COLLECTION

The Essentials of Applied Psychology

# The Narcissistic Abuser




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Disclaimer: This book is a tool for information and personal development.
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# Introduction — If you are opening this book, something is wrong

You did not buy this book out of intellectual curiosity.

Nobody takes an interest in narcissistic abuse the way one takes an interest in astronomy or the history of ancient Rome. You come to it because you are trying to understand something that hurts, and that you cannot manage to name. A relationship in which you feel yourself becoming someone else. A partner, a parent, a manager, a brother, a friend, and you no longer know whether to pity them or protect yourself from them. A stubborn impression, one that has come back a thousand times and been brushed aside a thousand times: what I am living through is not normal.

Perhaps you typed those three words into a search engine one evening, after yet another scene. Perhaps someone said to you, in a slightly too confident voice: “your guy is a narcissistic abuser.” Perhaps you read an article that described your life with a precision that ran cold through you.

And perhaps you also came out of all that more confused than before.

That is normal. On this subject you will find just about everything and its opposite. The term is everywhere: in magazines, in conversations, in the comments under videos. Sometimes it means a calculating monster, sometimes a plain boor, sometimes an ex you never got over. By dint of naming everything, it ends up naming nothing at all — and leaves you alone with your original question, untouched.

## This book will not ask you to prove anything

Here is what I want to set down on the very first page, before any explanation.

You do not have to demonstrate that what you lived through is serious enough to deserve being taken seriously. You do not have to establish a diagnosis about someone in order to have the right to suffer from the relationship you have with them. And you do not have to answer the question that has perhaps been eating at you for months — is it him, or is it me? — before you are allowed to get better.

That demand for proof, you probably imposed it on yourself. Or rather: you were taught it. In the relationships this book is about, there comes a moment when the person starts keeping the ledger of grievances themselves, all charges against themselves. They reread their messages to check whether they were unfair. They replay the argument to establish who started it. They wonder, sincerely, whether they are exaggerating.

That reflex is not a character trait. It is a consequence. We will see exactly where it comes from.

## What you will find here

This book was born of a much larger project: an encyclopedia devoted to narcissistic abuse, several thousand pages, written for clinicians and students. A reference work, with its rival schools of thought, its apparatus of footnotes and its scholarly quarrels.

This book is the version made for you. Not a simplified version — a useful one. I kept what sheds light and removed what gets in the way. The names of the authors who thought about these questions before us remain, when they help you understand. The controversies between theorists are gone: they belong in conference halls, and they will not help you tonight.

The book follows a simple path, which is yours rather than that of the history of ideas.

We will start with the word itself, because you have to know what you are talking about: where it comes from, what it actually designates, what the medical classifications say about it, and why its official status changes nothing about your situation.

We will then look at what lies behind the façade — that confidence, that charm, that apparent success everyone admires and whose other side only you know.

Then comes the chapter in which, if I have done my job well, you will recognize yourself line after line: the chapter on the mechanisms. How you were made to doubt your memories, your perceptions, your judgment. These techniques have names. Knowing them repairs nothing on its own, but it puts an end to something terrible: the feeling of being the only person in the world this is happening to, and of being partly responsible for it.

We will then take up the question that always comes back: why me? You will see that there is no "victim profile" in the way common sense understands it, and that what made you vulnerable is most often the best of what you have.

We will then follow the unfolding of a coercive relationship, from the dazzle of the beginning through to the aftermath of the break-up. We will dwell at length on that very particular bond that makes you suffer and that you cannot free yourself from — the thing you may have called dependency, weakness, or love, and which has a name and can be explained.

We will take stock of what all this cost you: sleep, confidence, sometimes health. And above all of what can be repaired, because almost everything can be repaired.

We will see how it plays out in a couple, in a family, with children in the middle of it — and at work, where the same mechanisms operate by other means.

The last chapter is the most concrete. Leaving, when it is possible and when you have decided on it. Holding on, in the weeks when you doubt. And rebuilding, which is slow work and which does succeed.

## Three cautions, and they matter

The first. This book does not make a diagnosis and will not teach you to make one. Narcissistic personality disorder exists, it can be diagnosed, and that requires a clinical assessment carried out by a professional who meets the person. Nothing you read here entitles you to label your partner, your mother or your boss. Which is just as well, in fact: you do not need that label. You need to recognize behaviours, to measure their effects on you, and to decide what you are going to do about them.

The second. Understanding is not excusing. You will read in these pages that people who function this way have often, very early on, suffered from something. That is true, and it has no absolving value whatsoever. An explanation is not a justification, and one person's suffering has never given them the right to destroy another. If a part of you still hopes to save him by understanding him better, this book is likely to disappoint you — and that may be the very service it can do you.

The third. If you are in danger, this book is not the right tool right now. Physical violence, threats, harassment after a separation are emergencies, not reading matter. In France, 3919 is available for violence against women, 17 for the police, and 114 by text message when you cannot speak. These numbers will come back at the points in the book where they are useful. There is no shame in dialling them, and it is never too soon.

## A word about what you will feel as you read

Many people describe the same thing: reading it brings relief and hurts, at the same time.

It brings relief because what was formless takes on a form. You are going to read sentences you have heard, almost word for word. You are going to recognize scenes. You are going to understand that what you took for your weakness was a predictable reaction to a specific situation.

And it hurts, because seeing clearly what happened also means measuring what it cost. The time, sometimes the years. The friendships lost. The person you were before.

So read at your own pace. Put this book down when it gets heavy. This is not about going fast. Some readers go through it in three days, others take six months and skip chapters to come back to them later. Both ways are fine.

One last thing, and then we begin.

You are not going mad. You are not losing your mind. What you perceive is real, and there are words to describe it. Those are the words we are going to look for together.