

The Cycle of Narcissism: Why Do They Teeter Between Love and Hate?

Most people seem to understand that being in a relationship with a narcissist isn't a pleasant experience. They know narcissists use inflated egos to mask their insecurities. At the same time, however, most people aren't aware of the degrading, abusive, and dehumanizing effects that the cycle of narcissism casts upon its targets.

Narcissism isn't a funny personality quirk or movie trope: it's a personality disorder. In fact, narcissists lack a comprehensive knowledge of emotions – particularly when it comes to whole object relations and object constancy.

That's exactly why being in a relationship with a narcissist is so confusing – they're constantly teetering between loving you wholeheartedly and hating your guts.

Understanding the Love Cycle of Narcissism

By the time you realize you're involved with a narcissist, it's often far too late to make a clean break.

In some cases, you have developed strong roots with the narcissist through marriage, children, intimate partner or cohabitation. In others, you may have experienced deep trauma and subsequent bonding with the narcissist which only prolongs your toxic attachment and love addiction.

Or maybe the narcissist has just spent so long devaluing you that you truly believe you don't deserve anything better. (You do!)

Regardless of the situation, narcissists tend to follow a similar scheme as they rope victims into relationships.

Counterfeit Love in the Cycle of Narcissism

Chances are, you look back on the beginning of the relationship very fondly. It might have even seemed too good to be real – true love at last!

Maybe the narcissist showered you with dinners, appreciation, validation, gifts, and affection like you've never experienced. This is called "Love Bombing" and it's the first stage in the love cycle of narcissism when the narcissist wants you to believe that this expression of love is genuine.

But just like a drug dealer who passes out first fixes for free, the narcissist has a plan for their Love Bombing: they want to get you hooked before limiting your supply.

Slowly but surely, these blissful moments of love are replaced by fights filled with degradation, dehumanization, and devaluation. Of course, they say it's your fault: you didn't live up to their unrealistic expectations and the fabricated idea of who you are or what you should be.

Then, finally, the good times turn into a distant memory.

A brief glimmer of hope will poke through every so often: the narcissist might bless you with a hug and a “you know I love you” after an intense fight. Maybe you’ll have a quiet evening with Netflix and some pizza that reminds you of the good times you used to have.

Maybe they really have changed – or at least you’ll be able to work it out, right?

This little taste of air – while you’re gasping for breath – is how the narcissist keeps you hanging on, longing for the times that once were.

But before you know it, the good time has passed and you’re onto the next fight, feeling worthless again.

Why Narcissists Rarely Truly Leave

Well, specifically, you can make their life easier while improving their status.

A narcissist will never have a genuinely loving and fulfilling relationship with anyone because that’s not what they want when they take on a partner. (Remember this when you finally split and later see them “happy” with someone new.)

The narcissist needs someone in their life to function like a proverbial punching bag: someone to validate their own self-worth. That’s why the narcissist will always turn into the victim during every fight – even when you rightfully bring up something hurtful they’ve done or said.

You might wonder, why doesn’t the narcissist just leave you if they hate you so much? Doesn’t the cycle of narcissism ever end? Aren’t they sick of this torment yet?

They’ve spent so long drilling home the idea that you’re worthless and undeserving of love or support – so why do they stick around?

There are a few reasons for this:

You’re functioning as their assistant. You clean up their messes, shop for food, cover their rent, manage the family, and oversee all their adult responsibilities. Who would leave that behind?

They’re comfortable unleashing their deepest abuse on you. Their casual friends or coworkers certainly wouldn’t put up with the degrading words you hear every day. In fact, others may not even realize or believe that your partner is an abusive narcissist. Some narcissists hide their intentions very well. They can’t admit failure. Leaving you would mean they’ve made *gasp* a mistake. This is far too much reality for any narcissist to handle. Plus, they wouldn’t be able to use their resentment against you later when you don’t live up to their expectations.

How the Cycle of Narcissism Leads to Abuse: Their Lack of Whole Object Relations and Object Constancy

Unlike many other mental health conditions, people with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) leave victims in their wake.

In fact, recovering from narcissistic abuse involves reshaping your entire identity – which the narcissist has replaced with their own. It can sometimes take years to fully recover.

If a narcissist enters your life, especially in the form of a romantic partner, they will completely drain you of your entire sense of self. When you finally break free, you'll find yourself starting over from scratch – questioning everything you thought you knew about yourself.

This is because narcissists don't experience or process emotions as you or I do. To the narcissist, emotions like love, sadness, or remorse are vulnerabilities to be exploited – not normal elements of the human experience.

See, the narcissist's dangerous lack of social and emotional development stems from their nonexistent comprehension of two key concepts: whole object relations and object constancy.

They can't comprehend that good people aren't perfect. To the narcissist, you're part of their mental hierarchy: you're either above their status and should be envied or you're below their status and worthy of chronic disrespect.

This poor emotional development drives narcissists to use emotions as tools to manipulate everyone around them: coworkers, friends, family members, and especially their intimate partners.

Whole Object Relations

This is our ability to see the "oneness" that brings us all together – it's what drives our sense of humanity.

Whole object relations allow us to see another person's qualities in an integrated way: we accept that people can be generally good, yet still sometimes do rude or hurtful things. We forgive people we care about who make mistakes because we know that everyone is human and, therefore, will act out on occasion. (This is one reason non-disordered people so easily forgive narcissists for their cruel behaviors).

Narcissists don't understand this concept. Instead, narcissists view people as either all good or all bad. To the narcissist, if you are no longer special in their mind, you have fallen to a low status. Quite literally, they'll categorize you as being among the dregs of society.

This is why they can go from making you feel special, to making you feel like dirt

underneath their shoes. By the time you've fallen from grace, they feel that you have no redeeming qualities and believe you deserve to be mistreated.

Object Constancy

This is where universal unconditional love comes from. For most of us, we recognize that we can still have a positive relationship with someone even if they make mistakes or occasionally hurt us – because chances are, they really didn't mean to cause harm.

Narcissists don't possess the capacity for object constancy. Therefore, when it comes to the broadly known 'devalue and discard' phases, they feel such dislike for you, they have no problem treating you with cold indifference and loathing.

The narcissist understands that you, on the other hand, have object constancy and they're keen on exploiting this trait.

The narcissist knows you'll stick around through all the abuse because you've experienced their good side and how well they can treat you – when they believe you deserve it, of course.

But this "good side" is all a façade and part of the cycle to keep you hooked and begging for that next fix. In fact, when the narcissist is being kind, it's an integrated part of the abuse.

Why the Cycle of Narcissism Continues Indefinitely

This cycle between very real abuse and phony affection is the narcissist's ideal relationship.

No matter how many times they promise to change and offer you brief moments of appreciation, this is just all part of the cycle of narcissism to keep you around.

It's just maintenance work to them: these promises are never genuine because they have no intention of changing anything.

In fact, the narcissist is incapable of ever seeing themselves as anything other than the victim. It is impossible for them to see things your way. The narcissist will always see you as competition that must be kept below their status.

