-law comes as a package deal and will forever be competing with you for the title of main woman — gross. Step away from your son, ma'am!

He has issues with entitlement and fails to actually get therapy or self-reflect.

If you're dating a man who expects his girlfriend to be his mother, at his every beck and call laboring for him, he may be a pampered little prince who thinks the world is centered around him, his needs, and protecting his ego, lashing out at anyone who threatens it. He may have grown up praised for breathing and reeks of entitlement — in fact he often expects princess treatment from the women he dates, huffing and puffing often about how women are diabolical and take advantage even though women at large are at greater risk for violence and exploitation in the dating world. His mother told him from a young age that his mediocrity was brilliance and

never gave him consequences for his actions. Maybe even both parents coddled him and made him believe he deserved to have the best woman even if he fell short of being the ideal man. But he was the apple of mama's eye and he expects his next girlfriend to be just like his mother, putting him on a pedestal no matter what he does or says. *Yikes!* Run now and forever protect your peace. Get yourself a high-quality man who treats and spoils you and courts you as you deserve and doesn't use these issues as an excuse not to heal or get therapy.

He has a classic case of Madonna-Whore syndrome.

Perhaps his mother passed down her internalized misogyny to strengthen his already misogynistic attitudes toward women or maybe he puts women on a pedestal in unhealthy ways because he saw his mother as the ultimate pristine "Madonna," (or on the opposite situation, if his mom cheated on his dad or was more sexually open, the "whore") but for whatever reason, he can't seem to get away from the dichotomy that separates a woman's sexuality from her intelligence or worth as a person or come to embrace her multi-facetedness. To him, women fall in two categories: virgin or whore. You'll notice this happening if you guys got wild between the sheets while you were first dating but he suddenly sexually withdrew when you became his girlfriend or wife — he cannot simultaneously respect you and have sexual attraction to you as wife and mother of his children because it's a projection of his own mommy issues. He wants to maintain the image of you as "pure" when you're in a commitment. It's a weird phenomenon but it's common

among guys like these and sometimes it stems from mommy issues too.

He expects you to overly nurture and reassure him and cater to his every need.

If he had an absent mother or even an overly involved mother, he wants you to fulfill the mother role and unjustly puts that responsibility on you to fulfill the needs only a nurturing parent can. He demands excessive reassurance and may be possessive and controlling of your time and energy, asking you to take time and energy away from your goals and friendships to take care of him emotionally or even help him with his career and finances. He wants you to cook and clean for him and do his laundry like his mama. Tell him to get a maid, therapist, and some independence pronto. Women do enough labor in this world without sacrificing their dreams to cater to a man that society has already set up with plenty of privileges. Whether this stems from mommy issues, daddy issues, or narcissistic traits, the advice here is still the same: see it as a red flag to trust your instincts, detach from the relationship and nurture yourself by enforcing healthy boundaries.

He has sexist attitudes and resentment toward women.

This one is less mommy issues and more deep narcissism and misogyny issues, but it may also be strengthened by his own misdirected rage at his mother which may not even be warranted in some cases. Perhaps he was abandoned by a deadbeat dad and unfairly blamed this on the mother that actually stayed and cared for him and resented being dependent on a woman for survival, growing up to despise women and take out his insecurities on them. Or maybe he felt like his mother betrayed his father in some way and now he projects that distrust into every woman he meets rather than actually getting help for his issues. Whatever the case may be, it's not your burden to bear or problem to solve. Women get therapy all the time to heal these wounds — men can do it too.

Becoming An Empowered Single Woman

The stigma of being a single woman has prevented women from raising their standards in dating and relationships. One of the most powerful ways to combat the toxic conditioning that leaves us settling for crumbs is to harness the empowerment and freedom singlehood provides so we don't settle for less just to settle down. In this chapter, we'll interrogate the stereotypes, myths, and falsehoods about what it means to be single as a woman in an unfiltered way that is also supported by research and many experts. If you decide to opt out of dating and relationships at any point, know that you are in good company. In the next chapter, you will also hear the voices of psychiatrists and therapists on the benefits of being single as well as childfree if that is part of your journey as well.

Why You're Actually Single As A Woman

There are three main reasons you are single if you're a woman, and they're not what you think.

You're out of the league of many people in the current dating pool.

Are we still gaslighting women into believing that there's something wrong with *them* if they haven't found their match, given how many amazing women have already opted out of dating altogether because of the quality of the current dating pool? Let's take it a step further. Consider the most famous celebrities you know who are single — specifically women. Looks? Drop dead gorgeous. Net worth? Multimillionaire status. Talents? Top tier and otherworldly. Personality? Well, depending on the celebrity we are talking about, usually captivating enough to charm an entire worldwide audience. It's clear being single as a woman isn't an indication of what you bring to the table, but rather what is being offered at the table.

Think also about stars who've been mistreated by the men they've dated. It includes the likes of Britney Spears (even at the height of her stardom and youth, she claimed she was cheated on by Justin Timberlake, according to her memoir), Shakira, Gwen Stefani, Sandra Bullock (Jesse James was allegedly cheating on her during the time she was thanking him in her speech after winning an Oscar, and James later admitted he cheated in part due to his ego, possibly feeling threatened by her), Beyonce (who was cheated on multiple times by her husband Jay Z), Halle Berry, Jennifer Lopez, Scarlett Johansson (allegedly), and many more. Many of the most beautiful and successful women in the world are either

single by choice or at the very least have often been mistreated by men of lower status than them who sought to “humble” them. Do you really think the average man who grows up in a misogynistic society doesn’t feel threatened by a woman who outearns him or surpasses his success and has a certain level of beauty and personality that grabs more positive attention than he does? As you learned, a wealth of research indicates otherwise.

Have you ever considered that you’re single *not* because there’s anything wrong with you, but because of everything that is *right* with you? While you may not be a celebrity, the same principle still applies. The more positive qualities and assets you have, the more selective you often have to be in your choice of partner because your dating pool of eligible bachelors who are actually compatible with you and worthy of you significantly shrinks. If you’re an attractive, empathic, intelligent, personable, and successful woman who possesses many positive qualities, you might think that’s an asset to the dating world and people often ask you curiously why you’re single.

Let’s be real: it’s very easy for the average man to find an amazing or at least decent woman with empathy in the dating world – yet we see that thousands of women who are leaving the dating world and opting out of romance and marriage altogether en masse due to the quality of men they are running into. Powerful women are shortchanged and cheated on every day by men they surpass in many aspects. Singlehood offers an escape from being betrayed or violated by someone you had to settle for or wasn’t even compatible with in the first place: instead of constantly settling down with users and cheaters in the dating pool who are threatened by your mere existence

like many women in the world including the most powerful women still are and men who seek to “humble” you out of envy once they have you, you’re not so easily impressed. You get to make your own rules and only settle for a partner who is truly worthy of you, without trying to shrink yourself or who you are.

You’re discerning and intelligent.

Unlike the average person who is ready to risk their entire life-course trajectory just to engage in a relationship, you’re actually smart enough to understand the costs of a relationship with a man and are familiar with the red flags of toxic behavior. You are well read on the research that shows that married women fare worse than married men on average especially when it comes to mental health and being more psychologically distressed, and the studies on how single, childfree women can be just as happy, healthy, and wealthy – in some cases, even moreso, than their married counterparts. You’ve heard the thousands of stories from currently married women who say they would never get married again — and you actually listen closely!

You know that in entering marriage, most women tend to take up more of the burdens of domestic labor, parenting and childrearing, and emotional labor, and sometimes even financial labor. Unless they are with a man with a natural and genuine provider mentality, the costs of marriage for women are rarely outweighed by the benefits. You know that childrearing with the wrong man would not just rob you of your own life, it would harm the way your child grows up and his or her beliefs about relationships. Some women enter marriage with a sign of relief that they’re finally married, even if it’s to a subpar man who barely meets their needs or

fulfills their true desires, just so they can say to the world, “I am married.” Smart women breathe a sigh of relief they’re not with the wrong man and they’re not tied down forever to someone who undervalues them. Remember: genuinely happy couples don’t constantly talk about their marital status or use it to “look down” on single people, especially on single women who are thriving in their lives.

You’re selective and won’t settle for just anyone just to settle down.

You’re single because you know your worth. You’ve de-programmed society’s centering of men and prioritized your needs, your desires, your goals, your authentic self, your peace, your joy, and you have no plans on sacrificing those just to please a partner who doesn’t please you. You may have already had plenty of experience to understand what you truly want from a partner. Others may call you picky and choosy, but they’re not the ones who have to live with your choices or the consequences of your decisions. *You* are, so pick wisely. You know that the energy you spend on building up a bare minimum man would be better off spent pursuing your goals, skyrocketing in your career, building your friendships, and *actually* finding healthy love you are worthy of. You know that your true love and soulmate isn’t going to be a man who needs to be chased down or pleaded with. You’re not waiting for the one — you’re living your life and you’re killing it. If “the one” so happens to come around, he has to be someone who adds value to your already flourishing life.

Part III: Healing from Toxic Love and Relationships

“Winning” A Break-Up With A Narcissist

If you're an empathic survivor of a narcissist or toxic person, it's likely you don't want to care at all about “winning.” You've just survived a war zone and now just want to survive the aftermath. It's true that the ultimate focus *should* be on healing. But what if you're in a state of learned helplessness where you can barely motivate yourself to get out of bed, let alone take the steps to process what you've just been through? Sometimes survivors need the motivation to begin to heal – and sometimes, counterintuitively enough, embracing all your taboo emotions and engaging in actions you otherwise might not is actually what gets you there in meaningful ways. Forget everything society has taught you so far about the “right” way to heal and what you should feel. Set aside the harmful idea that healing can only be done through forgiving,

forgetting, and spiritually bypassing the trauma. Forego the idea that healing can never be joyful and must always be brutal. Put that on pause. We'll get back to that later. *Instead, ask yourself: why should narcissists get to have all the fun?* Here's how you can “win” the break-up with a narcissist.

Gamify your healing milestones.

One powerful way to get yourself motivated to heal is by “gamifying” your goals. For example, clinical trials have shown that programs that “gamify” rehabilitation goals allow people to effectively transition into self-care after events that have affected their well-being. You can approach your healing by setting up smaller goals that you can reach before you achieve the bigger ones. Treat it like a game. Pair the positive habits you want to reinforce with rewards and pleasure that will motivate you each time you engage in this behavior – this is classical conditioning at its finest.

This presents a brilliant framework for how to gamefully live our lives – by setting up a reward system so that we feel rewarded and “score points” figuratively speaking every time we use our strengths and abilities to achieve something, no matter how big or small. For example, a smaller goal of healing may be going for a 15-minute walk in the morning. A bigger goal may be starting a gym routine. You'll eventually level up to that goal – but tackle the smaller ones first.

Exercise can be a vital part of recovery as it has the power to encourage neurogenesis (the birth of new neurons) in the brain – a vital aspect of healing the traumatized brain, where there tends to be neural atrophy. Every time you take

that morning walk (or yoga session or meditation), reward yourself with something, like a delicious cup of your favorite coffee, an extra snuggle session with your pet, or watching another episode of your favorite television show. You can also share your progress with others too; for example, by texting a friend a picture from your daily run – studies reveal that social reinforcement can help guide our reward system to work for us. As you get comfortable, gradually escalate – the 15-minute walk may become a 20-minute run, or an hour-long hike. Soon, your healing milestone will become a radical and ingrained part of your well-being regimen.

Replace self-sabotaging behaviors with a level-up and “glow up” activity.

Piggybacking off this, ensure that you are taking an inventory of the habits that harm you. The narcissist’s verbal and psychological abuse has likely trained you to engage in self-sabotage and self-harm, causing you to internalize false beliefs about your worthiness. One of the best ways to counter these beliefs is through small actions that communicate to yourself that you are worthy of being treated better. Fuel whatever anger you have toward the ways they degraded you into your “glow up” and “level up” goals. If you want to kick butt at school or work, now is the perfect time to channel your anger toward the narcissist into productive outlets. If you want a “revenge glow-up,” this is the perfect opportunity to sculpt both your brain and your body in ways you find most empowering and confidence-inducing for you. Replace self-sabotage with micro-habits that allow you to flourish.

Do you find yourself ruminating the first moment you wake up in the morning? Rumination can be a normal part of the healing journey but incorporating a breathing exercise (such as this popular Wim Hof breathing technique) when you wake up may help you to be more mindful and prepare you for your day so you are less anxious. Are you checking social media or your phone to see if the narcissist has tried to contact you? Practice putting your phone on airplane mode during times you don't need it and every time you have an urge to do anything related to the narcissist, use your computer instead to focus on the work you do need to do. Install browser extensions like *StayFree* to prevent social media websites from being accessible – this will enhance your productivity rather than placing your focus elsewhere.

Do you find yourself criticizing yourself whenever you look in the mirror? Use that opportunity to compliment yourself, provide extra incentive toward any fitness goals you have, or wear your favorite outfit and take a photo to tap into that “glow-up” energy. Any time you're tempted to romanticize the narcissist in your mind or engage in a harmful, addictive activity to numb your emotions (like drinking or smoking), replace it with an activity that benefits your well-being, health and fitness (it could be as intensive as going to the gym or as low-effort as dancing in your room, or grabbing a green juice). Over time, replacing your self-sabotaging behaviors with these micro-habits will allow you to flourish. It will also communicate to your subconscious that you feel worthy and deserving of self-care rather than punishment.

Turn the tables on the “energy exchange” that has benefited the narcissist throughout the relationship. Visualize connecting your joy with their karma so that you’re more inclined to pursue your happiness.

Remember how each time the narcissist insulted you or demeaned you, you felt deflated and *they* became more energetic and vibrant? You may have been the optimistic person in the beginning of the relationship – but you found your energy drained, time and time again until the narcissist was the one who stole your energy and used it to elevate themselves. Now it’s time to turn the tables – energetically speaking. Imagine that every time you experience happiness, a narcissist loses their wings (not that they ever had them in the first place).

Our brains can be wired toward seeking pleasure or avoiding pain: use this to your advantage. If you’re in the stage of your healing journey where you feel unmotivated, visualize that each time you feel joy or help others, it depletes the narcissist in your life of energy and takes away their power. This is not about wishing ill on anyone. It’s simply capitalizing on the universal truth that when we’re happy, narcissists inevitably lose their power. This will motivate you to find more opportunities to experience joy – to laugh, connect with others, enjoy nature, set up more stringent No Contact protocols, and kick some extra butt on that project. It will also make you more motivated to steer away from self-sabotaging behaviors if you imagine that each time you self-destruct or self-sabotage, this only gives them a boost of energy. Visualize this whenever you’re tempted to check up on the narcissist on social media or skip your daily self-care routine.

It will remind you that the benefit comes from upleveling yourself and not remaining stagnant in that old energy.

Wait, what? Isn't healing all about never thinking of revenge or karma ever? We agree that your energy is usually best spent on your own healing and not on seeking revenge in the conventional sense. However, success and leveling up tends to be the best “revenge” there is. The truth of the matter is, when someone has violated you, it's very common to feel the need for justice. To deny this is to deny the multifaceted humanity of a trauma survivor – and also to abandon how these emotions can actually serve you in your healing when used productively. By the time you've leveled up so hard that the narcissist's energy can no longer even touch you, you won't even care to think about them. But it takes some work to get there. There are times we need that extra motivation to keep going. Make your thirst for revenge, if any, functional and beneficial to you, your goals, and the greater good.

Build an unbreakable self-concept.

When survivors are healing from narcissistic abuse, they often worry that *they* themselves are a narcissist. They fear behaviors that are associated with stereotypical tropes about narcissism, even though there's plenty of research revealing that loving oneself and exhibiting healthy pride is quite different from narcissistic traits and behaviors. So, survivors of narcissists do everything possible to humble and shrink themselves. However, that only serves the pathologically envious narcissist who was invested in keeping you down. For the time being, don't worry about being too grandiose or

“full of yourself.” These are false accusations and projections from the narcissist that they used to keep you small. You are not self-centered or selfish for acknowledging your strengths and positive traits. You are embodying the self-concept and power they were afraid you were going to own all along. Every day, make it a daily habit to write down what you like about yourself and the qualities others have given you positive feedback about (both external and internal). At the same time, mentally “devalue” the narcissist by writing down their weaknesses and unsavory qualities, as well as what you won’t miss about them and what you are free to do now that you are out of the toxic relationship. Do not filter yourself – this exercise is to empower you.

You may not be at the part of your journey yet where you are grounded in self-validation. That’s okay. You will get there. For now, it’s time to remind yourself of what makes you unique, special, and irreplaceable – what makes you a loss and what makes being free from the narcissist a gain. An abusive relationship with a narcissist trains you to always compare yourself to others and forget who you are. It’s time to remind yourself that you have no competition. Treat yourself like royalty – someone who should not settle for less. You’ll start to notice that as your self-concept changes, the way you treat yourself transforms too: on a day where you may usually neglect yourself, you find yourself dressing up and going outdoors to enjoy the sunshine; where once you spent hours in bed, you now find yourself making plans. It might feel uncomfortable at first, but eventually you will learn to put yourself on a pedestal and devalue narcissistic people in ways that make them undesirable to you. You will no longer feel the need to have them in your life or crave their validation.

Call back your power through more realistic affirmations.

Spiritual rituals can be a significant way to heal – yet most of the time, rituals that go beyond love and light are rendered taboo. After all, everyone cautions you not to hex an ex; they want you to pray for them over a candlelit vigil. People tell you *never* to talk back and always be the bigger person – rising above is considered energetically superior and “mature,” though the same admonishment is never administered to the perpetrator. Anger is considered practically demonic, especially in women who are socialized to stay quiet as they endure numerous transgressions. In reality, avoidance strategies such as suppressing our anger and authentic emotions worsens our trauma symptoms according to studies.

Empowering affirmations can help stimulate the brain’s reward system and reinforce our positive view of self and core values, cultivating behavioral change– but the best part is, you can customize them to *you* and how you authentically want to feel about yourself and this situation. Affirmations can be a powerful way to call back your power on a daily basis. You don’t have to censor yourself. “I am amazing and irreplaceable. I call back my power and any benefits toxic people received from my energy,” is just as valid as “I am healing more and more every day.” Incorporate both types of affirmations into your recovery routine.

Another affirmation to call back your power could be something like, “Everything that was stolen from me in this toxic relationship returns to me tenfold.” Visualize your power coming back to you, touching every aspect of your life. Daily badass affirmations like these will train your brain over time to expect and identify opportunities to reclaim your power in

real life – whether it’s deciding to pursue career opportunities or taking smaller steps toward healthier eating. Remember, not all of your affirmations need to be strictly “love and light.” You don’t have to engage in anything you’re not comfortable with or anything that isn’t safe for your healing. But there are ways you can use rituals to be a cathartic source of healing that don’t fit the cookie-cutter recipe of kumbaya and forgive and forget. Instead of turning the other cheek, make the narcissists in your life meek by feeding yourself the power toxic people have robbed you of. Words as well as actions hold the power to define yourself and your reality. They can train you to fight back and regain control and mastery over your life. You deserve to be victorious and to be the winner of your life.

Therapies and Tools for Healing

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based treatment for depression and anxiety. CBT uses talk therapy to target negative self-talk, cognitive distortions about ourselves, others, and the world, and also intervenes in harmful behavioral patterns that may stem from those thoughts. In CBT, you can develop healthy belief systems that may have otherwise been interfered with by disturbing or traumatic events. Specialized evidence-based CBT trauma therapies include Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure therapy, both of which have been shown by meta-analyses to be effective for substantially improving PTSD symptoms.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

DBT is an evidence-based treatment created by Dr. Marsha Linehan for vulnerable populations, such as those who are struggling with self-harm. It combines traditional Western methods with Eastern medicine, focusing on mindfulness, distress tolerance, and emotional regulation exercises to help maintain emotional balance. DBT uses a combination of individual therapy sessions, group therapy sessions, and homework exercises to provide key skills and tools that can help someone manage the daily stressors resulting from trauma or emotional vulnerability. Randomized clinical trials indicate DBT can be especially life-saving for those with suicidal ideation, self-harm, and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. DBT can be incredibly effective for survivors of prolonged trauma, including childhood trauma, providing you with the tools to calm your nervous system and increase mindfulness of the present moment.

Eye Movement and Desensitization Therapy (EMDR)

EMDR is a trauma-processing therapy that includes bilateral eye movements or tapping movements as you process traumatic events with the help of a therapist. Developed by Dr. Francine Shapiro, EMDR involves an eight-step process where traumatic memories that are unprocessed and cause triggers for you are tackled without the need for talking in detail about the trauma. According to Shapiro's Adaptive Information Processing Model, traumatic memories are maladaptively stored in the brain without being rationally processed in the prefrontal cortex. The thoughts, behaviors,

and emotions stemming from the event, which may feel disconnected due to the way traumatic memories are stored in the brain, become more integrated in EMDR. EMDR has been shown by randomized clinical trials to be effective for reducing PTSD. EMDR bypasses the “emotional” part of our brain (the amygdala) so our brain can process memories that may otherwise be too overwhelming. In EMDR, people who have experienced traumatic experiences can address the subconscious beliefs that have been deeply rooted inside their nervous system during trauma in safe ways, processing these traumas without as much resistance while instilling healthier beliefs about themselves and the world around them.

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)

When using the Emotional Freedom Technique or EFT tapping, you tap on the 12 meridian points (known as “energy hot spots”) of the body, often using empowering affirmations (e.g. “I am safe now, I am healthy now”), to create more balance in the energy flowing throughout your body. EFT is often called “psychological acupuncture” as it allows you to target these meridian points but without invasive needles, applying pressure to these parts of your energy with your fingertips instead. Emotional freedom technique has been shown across studies to improve physical health as well as emotional well-being.

Meditation and Mindfulness Breathing Exercises

According to research conducted by Harvard professor Sara Lazar and fellow colleagues, daily meditation and mindful breathing exercises can help heal the same parts of the brain that have been affected by trauma, such as the amygdala (the “fear” processing part of our brain which plays a key role in our fight or flight response), the prefrontal cortex (the part of our brain that contributes to executive functioning, decision-making, judgment, planning, concentration, and focus), and the hippocampus (the part of the brain involved in learning and memory). You may enjoy pursuing daily guided meditation, a group meditation class, or specialized breathing exercises such as the famous Wim Hof Method—his methods also combine intensive breathing exercises with cold water therapy, which gives a “reset” to our immune system.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions and Yoga

Research suggests that mindfulness-based interventions and yoga can be helpful in reducing trauma-related symptoms. One of the most popular interventions is the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, a supplementary treatment that combines meditation and yoga to create greater awareness of the present moment, enhance bodily awareness, reduce physical tension through body scans, and regulate the stress response through breath and meditation. MBSR has been shown to be effective for stress management, and researchers note that it targets two important pathways in the brain known as stress resilience pathways. This includes the regulatory pathway, which regulates the “fight

or flight” stress response through prefrontal cortex activity and connectivity, as well as the reactivity pathway, which includes the amygdala and anterior cingulate cortex activity and connectivity where such stress responses originate.

MBSR can enhance activation of the regulatory pathway while decreasing activity in the reactivity pathway, helping you to control the stress response with better emotion regulation. Mindfulness interventions can change the way your brain appraises stress, how you react to it physiologically, and how you cope. Trauma-focused or trauma-sensitive yoga is a yoga practice that can help make yoga a safer, more empowering, and more accessible practice for trauma survivors, allowing them to regain mastery over their bodies when they would otherwise be triggered. Using breath and movement to heal the impact of trauma on the brain, trauma-focused yoga can help soothe your nervous system and enhance focus, concentration, and bodily awareness. Since it often doesn't include hands-on adjustments from instructors, yogis are able to remain in control of their practice, restoring a fulfilling sense of autonomy to their minds and their bodies.

Vagus Nerve Healing

The vagus nerve is one of the main cranial nerves in our bodies, a vital part of our parasympathetic nervous system that helps calm the body after we've experienced the fight or flight response in a stressful event. When the vagal nerve is overstimulated by emotional distress, however, this can lead to health issues. You can help heal the vagus nerve in many ways, including alternate nostril breathing, massaging your ears, humming, box breathing (prolonging your inhales and

exhales for a count of four breaths and holding your breath for a count of four in between), other forms of deep breathing, or exposure to cold water.

Animal-Assisted Interventions and Therapy

Animal-assisted interventions are evidence-based therapeutic treatments that are effective at reducing PTSD symptoms and depression. This can include the use of dogs or horses along with a therapist to help enhance social bonds after trauma and increase interpersonal trust, promoting healthier attachments. As you connect with animals in a safe space, guided by a therapist, you learn more about your unique triggers and find a safe connection and unconditional love. Such interventions can potentially reduce fear, anxiety, and social isolation, as clients are able to communicate and express their emotions with animals in a way that does not require having to speak about their traumas directly. This can promote healing, processing, and the modeling of boundaries, as well as empathy, mutual nurturing, and connection in a low-pressure environment.

Spiritual Healing Modalities

As a supplement to traditional and evidence-based healing modalities, some trauma survivors may find it healing to engage in spiritual practices that help assist in their healing. Every healing journey is different, and if you hold spiritual beliefs that align with these practices, any of the following can be added to your toolbox if you think they can help you.

Reiki Healing

Reiki is an alternative Japanese energy healing method that involves “hands on” healing. Under the guidance of a certified Reiki practitioner, practitioners “transfer” healing energy to their clients throughout the body to help aid in physical or emotional recovery.

Crystal Work

Crystals are said to hold immense power in the spiritual world, containing diverse combinations of minerals that are said to help balance our energies. Different crystals are best suited for specific situations and ailments. As we use crystals in our environment or “transfer” their energy to us, they help with the specific problem we are dealing with. For example, amethyst is said to bring emotional clarity and healing in times of emotional turbulence, as well as protection during times of attack. Rose quartz is great for attracting love and boosting self-love. Carnelian may boost creativity and confidence.

Cord Cutting

Cord-cutting is an energetic ritual used to cut ties with toxic or unhealthy people or past situations, freeing ourselves from harmful attachments. You can perform a cord cutting through meditation or use a guided meditation to help cut cords. Here is a cord-cutting exercise below.

Cord-cutting and Releasing Exercise

After you have worked on healing from your toxic relationship using the evidence-based modalities discussed, you can use this additional ritual to symbolize a final release from your toxic relationship. Write down a list of experiences and emotions you want to release from your last toxic relationship (i.e. “I release the envy they projected on me; I release the trauma bond that keeps me attached to them; I release the limiting beliefs they tried to impose upon me; I release the negative beliefs about love instilled in me from this relationship”). Send all the energy of your emotions from this relationship toward this letter.

Then, light a white candle and use it to burn this list as you affirm, “I release all toxicity and negativity this person brought to me, and only allow for healthy love and miracles to enter my life from now on.” Burn some incense around your candle to shift the energy of the space around it as the letter burns, and imagine that as it burns, the flame is exorcizing all of the toxicity from this relationship to make room for a healthy soulmate to enter. Next, ground yourself in a meditative state. Sit cross-legged on a cushion or a couch. Notice how each part of the cushion or couch supports every part of your body. Breathe in deeply, prolonging your inhale and exhale for at least four breaths. Notice the sounds in the room, the pace of your breathing, and the sound of your heartbeat. Then, close your eyes.

Imagine a white light surrounding you in a circle, protecting you from harm. Another light is attempting to trespass this shield—the aura of the toxic person in your life. Imagine the color of this aura and imagine that both of your auras are

connected by a thick, long rope that seems to bypass the energetic white light surrounding you. This rope symbolizes how the toxic person has kept you bonded to them psychologically and mentally. Imagine that you hold a pair of scissors with the power to cut this rope and detach from this connection. Take another deep breath and imagine how it would feel to cut the rope—how thick the rope would feel and how it would sound as it is being cut, and the movement of your fingers as it clutches the scissors.

Once the rope is finally cut, imagine the aura of the other person suddenly darting back and swiftly leaving the room. Affirm aloud, “I free myself from this toxic bond. I call back my energy, peace, and power from this person. I allow only abundance and healthy love into my life.” The circle of white light continues to protect you, and as you take another deep breath, you open your eyes. Chakra and Aura Cleansing We are said to have seven chakras or energy centers located throughout the body: the crown (top of your head), third eye (between your eyes), throat, heart, solar plexus (above the belly button), sacral chakra (below your belly button), and root chakra (located at the base of your spine). Your aura is your energetic “signature,” your vibration. To help balance the energy of these chakras or do aura cleansing, you can meditate where you imagine a bright white light surrounding you in a bubble of protection, do yoga, burn incense, immerse yourself in nature, work with crystals, or use color therapy that corresponds to each chakra (for example, the root chakra is associated with red, the sacral chakra is associated with orange, and the heart chakra is green).

Grounding Exercise

Sit cross-legged on a couch or cushion. Breathe in deeply for a count of four and then hold your breath for another count of four before you prolong your exhale for a count of six.

Now, notice how each corner of the couch or cushion supports your body, holding it up and keeping your body safe and secure. Slowly identify the colors, scents, and noises in your environment. What are you hearing and seeing? What thoughts are coming to the surface, and what emotions are you experiencing right now? Without judgment, mindfully observe these thoughts and emotions and imagine them like clouds moving in the sky or leaves flowing in the river. Take this time to say aloud anything you are grateful for. Next, scan your body for any tension, starting with the top of your head and down through your face, jaw, neck, arms, chest, stomach, legs, and feet. If you notice any tension in any part of your body, you can choose to breathe deeply, imagining your breath flowing to that part and relieving the tension. Alternatively, you may choose to exaggerate that tension by contracting your muscles in that part of your body and then releasing this contraction every time you feel any tension in that part of your body. Breathe deeply into your diaphragm until you feel sufficiently relaxed.

You May Be Trauma Bonded To Toxic People - How Narcissists Create Powerful Trauma Bonds

Trauma bonding is a powerful, inextricable bond that develops between an abuser and victim due to the presence of danger, betrayal and a power imbalance. Dr. Patrick Carnes also calls it “the betrayal bond.” According to researchers, in order to survive the abusive environment, the trauma bond causes victims to engage in behaviors to appease the abuser in an attempt to avoid further abuse, mistreatment or violence – they may even develop a sense of gratitude for the abuser for being “allowed” to survive. Victims who are trauma bonded may also develop an amplified appreciation for the small rewards doled out in the abuse cycle, what Dr. Joe Carver calls the “small kindness” perception.

Victims who are trauma bonded find themselves biochemically and psychologically tied to the abuser in ways that make it difficult to leave the relationship. Trauma bonding can cause the victim to tolerate mistreatment because they are

so focused on survival and of maintaining the relationship that they feel unable to protect themselves – in fact, some victims who are trauma bonded develop the need to defend and protect their abusers.

It is important to remember that trauma bonding has little to do with the actual merits of the abuser, or how “strong” the victim is. Even the strongest of people can become trauma bonded to an abuser who has subjected them to chronically cruel and callous treatment.

Due to their lack of empathy, and their ability to manipulate, deceive, gaslight and subject their victims to countless mind games, narcissistic and psychopathic individuals specifically create very powerful trauma bonds with their victims. Here are six ways they do so.

Intermittent reinforcement.

One of the most powerful ways narcissistic individuals create trauma bonds is through intermittent reinforcement. This is when they subject you to hot-and-cold behavior to get you fixated on them and seeking their validation. They will intermittently incorporate periods of affection and attention into the abuse cycle. They may love bomb you with excessive contact, attention and affection, only to abruptly withdraw or mistreat you, treating you with cruelty and contempt. This intermittent reinforcement creates a powerful biochemical and psychological addiction to the cycle of abuse, as you work even harder to get the next “fix” or “reward.”

Research by Dr. Helen Fisher shows that people in love, particularly those in adverse-ridden relationships, show

activation in the same areas of the brain's reward system as in people addicted to cocaine and other drugs. When a narcissistic or psychopathic person subjects their victims to a "mean and sweet" cycle of abuse, it can feel akin to a drug addiction. That is why it feels especially painful for victims to detach from their abusers and they experience "withdrawal"-like symptoms and craving from the trauma bond that is created.

Since studies show that dopamine flows more readily in the brain when "rewards" are intermittent and unpredictable, this cements the reward circuits in your brain related to what Fisher calls the "frustration-attraction" experience. As their attention becomes more scarce and more unpredictable as the cycle of abuse continues, so do your frantic attempts to regain the honeymoon stage of the relationship which they first presented you with. Like a gambler at a slot machine, you become trained to continue "playing" their games in hopes of the elusive win.

Manufacturing chaos.

Individuals with narcissistic and psychopathic traits enjoy manufacturing chaos and getting reactions from others. By creating chaos in your life, they monopolize your attention and resources so that you are unable to take care of yourself or tend to your needs.

They may do so by: crazymaking arguments that are instigated out of thin air, inducing sleep deprivation especially before important events, engaging in relentless interrogation and accusations, or making blatantly inappropriate com-

ments followed by gaslighting of your reactions as “crazy” or “oversensitive.”

Such interrogation and destabilizing tactics can be similar to the ones that are used on prisoners of war, according to researcher Albert D. Biderman, who developed a Chart of Coercion to show how these tactics can overlap with the tactics of domestic violence perpetrators.

By manufacturing chaos in your life, narcissistic and psychopathic individuals gain leverage. As you spend most of your time and energy navigating their diversion tactics, defending yourself against their claims and trying to skirt their sabotage, your self-care is depleted and you become too exhausted to fight back as effectively.

The trauma bond becomes even stronger as you subconsciously justify your investment in them as a relationship “worth” fighting for despite all the obstacles they subject you to – this is one of the ways you cope with and survive the tumultuous relationship.

Jealousy induction.

As mentioned previously, studies indicate that narcissistic and psychopathic people both engage in jealousy induction to gain a sense of power and control. Some narcissists and psychopaths also provoke jealousy on purpose to exact revenge, test the relationship, or compensate for low self-esteem depending on the specific subtype of narcissism or psychopathy at play.

By subjecting you to implicit or explicit comparisons, flaunting past partners or potential prospects, or constantly

bringing in others into the dynamic of the relationship, you become trained to “compete” for the narcissist, even if you were the one who was originally less interested in *them*. You also lose a sense of your uniqueness and positive qualities as you become hyperfocused on the love triangles they manufacture and this takes a toll on your self-worth and self-perception over time. The narcissist skews your self-perception so you no longer see yourself and your positive qualities accurately and feel less important and valuable.

As the narcissistic or psychopathic person forces you to compare yourself to others or compete, they create the illusion of false desirability. Your ability to identify their red flags and mistreatment of you becomes diminished as you become conditioned to see the narcissist or psychopath as the “valuable” one – someone you have to “win” over regardless of their heinous transgressions – even if you have more options than they do and surpass them in many aspects. This makes you more trauma bonded to them as you fear the loss of their attention more so than the loss of your own identity and self-confidence.

Identity erosion and distortion.

Narcissistic and psychopathic individuals do not always abuse in a way that is outwardly obvious. That is why they engage in underhanded methods to take control over your mind and erode your sense of self and identity over time. This is a key component of the trauma bond, as researchers note that trauma-bonded victims internalize the perpetrator’s perception of them rather than staying grounded in their own

sense of self. One of these tactics is the method of “distortion” – a way of making you see yourself as the opposite of what you actually are, in an attempt to lower your self-esteem so that you are more compliant and malleable to their advances.

Narcissists will distort your true traits and behaviors to depict you as the opposite of who you are. Ironically, their accusations tend to be a projection of their own behaviors, traits, and character.

You will notice that their accusations contradict the feedback you get from empathic people who have no agenda to gaslight or control you. While others may comment on your kindness, empathy, integrity, intelligence and knowledge, the narcissist may claim you are selfish (especially when you start setting healthy boundaries with them), deceptive, or lacking in some way – all claims that better describe them.

This is a way to isolate you from the healthy and accurate feedback and support they know you have so they can control your self-perception – and better control you.

Imagine the narcissistic individual metaphorically placing a funhouse mirror in front of you to “distort” your true proportions – this is exactly what they are doing when they engage in covert insults or make comparisons to you and something else that represents the opposing qualities of what you actually are. For example, a covert narcissist may do this by commenting on a positive trait you possess by implying you’re the opposite (e.g. “You’re no fun,” or “You’re not very social” when you are in fact outgoing and popular). Or, they may compare you physically or emotionally to someone you could not be more different from to covertly diminish you.

Distortion can happen in a number of ways, but the motive is the same: to destabilize you, plant self-doubt especially

about positive qualities you possess, as well as the positive qualities *others* notice about you and celebrate. This is a way to alienate you even when you are surrounded by support and healthy praise from others.

By alienating you, you become further trauma bonded to the narcissist for comfort and approval as they become your primary source of validation and feedback for your sense of “self.”

Alienation and degradation.

Not only do narcissists isolate you from healthy feedback from others, they alienate you emotionally. They may do this by falsely comparing you to other people, claiming they’ve “never had a problem like this” with anyone else to make you feel defective and separate from others and deserving of their abuse.

By gaslighting you in this manner, they’re able to paradoxically pull you closer to them as you may feel subconsciously conditioned to seek their reassurance after this claim. You may be misled into believing that your reactions to the abuse are the problem, and become further bonded to them in a subconscious effort to validate the fact that you are *not* the problem.

In reality, many people who are closest to the narcissist have been subjected to their manipulative and aggressive ways, but they’d rather gaslight you into believing you’re the only one so they can continue to get away with their abuse.

In saying you are the problem, narcissists can convince you that your perceptions are inaccurate and that you are over-

reacting. However, if you ever talk to any of their other victims, you'll soon find out they follow very similar patterns indicating their lack of empathy, callousness, cruelty, and degradation of others.

Destructive conditioning.

Narcissistic and psychopathic individuals punish you for experiencing joy outside of them. That is why they attempt to pair your joyful moments with insertions of terror, abuse, criticism and minimizing remarks.

They want to destructively condition you to associate the experience of gaining fulfillment and pleasure from sources outside of them with experiencing fear, distress, and their rage.

This is also due to their pathological envy and the sadistic pleasure they derive from attempting to deflate your excitement.

That is why narcissistic and psychopathic individuals are notorious for ruining holidays, special celebrations and birthdays.

Remember: toxic people always feel a compulsive need to destroy beautiful moments – to better isolate you, control you, get you to associate joy with their punishment, and make you dependent on only them for fulfillment.

That is why it is so important to detach from toxic individuals early on, so you have a pathway back to peace. You deserve to hold onto your joy. In your healing journey, after processing some of the trauma (preferably with a trauma-informed mental health professional), you can revisit the

memories where they tried to sabotage you and savor the joy that should have been savored all over again. This time, imagine these joyful moments playing out without their interference. Use this reconditioning of memories to assist in your healing and remind yourself of the pure, unadulterated joy you truly deserved to experience.

If you are in a trauma bond with a narcissist, you are not alone, and support is out there. You must connect to your authentic outrage at being violated and get in touch with the reality of the abuse in order to begin breaking such a bond, but the first step to breaking a trauma bond is to recognize it in the first place.

How to Break Trauma Bonds In Toxic Love With Narcissists

So we know how trauma bonds form, but how do we actually begin breaking them? Here are some methods you can use to give yourself a jumpstart on healing. If you need more extensive insights on trauma bonding, you can find them in my book, *Breaking Trauma Bonds with Narcissists and Psychopaths*.

Get in touch with your authentic outrage and anger at being violated in the first place – and with the reality of the abuse.

The real reason narcissistic and psychopathic individuals are threatened by your anger is because they know what a powerful tool it can be to detach from them. That is why they demonize any valid anger you express toward them to depict you as “unstable” or “bitter,” framing it as you “not letting things go” rather than the more accurate perspective of you having legitimate reactions to their inhumane cruelty. After all, if they didn’t want you to bring up the past, they shouldn’t have repeated it in the first place.

The narcissist has used gaslighting and projection throughout the relationship to subdue and silence your authentic anger toward them because they know if you got in touch with it, you would be more likely to ground yourself in the reality of the abuse that is occurring and be able to leave them with more confidence.

The key to accepting the real anger you feel toward the narcissist isn’t necessarily about confronting them with it, but rather harnessing this anger strategically to detach from them. You can use anger to fuel you toward cutting ties with them, going No Contact, and to stand up for yourself, protect and defend yourself in healthy ways. It can help to keep a list of abusive incidents to document what has occurred so you can validate yourself and connect with the valid anger of what they have subjected you to.

Interrupt your usual patterns and level up.

Trauma bonds cause victims to develop certain patterns – patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that are used to cope with the trauma of the relationship. It's important to begin interrupting these patterns which center the abuser as the focus of your existence and create “periods of peace” away from your abuser so you can learn to live life without them.

One of the most productive ways you can do this is by replacing your usual self-destructive patterns associated with the narcissist with an activity that allows you to “level up” – whether it be an activity serving your your self-care, healing, career goals, mental health, or physical fitness. This has the added benefit of nourishing your well-being over time, heightening your confidence, and reminding you that you do deserve better. It is one of the first steps to creating a life you look forward to living away from the narcissist.

For example, if the narcissist is giving you the silent treatment or devaluing you and you have a pattern of chasing them, use these silent treatments as an opportunity to detach from them and return back to yourself by engaging in a new or old hobby or working toward one of your goals. You can also use this time period to engage in “reality checking” about their abusive patterns. If you have a pattern of always trying to defend yourself or explain yourself in response to their gaslighting, you might start to break that pattern by walking away from arguments before they escalate and spending that time journaling about the incident and how it made you feel. This has the double benefit of resisting their gaslighting attempts.

If you always have a habit of checking up on your abusive partner because you suspect they're being deceptive, you can interrupt that pattern by using that time to engage in some form of self-care that will replenish you (whether it be taking a walk in nature, meditating, yoga, or anything else that centers and grounds you). If you have a pattern of texting them every morning or constantly throughout the day, you might break that pattern by texting them later in the day and using that extra time to jog, read, or connect with a supportive friend. You may also find reading resources on narcissism and visiting online support forums or pages centered around abuse recovery helpful in further grounding yourself in the reality of their manipulation and abuse. These small steps can train you to take the bigger steps to exit the relationship later on when you feel safe and ready to do so.

Take your abuser off the pedestal and “devalue” them accordingly in your mind.

In the beginning, the abuser may have been charming and used tactics such as love bombing—excessive contact, flattery, attention and affection to make you value them in your life. This is because they knew they could not win you over with their authentic self. Likely, they also knew you had more options than them and viewed you as “out of their league.” Many narcissists are attracted to partners they deem “special and unique,” that they can show off like trophies and benefit from being associated with. In fact, this need to associate with “special and unique” people is *literally* part of the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

As the abuse cycle continues, however, the abuser slowly but surely erodes your sense of self-confidence and self-respect through manipulation, degradation and devaluation to maintain control over you and isolate you so you begin to see *them* as the “prize” to be won over. In order to break the trauma bond, you have to break the narcissist’s illusion of false desirability, created by the biochemical and psychological addiction that is created by the abuse cycle. Their abuse has trained you to see yourself as “below” them when in reality you surpass them in many ways. That is why they targeted you in the first place.

Instead of engaging in the self-criticism and self-blame they have conditioned you to engage in, start identifying the negative qualities (both internal and external) that make *them* an undesirable partner for you and for other empathic people. What turns you off about them? What did you initially dislike about their personality, appearance, interests, hobbies and demeanor? What will you *not* miss about the narcissist once they’re gone? What can you do once you’re free of them, that you couldn’t do before? What will you be free to do, feel, and think? How confident will you be? What burdens can you now let go of? What thoughts and triggers will you no longer be haunted by on a daily basis? What special occasions will no longer be sabotaged or tainted by their presence?

Remember, this is an abuser who has violated and betrayed you on many levels – do not agonize over or shy away from being ruthless when thinking about their negative traits and the negative impact their behavior has had on your life. After all, they did not think twice about disparaging you with falsehoods – the least you can do is center yourself in the truth about them. This exercise will help you to see them

accurately rather than through the rose-colored lenses of the love bombing and devaluation cycle. It will ultimately remind you that being free from them is a blessing and will give you more of an incentive to cut ties.

Acknowledge the positive qualities that make you special, unique and irreplaceable – and do more of what the narcissist tried to discourage in you.

As we know, narcissists provoke jealousy on purpose and manufacture love triangles. This gets us to compete or compare and lose sight of what makes us irreplaceable.

The trauma bond convinces you that the narcissist is irreplaceable. The truth is, the narcissist is the one who is replaceable – there are plenty of similar manipulators who all use the same tactics out there and can don a charming false mask for a while, only to reveal their true cold, callous selves.

You, however, are likely an empathic, kind, attractive, talented and supportive person who has the capacity to give healthy love. You have specific traits, internal and external qualities that can't be replicated in anyone else. Get in touch with what makes you irreplaceable on a daily basis and you'll slowly start to recognize that no matter what the narcissist does or doesn't do, they don't get to have access to you, your specific unique qualities, and all the benefits you bring to their life.

As you break the trauma bond, also remember what the narcissist claimed they disliked about you or tried to actively sabotage. Then, in the process of breaking the trauma bond or after you've safely exited the relationship, do more of that. What narcissists claim are your weaknesses are actually your strengths.

These are the same qualities and behaviors they feared in you and tried to discourage because these made you powerful and independent of them. Those were the assets they had to attack and minimize because they knew these made you powerful and independent of them. They disliked your self-confidence? It's because your healthy pride threatened their ability to instill insecurities in you. They didn't want you to pursue higher education or career goals? Your ability to attain knowledge and pursue your dreams made it harder for them to control you. They told you that you don't "let things go"? Your ability to discern patterns and call out abusive behavior threatened their attempts to erode your boundaries. Provided that these qualities and behaviors benefit you and do not cause harm to others, find ways to reclaim them in ways that empowers yourself and others.

Connect with your ego.

It is not empathy, compassion, or forgiveness that breaks the trauma bond with a narcissist. Surprisingly, it is your anger, your ego and pride which have the potential to bring you back into a healthy state of self-defense and break through the mental fog with more clarity and certainty about how unacceptable the abuse you're experiencing is.

The concept of the "ego" has been demonized in spiritual communities, but it is one that can save your life. This is especially true if you are a woman who has been socially conditioned to bask in humility and sacrifice in your relationships. You may have been taught that you shouldn't be "cocky" about yourself or take pride in your appearance or

achievements. However, having a healthy ego is necessary to remembering who you are and what you deserve. Take time every day to connect with your ego and ask how it *really* feels about this relationship and how you feel about being mistreated – not just what your coping mechanisms have taught you to feel.

What you learn may surprise you – you may find yourself hearing an inner voice that expresses disgust and disdain for the abuser, a feeling of, “I can do so much better than this person,” and genuine anger at what you’re being put through. You may find yourself identifying the positive qualities and traits you are proud of which were dismissed or minimized by the abuser. You may even find yourself wanting revenge – this is actually a feeling you can channel into the healthier outlet of leaving the relationship altogether, because we all know the best “revenge” against a narcissist is freeing ourselves from them and becoming even more successful in the aftermath.

That's because the ego has the healthy pride and survival instincts that is required to detach from toxic relationships.

Society may demonize the ego, but suppressing the ego only suppresses your natural defense system against predators. *It's all about using the ego strategically.* Avoid using the ego to exhaust yourself arguing with the narcissist or to excessively prove your worth to them or to participate in their love triangles by trying to compete. Avoid allowing the narcissist to use love bombing to lure your ego back into the relationship. Use your ego to tap back into your natural survival, self-protective instincts and your authentic anger at being violated in order to detach and exit from the relationship instead.

When we have pride in who we are *and* connect to the authentic outrage of being violated, we are more likely to notice the disrespect of their transgressions, cut through the mental fog and resist mistreatment with more clarity and certainty because such an emotional state can put us into self-defense mode. Even when self-love and self-respect have been eroded by the effects of trauma — anger and pride, as well as outrage at having your self-concept belittled — can still kick in to save your life when you need it the most, because the ego *wants* to defend you and protect your rights. Without anger or the ego, many victims of narcissists misuse empathy and compassion to sympathize with and rationalize the narcissist's behavior — or to overexplain themselves and their feelings in hopes that the narcissist will change.

The narcissist or psychopath only uses your empathy against you to exploit you further and to have you stay in the relationship. Instead, the ego helps us use that same energy

to detach from the relationship. When you have enough healthy pride to know, “I am not going to let anyone take the self-concept I’ve created away from me,” abuse is much harder to rationalize and shockingly it’s this emotional state that often helps survivors break for good.

Lean into the disgust, disdain, and naturally intuitive fear you may feel toward your abuser. Recognize that they are missing out on you and you are freed by their absence.

The intuitive fear and natural sense of repulsion you feel toward potential predators and manipulators is something that is discussed in international security expert Gavin de Becker’s book *The Gift of Fear*. From a young age, women especially are conditioned to excise this natural defense mechanism from their survival toolkit for the sake of social conditioning. They are taught to always be polite, demure and compliant to protect the feelings of others. You may find yourself rationalizing the red flags in your relationships and overriding the natural sense of disgust you feel around someone who turns you off with their actions or words – just to protect their feelings.

However, when you “lean into” the natural disgust that the abuser makes you feel every day they mistreat you, you allow nature to guide you away from predators and back to safety. A good way to “reality check” with yourself about the narcissist’s true nature is to ask yourself, “How would I feel if someone I didn’t know was doing this to me?” This will help you take the more detached, curious perspective

of the narcissist as a “stranger” and will give you a lens to see how their actions would look if you were *not* in a close relationship with them. Many survivors of intimate partner violence find themselves stuck in a “fear, obligation, guilt” cycle where they fear they will “miss out” on the narcissist suddenly morphing into a great partner for them. In reality, they will only “miss out” on more abuse when they leave. It is the narcissist who loses someone who truly cared for them – you, on the other hand, regain your freedom and your life when you lose them.

Surround yourself with feedback from healthy, empathetic people so you are regularly reminded of the difference between “normal” treatment and inhumane treatment.

Narcissistic individuals try to micromanage even our perception of the positive feedback we get from others. This means they will try to detract from the compliments and healthy praise others give you and try to instill in you the falsehood that you have no support system apart from them. That’s why it’s so important to maintain connections with empathic people who can give you the accurate feedback you deserve, that give you a mirror to the “true” reality of your identity that the narcissist tries to distort. If your narcissistic partner has isolated you from friends and family, you can begin to reconnect with these loved ones or seek community support in the form of safe, validating support groups. It can also help to keep a list of some of the positive feedback you’ve received in the past and remind yourself that the real reason

narcissists were so intent on undermining this feedback was because they knew it would give you a source of validation outside of them.

Seek professional trauma-informed support.

Healing from a trauma bond also requires processing some of the trauma the narcissist has subjected you to. Seeing a mental health professional who is well-versed in domestic violence, narcissism, PTSD, and manipulation can help you identify the “hooks” that keep you tethered to your abuser and slowly dissipate them in a safe space.

Specialized therapies such as EMDR, DBT, or Cognitive Processing Therapy may also help you to process the traumas you’ve experienced with your abuser so you no longer feel as attached to them and you are able to locate the maladaptive beliefs that have been instilled in you by the abuser.

Connect with your “inner parts” according to the Internal Family Systems theory.

Therapist Dr. Richard Schwartz developed the Internal Family Systems model to better identify the patterns he saw among his clients who appeared to have discrete “subpersonalities” within their minds which battled for control. Although each person has a core, compassionate “Self,” the Internal Family Systems Theory posits that we develop these other disparate “inner parts” which can be different from this core “Self.” These inner parts can be shaped in part by our childhood

experiences and traumas.

This can include the “exile” parts which represent the younger parts of ourselves that have been traumatized and contain the shame and fear of early childhood trauma. It also includes the “managers” which attempt to keep us in control of our relationships through activities like caretaking or lashing out at others. We also have inner parts known as “firefighters” which react when our exiles are particularly triggered by trying to numb the pain (such as through addictions).

In order to fully connect with all the emotions of this experience, integrate ourselves and unravel which inner parts may be dominant in your relationship with the narcissist and may be working against you, it’s important to recognize which inner parts may be “running the show” when it comes to your trauma bond. Perhaps you have a “manager” part that is overly fawning and people-pleasing which attempts to appease your partner in order to avoid abandonment, or rages back at the abuser in an attempt to stay in control. “Speaking” to that inner part, with the help of a therapist, could allow you to identify the behaviors of each inner part and better meet the needs of that inner part without engaging in self-destruction by staying attached to a toxic person.

Or maybe you’re prone to feeling fragile and abandoned when your “exile” inner part is triggered by the narcissist’s abuse, so a “firefighter” part comes to the rescue to douse out the fires by using self-numbing activities to dissociate from the real pain of the abuse. This avoidance of trauma can actually worsen symptoms of trauma, so you may want to identify which avoidance strategies you are using and instead start to adopt healthier ways of confronting your pain.

This will permit you a way to process and heal past traumas without staying attached to the present trauma of an abusive relationship.

Go No Contact or Low Contact depending on your circumstances.

One of the most important steps to breaking a trauma bond is getting substantial time and space away from an abuser. Toxic love can be akin to a drug addiction. Detoxing from the trauma bond requires some level of no contact or low contact if you can't go cold turkey yet because of your unique circumstances such as sharing children or a home with the narcissistic partner or because the trauma bond is too strong at the moment to break right away.

Even if you can't go no contact yet, from now on, put the bare minimum effort and energy into the abuser and save the rest of the time and energy you usually spend trying to change the abuser or meeting their needs into fueling, nourishing, and loving yourself. Make sure you give the narcissist an excuse like being busy with a project or feeling ill to ward off their suspicions so they do not suspect anything is wrong and do not escalate into narcissistic rage as you prepare to leave them. Rebuild your confidence, center your goals and hobbies, and take small steps toward these goals every day. By pouring into yourself daily, you acknowledge that you are someone worthy of being taken care of and deserving of the freedom, joy, peace and healing that awaits you after the trauma bond is broken.

Science-Backed Ways to Have A Massive Glow-Up That Make Your Exes Cry

We all love a good comeback story. When recovering and healing from a toxic relationship, many women share that they feel they are aging backwards and reverting back to their “true” self before the relationship. This is not surprising, as there are many biochemical and physiological changes that take place in the body and brain during an unhealthy relationship. Once the healing journey begins, victims of toxic relationships and dysfunctional dating cycles often see themselves experiencing a massive glow-up – in reality, it’s just a return to their natural beauty and peaceful mindset. Here are four science-backed ways you can “glow up” in many different ways, physically and also mentally, after a toxic relationship.

Exercise, intermittent fasting, and moderating unhealthy carbohydrates under the strict guidance of a doctor or nutritionist.

During a toxic relationship, levels of the stress hormone cortisol go haywire. What some people may not be aware of is that cortisol also affects insulin levels, potentially increasing insulin resistance which may contribute to excessive weight gain and a plethora of other health issues. One science-backed way to disrupt insulin resistance according to research is intermittent fasting. Intermittent fasting and exercise have other benefits as well, since studies show that they both increase brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) levels in the brain. BDNF is like fertilizer for the brain, contributing to the survival and growth of neurons and bringing with it antidepressant effects that combat the effects of trauma in the brain.

Gentle exercise such as walks are encouraged during this time as well, and nutritionists generally suggest turning more towards eating more high-fiber carbohydrates and healthy fats (like whole grains, vegetables, legumes, fruits, avocados) rather than simple carbohydrates (such as sugary foods, candy, white bread, and refined starches) in your meals while still ensuring your meals remain nutrient-dense and balanced. This is important since excessive consumption of unhealthy carbohydrates (which are common when one stress eats in a toxic relationship) can affect your health long-term as well. Speak to your doctor or nutritionist about any changes to your diet and be aware that such changes must be heavily monitored, especially if you have a habit of disordered eating patterns. ***Do not engage in intermittent fasting or special diets,***

for example, if you have a history of eating disorders, without speaking to your doctor.

Processing traumas in therapy like EMDR or DBT. Give yourself time to grieve.

Trauma lives in the body and how we process trauma can affect the way we look, think, and feel. Survivors of toxic relationships report that during the relationship, they may have experienced unwanted appearance changes to their face, hair, skin, weight, that seemed to dissipate once they began healing some of the emotional trauma they experienced. They may have also experienced PTSD and intrusive thoughts, memories, flashbacks, and nightmares. Processing your relationship through therapies like EMDR and DBT can help for self-soothing and healing and lower cortisol levels as well. If you find yourself overwhelmed by trauma, EMDR doesn't require as much talking about the trauma as it does actually *processing* the trauma by bypassing the amygdala through rapid, alternating eye movements, and instilling healthier beliefs. DBT teaches emotional regulation and self-soothing skills that can help you during times of acute stress or reliving the traumatic event.

Maintain a mindful lifestyle that incorporates yoga and meditation.

Have a “mindful” makeover of your mindset. Daily meditation and yoga are evidence-based, supplementary practices that can be added to any healing journey. Meditation and mindfulness along with grounding techniques can help enhance executive functioning which includes decision-making, planning, focus, and emotional regulation, all of which are often affected negatively by the trauma of a toxic relationship. If done on a daily basis, studies reveal it can even begin to heal parts of the brain most affected by trauma such as the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala, and the hippocampus. Yoga can also help decrease PTSD symptoms and give you a sense of mastery over your own body and a greater appreciation of what your body can do, which may help battle the effects of body dysmorphia or body image issues. Many survivors have experienced positive effects of both, sharing that they have felt calmer, more peaceful, and able to tackle their goals and dreams with more ease when incorporating these methods.

Channel your experiences into success.

A physical and mental glow-up are lovely, and so is a financial glow-up! Give yourself the “Elle Woods” treatment and replace the dopamine rush of your hot-and-cold relationship with motivation toward your career and financial goals instead. In a toxic relationship, people often lose their sense of self and identity. If you still have distress or anger regarding what you experienced in the relationship, harness those

emotions into determination to set goals and chase after your dreams, the ones you may have had before the relationship or could have been inspired to go toward afterwards – whether it be going back to school, refocusing on your career, building thriving social networks, use this time of independence to do what you love and cultivate your gifts and talents to help yourself and the world around you. Remember, success and leveling up are the best and most productive “revenge” there is! Go forth and prosper. You deserve it.

Why Your Toxic Ex Comes Back When You've Moved On (Don't Fall For It)

Ever wonder why that toxic and narcissistic ex-partner kept reaching out to you, long after the relationship had ended? Or why they seemed to make attempts to provoke you after the break-up? Research indicates that there are darker reasons why a toxic or narcissistic ex may reach out, and it's usually *not* because they genuinely miss you. Here are some reasons a toxic ex may return when you no longer want anything to do with them, according to a researcher specializing in narcissism and psychopathy.

Continued Access to Your “Benefits”

If an ex reaches out to continue a friendship with you even after they violated you in the relationship by cheating or mistreating you in any way, be wary. Researchers Mogilski and Welling (2017) found that individuals who had darker personality traits (such as narcissism, psychopathy, and duplicity) tended to stay friends with their exes out of convenience, sex and access to resources. In laymen's terms?

They want to keep using you for their benefit, without any of the commitment, obligation, or consequences, leeching off of you for money, social connections, access to your emotional labor and attentiveness, as well as physical intimacy. Remember, the biochemical bonds we develop with toxic partners can be inexplicably addictive. Sex with a toxic partner only strengthens that bond by releasing oxytocin and dopamine, creating associations between the reward circuits in our brains with our ex-partner, and creating a dopamine high like no other, especially in an “on and off” hot and cold unpredictable relationship. A malignant narcissist knows this on an intuitive level and will use sex to prevent you from “detoxing” properly from the relationship.

Regaining Control Over Your Self-Esteem and Ability to Move Forward

If you left the relationship first, a narcissistic person wants to regain control, and by “returning to the scene of the crime” and potentially ensnaring you back into the same toxic cycle can be one of the ways they do so. Basically, they don’t miss you as a person – they miss the control they had over you. Consider that studies show that narcissistic people tend to stalk and even harass their ex-partners when their victims finally leave them. This is a control tactic to ensure you do not move forward with your life – whether that means moving forward with a new partner or just a happier and healthier future in general. By dangling the carrot of a possible reunion or igniting the hope that they will change for the better (something they refused to do during the actual relationship), they want to lure you back in and punish you for leaving in the first place. If you take the bait, narcissists will often mistreat

and devalue you even worse than before, just so they can be the ones to devalue and discard you, have an upper hand in your dynamic, and establish a false sense of superiority.

Creating Love Triangles With Their New Target

Your toxic ex may have seemingly moved onto a new partner, someone who tolerates their toxicity, but that doesn't mean they want to lose access to you as a source of praise and an ego boost. They want to keep you around as a fallback person for whenever they experience disruptions in their new relationship, and they want to provoke your jealousy and their current partner's on purpose to maintain power and control, as studies suggest narcissistic and psychopathic partners are prone to doing. If you decide to remain friends with a narcissistic ex, it's likely they will still use you for emotional labor, attention, and even sex when they need a "break" from their committed relationship. Do not fall for this or believe you are being chased because you're the one they truly love and the "one that got away" if they claim this. Remember, psychopaths and narcissists tend to be prone to boredom and require constant stimulation and novelty from multiple sources. You are simply another toy to play with. No one wins in this scenario except your toxic ex.

30 Badass Affirmations to Stay No Contact With Your Narcissistic Ex

No Contact from a narcissistic or otherwise abusive, toxic ex-partner can be a rewarding and challenging time. Survivors of emotional and/or physical abuse are not only paving a new path to freedom and rebirth, they may also be struggling with the effects of cognitive dissonance, fear, obligation and guilt (FOG), as well as the traumatic effects of the abuse on their minds, bodies and spirits. They may also encounter stalking or harassment from their abusive partners in their attempts to detach from them, especially if they ‘dared’ to leave those partners first.

Due to biochemical and trauma bonding with their abusers, survivors may also struggle to not contact their ex-partner or check up on them due to being conditioned to rely upon their abuser’s approval and validation during the abuse cycle as a survival mechanism.

Considering the fact that detoxing from an abusive relationship is very much like recovering from an addiction, ‘rehab’ from this type of toxicity needs to be addressed in a way

that is both compassionate and empowering. These powerful affirmations can help you reconnect back to your sense of reality when you may be plagued by emotional flashbacks, triggers or cravings to reconnect with an abusive partner. I've also included brief explanations of each affirmation, in case any of them need further clarification in order to better appreciate the underlying meaning for each.

For those who may have implemented Low Contact due to co-parenting with an abuser, you can feel free to customize these various phrases to best suit your situation. You may also want to brainstorm your own affirmations that are best tailored to your unique needs and desires.

1. Every act of silence is a protection against psychological violence.

Every time you choose not to check up on, respond or reach out to an abusive ex-partner, you demonstrate that you value yourself, you value your time, your new life and your right not to be subjected to abuse or mistreatment. You protect yourself from traumatizing information or emotional violence that could further retraumatize you and ensnare you back into an abuse cycle. A cycle that can only expose you to more pain, heartache and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. You have escaped from the abuse – don't let yourself reenter the cycle right back into a seemingly inescapable situation again. It can get more and more difficult to leave each time you do.

2. I have a right to be free from abuse. Every human being has that right and I do, too.

We have to remember that we are just like any other human being – including those who have never been in an abusive relationship or those who have never tolerated any form of abuse if they encountered it. They had the right not to

be abused and we do too. This is not to blame or shame anyone who has stayed in an abusive relationship; there are many reasons why abuse survivors stay well beyond the first incident of abuse, including the trauma repetition cycle that arises due to subconscious wounding from childhood. This is simply a reminder that there are many people who are in healthy relationships – and as a human being, you are so worthy of the same.

3. No one can take away the power I have within me.

It may come as a surprise to you, but narcissistic abusers don't actually hold any authentic inner power – they take away power from others because they have none within themselves. They have no sense of core identity – they need us more than we need them (even if it feels otherwise). They leech off of our light – we are *their* life source, their narcissistic supply and they are the energetic vampires who live off our resources, our talents, and our empathy and compassion.

4. My will is stronger than an abuser's attempts to bully me.

If you're suffering from PTSD or Complex PTSD and you're hearing your abuser's voice and/or are being met with hovering attempts to shame you back into the abuse cycle, you're not alone. Many survivors of abuse are left reeling from the bullying behavior of their ex-partner. They cannot understand why their abusive ex-partner refuses to leave them alone, stalks or harasses them, or even goes so far as to flaunt their new source of supply to them as a way to provoke them. Remember: the abuser's tactics cannot work on you as effectively if you are willing to prioritize your freedom over their attempts to bully you. The bullying may hurt and you

will have to address it as you process the trauma, but where there is a strong will, there is an even stronger survivor who can meet any challenge along the way.

5. I am stronger than empty threats.

Abusive ex-partners may smear you, slander you or even threaten to release personal information about you, especially if you ‘discard’ them first due to narcissistic rage and injury. They want to regain power and control to put you through an even worse discard and essentially ‘win’ the break-up or save face after the ending of the relationship. Much of these are empty threats. It’s true that more dangerous narcissists may follow through with their threats, but the point is that you can choose how you respond to their threats. You have choices and options to protect yourself and document those threats in case you need to ever take legal action. You can go to law enforcement if you have to (and feel safe doing so). You can also seek support from a lawyer and/or counselor who can offer you insights into your particular situation. What you *don’t* have to do is give into the threats of emotional blackmail and go back into an abusive relationship only to be terrorized in an even worse fashion than before. Who wants to be in a relationship where you are coerced back in?

6. I will defend and protect myself, no matter what.

Whether that means getting a restraining order, changing your number or blocking them from all social media platforms, do whatever you need to do to protect yourself from the narcissist’s manipulation and abuse on your journey to No Contact (or Low Contact if co-parenting). You don’t deserve to be retraumatized, in any shape, way or form. Seek support from your local domestic violence shelter (yes, emotional abuse is still violence), find a trauma-informed therapist,

research local support groups, Meetups or group therapy focused on trauma recovery and support. Find any and all support you can to help build and reinforce the fortress of protection around you. The more quality support you have, the more confident you'll be in moving forward without your toxic ex-partner.

7. I never give up; I keep going.

No matter how difficult it becomes, you never give up. Even if you make a mistake, all is not lost. How do you beat an addiction? You don't let imperfection impede you from progressing on your path. You keep going. If you fell off the wagon and broke No Contact (whether by checking up on the narcissist or responding to them), don't judge yourself too harshly. Self-judgment leads to the same sense of unworthiness that leads you back into looking for validation from toxic people. Instead, get back on the wagon and commit yourself to the journey even more fully. Practice mindfulness and radical acceptance of any urges you might have without acting upon them and participating in more self-sabotage. Know that every setback is simply bringing up the core wounds you need to heal in order to move forward with even more strength and determination than before. Understand the triggers that led to your decision to break No Contact to mitigate them in the future and grieve for the illusion the narcissistic abuser presented to you (the 'false mask' they presented). Know that this person never truly existed and that the promise of a relationship that was fabricated in the idealization phase led you to an investment that ultimately led to more loss than gain.

8. My life is worth more than empty promises.

When a narcissistic abuser is hoovering you, they are re-

idealizing you and making the same promises they made in the beginning of the relationship. They promised to change, to love and care for you, to always support you and be there for you. Yet they invalidated, belittled and degraded you instead. These empty promises are just another way to control and coerce you back into the abuse cycle. Don't feed into the illusion of what the relationship could have been. Instead, acknowledge it for what it was: moments of terror merged with false promises that were never carried out. You deserve more than empty promises: you deserve the real thing. The true promise of a new and healthier life awaits you: make a promise to yourself that you will pursue that new reality instead.

9. This is life or death and I choose life. Every time.

Many abuse survivors have a high level of resilience as well as a pain threshold that could rival a sumo wrestler or someone walking on hot coals without so much as a grimace. Even if you feel like you can 'deal with' further abuse even after the break-up, consider that this is truly a life or death situation. If you are escaping from a physical abuser, this affirmation hits home. Yet even if you're coming out of an emotionally abusive relationship, it also holds weight. I know many might not think of emotional violence as a life or death situation, but considering the suicides that occur from bullying and domestic violence and the fact that domestic violence survivors are actually at a higher risk of committing suicide, it is truer than we think.

Each time we sacrifice our peace of mind for one more 'hit' of the abuse rather than detoxing from the relationship, we also belittle, demean and abuse ourselves. These incidents build up collectively to reenact the same sense of hopelessness

we had during the abusive relationship and can pose severe harm to our psyche over time due to the cumulative impact of traumatic and retraumatizing experiences. By breaking No Contact, we convince ourselves that we are unworthy of something more than being with a toxic person. In the case of life or death, be sure to choose your new life without your abuser...each and every time.

10. Loneliness is infinitely better than any form of abuse.

After an abusive relationship, we may begin to romanticize our ex-partner in times of loneliness. We might even wonder if it was ‘worth’ leaving the abuse since we now feel so alone. We may have mixed emotions about our abuser as the “good times” come flooding back in the absence of our abuser.

Remember: you were the only one truly invested in the good times. For your abuser, those good times were simply a form of periodic love-bombing, a form of intermittent reinforcement that kept you under their control while feeding you crumbs.

The ‘good memories’ we had with our abuser never justify the abuse or make up for them. Loneliness can be a sign that you are working through and processing the trauma. It’s a sign that you may need to be more present with yourself and surround yourself with better support networks. It’s also a sign that you are in dire need of learning to enjoy your own company. Acknowledge and validate the loneliness, but don’t resist it by pursuing more toxic people or going back to the same toxic relationship. Survivors often need a period of self-isolation to reflect and recover from the trauma before they date or pursue new friendships. Take this time to heal and don’t rush the process: it’s very much needed in order for you to be in an optimal state of mental health. The more healed

you are, the better the quality of your future relationships will be, whether with new friends and/or partners.

11. I deserve so much more than to be an emotional punching bag.

When you're in an abusive relationship, you are not in a healthy, reciprocal relationship. You are an emotional punching bag for an immature and unstable person. They get to take all of their flaws, their insecurities, their internal garbage and spew it onto you. Throughout the relationship, you were trained by your abuser to 'take it' as a natural part of being in a relationship with them. No more. You deserve more than to be someone's emotional punching bag. You deserve a mutually respectful relationship where love and compassion are the default.

12. I can communicate my feelings to people who deserve to hear my voice.

We don't have to use our voice with people who are committed to misunderstanding, invalidating and mistreating us. We can reserve our energy and time for people who are willing to see our beautiful qualities and celebrate them. We can use our voice for people who truly want to help us, who appreciate our help and reciprocate our efforts. Instead of wasting your precious voice on people who will always be intent on silencing you, why not use it to help those who really need it, to comfort someone who is just as empathic and compassionate as you are, to receive insights from a trusted professional or to share your story and change the world? I guarantee you that helping people who are *actually able* to evolve (and this includes yourself!) is a much better use of your voice than trying to convince a person without empathy to treat you well. It's more likely to be effective, too!

13. My mental health is my number one priority.

Make sure you're engaging in extreme self-care during the No Contact journey. This means checking with yourself every moment of the day to ensure that you are thinking healthy thoughts, taking advantage of the diverse healing modalities available to you, and addressing any symptoms of trauma that may be interfering with your ability to function in day-to-day life. If your mental health is suffering, all other aspects of your life will also feel the impact. So take care of yourself – and don't be afraid to seek professional support if you need it. No one should have to go through this turmoil alone.

14. Staying sane is more important than being validated by an abuser.

Often when we have been devalued by an abuser, we become controlled by the need to be validated by them as 'worthy.' This need becomes especially amplified when we see that the abuser seems to have moved on with a new victim. This is because the abuser was the source of our pervasive sense of unworthiness throughout the abuse cycle and we now feel as if we need confirmation that we were not the problem. Unfortunately, the reality is that narcissistic abuse will inevitably leave us without any closure from the toxic ex-partner. Narcissists are masters of impression management and they rarely expose what is actually happening behind closed doors – so all you are likely to see is them idealizing their victims for the public, just like they did with you. That's why you must prioritize your own sanity by accepting that while you may never get closure or confirmation of your worth from the narcissist, you can find ways of cultivating your own belief in your self-worth. This means stepping away from the narcissist's public façade and investing in living your own

best life.

15, 16, and 17. I trust my own reality. I know and trust what I experienced and felt. I validate myself.

These are a set of affirmations that can help you to resist the gaslighting attempts of your ex-partner or their harem. I don't care how many harem members love the narcissistic abuser. I don't care if the narcissist is on the cover of Time Magazine for Person of the Year. Their popularity with others or public façade doesn't make them immune to being abusive. In fact, many malignant narcissists disguise themselves as charitable, loving people. That is the nature of their false mask: they are wolves in sheep's clothing.

This affirmation is here to remind you that despite the amount of people your abuser may have fooled, no one has the right to take away the reality of the abuse that you endured. You know what you experienced – you know how valid it was and the impact that it left upon you. It doesn't matter how charming the narcissistic abuser is or who chooses to believe them; let their harem members learn at their own pace who the narcissist is. You're not here to convince anyone. You're here to validate yourself and resist the gaslighting attempts to distort your reality and that of the abuse. Don't feel obligated to protect your abuser, minimize, rationalize or deny the abuse you endured. Honor and acknowledge your authentic emotions as well as depth of trauma you experienced.

18. I am worthy, I am beautiful (or handsome), I am brave, I am strong, I am fearless.

These are another set of positive affirmations that can help remind you of how worthy and courageous you truly are, with or without a partner. It conditions you into believing good things about yourself, especially if you're used to hearing

harsh words from your abuser. I recommend recording these into a tape recorder or voice recording application on your phone and listening to them on a daily basis just to get yourself used to hearing them. Repetition is essential to deprogramming the harmful messages your abuser instilled in you and reprogramming your mind for future success.

19. Each second, each minute, each hour, each day, each month, each year, I am getting stronger.

While you may have moments of powerlessness and hopelessness from time to time, rest assured that as you move forward with No Contact, you will gain more and more strength and resilience than you ever knew was possible. As more time passes and as more trauma is processed and addressed, the more space you'll carve out to become the person you were meant to be. You'll eventually reach a point in your healing journey where the strong attachment to the abusive person has 'dulled' in its emotional potency.

20. Leaving (or being left) was the best thing that ever happened to me. I made that happen.

It was your agency and your powerful light that got you through the worst moments of your life so never underestimate your ability to survive after the abuse. There are so many victims still in abusive relationships – including the new source of supply. You've awakened and you've taken back control over your life. This is a blessing that should not be taken for granted. Instead of focusing on the ways you still feel trapped, validate your grief while allowing yourself to celebrate the ways you've been freed.

21. I am a motherf*cking badass. I can survive anything. And I will thrive.

For those who need that extra punch (and dose of profanity

along with their reality check), this affirmation can charge you with the determination and badassery needed to rise above the pain and channel it into something greater. Remember: for every crucifixion, there is an even greater possibility for resurrection. Transform all the grief and outrage you feel into your greater good: use it to fuel you to reach greater heights, achieve your goals and kick some serious butt in all facets of your life.

22. Do no harm; take no shit.

We don't have to be vindictive or retaliate against our ex-partners in order to take care of ourselves, set boundaries or to lead victorious lives. At the same time, we don't have to internalize anyone else's garbage. You can empower yourself by establishing what your boundaries are and following through with them – each and every time. Whether it be with your abusive ex-partner or a new acquaintance, the healing journey is all about learning how to implement healthier boundaries and becoming more assertive in our authentic truth.

23. My success is their karma. Karma can answer him or her – I am too busy.

Live your life and try to minimize your focus on what the narcissist is doing, who he or she is seeing or what they are getting away with. Let the narcissist learn at his or her own pace what life is all about; you don't need to educate a grown ass human being on how to be a decent person. You don't need to give karma a 'push' either – let it unravel and unfold organically, if at all.

The best karma a narcissist can receive is actually the weight of your indifference and success after you leave them.

24. I am the life source. I am the Light. Without me, there

is nothing to feed on.

These are emotional vampires we're dealing with; it's up to you to make sure that they don't leave nourished on your supply while you're left malnourished, drained and underfed after an interaction with them. Without their sources of supply, narcissists live in the darkness of their own emotional void. Don't let your mind, your body and your soul be part of their feeding queue. Remove yourself completely from the equation altogether. If they don't get to feast upon your emotions, your commitment or your investment, you get to nourish yourself with a healthy mind and life.

25. They don't miss me as a person – they miss controlling and mistreating me.

Narcissistic ex-partners only try to play the 'let's be friends' card because they miss what you provide for them. They miss putting you down. They don't miss you or any other victim as a person because they truly cannot even wrap their heads around people as individual human beings. To them, supply is supply and they rarely 'know' their sources of supply beyond a shallow impression of them as objects to control and misuse for their own gain. Remember that when a narcissistic abuser tries to Hoover you, saying they miss you, what they're *really* saying is that they miss the power and control they felt when they were able to provoke your emotions.

26. They don't love or care about me – they care about fulfilling their own needs.

Normal partners would leave their ex-partners alone and move forward especially after they realized that their ex-partners were not the one for them. Narcissists don't care what is best for their ex-partners; they don't care if they're potentially retraumatizing them by reaching out to them

or flaunting new supply. They want to fulfill their own needs and it doesn't matter who they hurt in the process. Give yourself this reality check each and every time you find yourself romanticizing the abuser: they do not love or care about you, at all. If they did, they would have made the effort to treat you better. Love is expressed in actions, not empty words.

27. Each time I don't respond or set a boundary, I remind myself of what I am worth.

You are truly worthy, warrior, and you don't need anybody else to validate your worth to you. You are precious, valuable and enough. Know it and own it; don't let anyone take away your divine self-worth from you. Each time that you permit yourself to stick to No Contact, you communicate to yourself that you are worthy of a better life. Continue to tell yourself that you are whole just as you are and so very deserving of the best life possible. Treat yourself as if you were already whole and one day you will realize you've internalized this belief. Feeling and knowing that you are enough goes beyond just an affirmation; it can lead to success beyond your wildest dreams. You just have to be willing to be receptive to this belief. Gently invite it into your life and find ways to cultivate it every day until it is so fully rooted in your psyche that it has no choice other than to blossom.

28. I care about and love myself.

Be gentle with yourself during this time. Treat yourself as you would a dear friend or a wounded baby bird. How would you take care of yourself? What would you tell someone you love who is hurting? How would you treat someone who you wanted the best for? Treat yourself that exact way – you deserve all the care, compassion and validation that you tried

to give to the narcissist.

29. I am my own best friend. I am my own best advocate.

You can have a nourishing support network, but at the end of the day, you are the only one who can advocate for yourself and your healing. You are the only person who can act on your own behalf and make the right choices for your recovery process. Nobody can do it for you. So advocate for yourself, each and every day: turn off the phone, the computer and any form of communication with the narcissistic abuser and walk away from temptation. You are worth so much more than this toxic person could ever give you.

30. I love myself. Truly and always, I love myself. And for the first time in a long time, I am putting myself first.

The journey to healing is about you. Not your ex-partner, your friends, your family, or society. You may have placed your mental health and basic needs on the back burner for a long time when you were in this abusive relationship. Now it's finally time to prioritize you, your needs, your dreams, your desires and what you personally want to manifest in your life. Take this valuable time to really get to know yourself and honor your goals. You deserve to make all your dreams come to life. It's time for you to shine – and no one is ever going to get to dim your light ever again.

Since you purchased this digital guide, you now also have access to exclusive in-depth healing guided meditations designed to help you recover from manipulation tactics such as gaslighting, stonewalling, pathological envy, projection and more. You can access these meditations by clicking [here](#).



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