Covert narcissism and love and sex. Relationship with a predator in a romantic mask.
Katarzyna Lorecka. Life & Relationship Mentor, psychologist, therapist, autor

Covert narcissism in love and sex.
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Part I. Covert narcissism

I work with people on the sphere of love and publish books about it, because many people dream about love and then they find themselves in relationships that disappoint or worse, hurt and destroy them. Love is one of the fundamental human needs and no wonder it occupies an important place in our lives. Who wouldn’t want to feel loved? But love is not only about taking, but also about being able to give love to others. Today I write about love relationships formed by people with the characteristics of covert narcissism, because an enormous number of former partners of such people are tormented by the question of what the other person felt and whether it was love. Narcissists create a kind of emotional connection in which the other person is a giver, an object needed to supply the narcissist with life-giving energy. Narcissists can fall in love but they are not able to love. Isn’t it true that a relationship that one forms with someone is a reflection of the relationship one has with himself? In a trauma-bond with a covert narcissist, the partner meets demons from his beloved’s past. So let’s have a look at how love entanglement with a narcissist looks like in life and in the bedroom. But before we get to the topic, a few words of introduction:

- I use the word “narcissist” or “narc” not to label, because the diagnosis should be made individually by a mental health specialist. Using this term, I refer to a group of narcissism-related characteristics. Narcissistic persons may have different intensity of traits, in other words they meet the criteria of narcissistic personality disorder or, if the intensity of traits is high, they have a feature of disorder, although they are not clinically disturbed. They may also have co-existing personality disorders. Also, narcissistic features are manifested in a
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more visible or hidden-covert way. Thus, narcissists are a diverse group, although having their specificity, which may be more or less intense.

- I use the male form to describe the phenomenon, but narcissism also applies to women.
- When writing about a romantic partner, I use the form "partner" as a generalization by which I mean a romantic partner being a woman or a man-partner of a narcissistic person. The reader can refer the information to a particular case, depending on the sex of the people in the relationship. Features and typical behavior strategies related to covert narcissism are typical for women and men. I also call the partner the "Source of supply" of vital energy, not out of disrespect, but that's what the partner is for the covert narcissist.
- I divided the text into 4 parts: I. general characteristics of people with covert narcissism; II. description of the love relationship cycle and typical behaviors of the covert narcissist; III. sexuality associated with covert narcissism and its genesis; IV. sexuality in a romantic relationship with the covert narc.

I devote special attention to sexuality related to covert narcissism, because it is an important and often overlooked area in literature that poses many challenges for partners.

Covert (oversensitive) narcissism

The relationship with the narcissist hurts and it is better to avoid it. But recognizing that you deal with someone with a narcissistic disorder or narcissism is not always easy. Narcissism is associated mainly with the grandiose tendency. Meanwhile, narcissism can have two sides - the explicitly large, shiny, haughty and insensitive - but also less evident: helpful, shy, pathologically sensitive, dependent, anxious. There is a variety of so-called covert narcissism, also known as oversensitive narcissism. As the name suggests, such people seem sensitive, emotional and somewhat introverted. They form a toxic connection with a partner, because in childhood the parent's behavior was not supportive to their development of a healthy identity and autonomy. In the first important relationship with an adult caregiver, the child functions united with him - as "We". In this initial symbiosis, a child learns to balance his need for intimacy with the need for independence, with an adult who is physically and emotionally available, attentive and understanding the child's behavior and being able to follow his signals in a way adapted to the needs of the child. And at the same time gradually gives him the initiative, providing a sense of security and support if needed. Thanks to this, the child acquires skill in functioning as a separate entity and builds his identity ("I") with the confidence that he can return to his beloved person at any time. The skillful support of a parent in this process teaches that in love, closeness and independence can coexist in a love relationship. That you can value your own independence feeling close connection with a loved one.

The features of narcissism are to some extent genetically determined, but the family environment is also important. The development of narcissistic personality disorder and narcissistic traits is associated with childhood trauma (injury), the so-called narcissistic trauma.

A small child, weak and vulnerable in the world, did not have someone's loving and accepting eyes that he could often look into in order to find himself; protective arms in which he would feel safe; he didn’t have the closest adult to reflect his emotional states and teach him about himself. The lack of such a reflection is, moreover, emphasized as one of the factors in the development of covert narcissism and the search in adult life for someone who could provide a mirror image that was missing during childhood and adolescence. The child did not receive adequate support in important
developmental stages and did not learn to understand others and maintain valuable relationships with them. He had no chance in his family to break free from symbiosis to develop individuality, separation from a violent parent or parents. The shame he felt while being unhealthy dependent on someone who hurt him became a fertile soil for the development of narcissism. This child was disapproved and there was no empathy from parents but disapproval and criticism, excessive demands, hurt and emotional and / or physical violence. His emotional needs were ignored and depreciated and the boundaries were violated, crossed. He was treated as an object and not as a person. It is important to understand that in future life this is how he will perceive others - as objects, tools, and not as people with their feelings and personal boundaries.

In the family environment, the child felt rising resentment, frustration, aggression and the need to defend himself against extreme hate. But non-functional ways of self-defense ultimately destroy self-image. Escaping from the painful reality, the child lived in fantasies in which he was important - he created a false ideal image of himself. In the absence of a real sense of identity, this image has permanently become a reference, serving in childhood as a shield hiding the faint battered real 'I' in contact with a stronger and dangerous parent. And the more someone seeks to confirm the ideal 'I', the more he moves away from his true 'I' - which only strengthens the false 'I', insecurity and sense of shame. Hidden behind a false self-image, the childish weak real 'I', which had no chance to mature, was disappearing.

As an adult, the covert narc remains immature, his identity is fluid, uncertain and crushed. He is hardly involved in work, he is rarely satisfied and quickly gets bored, so he can change jobs relatively often. He thinks he shouldn't work a lot, because he suffered so much in his life that he is entitled to it and deserves it. Lack of real self-knowledge makes the covert narcissist perceive himself as an individualist. He does not respect authorities and lives in a conflicted world created in the mind that does not conform to external social norms. This also distinguishes him from the grandiose narc, which nowadays find their place in many industries and professions, but also in the society of Western countries, where focusing on one's own interest and emanating one's ego is quite widely accepted. The specificity of covert narcissism makes it difficult for a person with such a disorder or its features to integrate into a community for longer. Covert nars, however, are closer to the chameleon than to the individualist who knows himself and his values. The feeling of being an individualist may also result from the coexistence of other personality disorders, such as avoidance personality traits, which in this case even leads to episodes of social phobia.

A covert narc strongly needs a sense of control to feel safer. He controls others to give him recognition, vitality and meaning of life, but also to avoid their feelings or behavior that would threaten him. Although narcissism is considered a personality disorder or a syndrome of specific characteristics, it is closer to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and bond disorder (attachment disorder). The reaction to persistent narcissistic trauma in the mind is addiction (to substance, sex, people) and blaming others. However, a narcissist will not admit it, because these are his non-functional mechanisms for dealing with childhood mental scars.

The covert narcissism is also associated with a tendency to chronic boredom and low tolerance for boredom. In their lives there is boredom and emptiness when they are in a relationship, or life is full of stimuli and excitement when they're looking for the perfect partner, who will start to get them bored again after a while. The inner emptiness causes the need to fill it with strong and new stimuli.
It can turn towards addictions, for example psychoactive/psychedelic substances that provide strong sensations in a world of mental fantasy. They tear away from the painful internal and external reality, and at the same time, they let a narc feel power and confidence for a short while. Another common addiction is: masturbation / pornography, sex addiction, paraphilias (more about sexuality in Part III); food dependency, etc.

Covert narc has no sense of self, so he has a changing mood - once he feels like a perfect powerful superman, another time he gets shy and embarrassed. His functioning is unstable and resembles a sinusoidal arrangement of peak moments and moments of breakdown. When his belief that omnipotence is possible breaks down (so-called dysphoria - a serious episodic deep mood reduction, the main factor of depression of people with covert narcissism), hypersensitivity causes depressive moods. Depression can be slightly different from what it usually looks like and often manifests itself in the form of rage, disregards and condemnation. Adults with narcissistic features carry through life the deeply hidden fears of childhood, the lack of a basic sense of security, and fantasies of superiority. They need someone to help them maintain a stable state of mind. A person with covert narcissism suffers from a sense of inferiority, doubts about himself, shame and his own mental fragility. This all lies deep in the mind and soul of the covert narc, who will do everything possible not to confront and admit these feelings. Because of the unique suffering experienced in childhood and adolescence, he wants to be seen as someone special. To gain recognition for how much life has experienced him. But his fantasies of grandeur aren't so openly manifested, as in the case of typical-grandiose narcissism. Covert narc wants to stand out, wants glory and admiration, but no flashlight. He will seek admiration in a more hidden way, hiding behind the mask of a romantic soul with a sensitive heart. Although he has moved away from feeling the self, he does not have to be completely devoid of empathy, which distinguishes him from the grandiose narc. He does not have emotional empathy, i.e. the ability to feel with someone, to be with someone and his feelings; but he can have (in varying degrees of intensity) cognitive empathy, so-called cold empathy. Thanks to this, in romantic relationships, the covert narc receives the emotions and recognizes the needs of the partner, although he is not able to imagine partner's feelings to understand his decisions, attitudes and actions. In place of emotional empathy and experience, the covert narc understands what someone else thinks, but not what this person feels. In his head there are many thoughts about what he thinks and how he should feel at different moments. However, he pretends to be empathetic towards his partner, especially at the beginning of the relationship, when he gains admiration and makes him dependent on himself. Later, he no longer has to pretend, especially when he does not want or need anything from his partner. Then, in response to the partner's request for empathy, for example when he asks him for empathy telling how he feels after a hard day, the covert narc will show that he does not care about his partner's feelings or he is not curious about what triggered them. He will break the conversation, change the subject, not take the side of his partner - he will be the "devil's attorney" or cause an argument to distract from the subject and put himself in the spotlight. Inability to feel real empathy is an important aspect of the functioning of the covert narc, because cold empathy allows to see someone's perspective, but lack of emotional empathy doesn't allow him to show kind concern. This makes cold empathy the fuel for manipulating others without worrying about the consequences of his actions. Emotional empathy is needed to reveal oneself in front of one's partner, to reveal one's true self, to communicate feelings coming from the world of inner experiences, to get to know one's true self and the real partner, to take into account the effects of one's own actions also from the position of the other's feelings, to feel the partner as a living
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whole and treat him/her as a human being, to love with reciprocity, to feel gratitude and happiness. It helps to engage in mutual relations with a partner with respect for his feelings, to give emotional support, empathic readiness to help, to build true emotional closeness, it gives the awareness of mutual needs, in sum it’s the basis of good functioning in the relationship. Lack of emotional empathy of the covert narc causes concentration on oneself, selfishness, accusation, contempt and other negative emotions and leads to distancing from the partner. As it can be seen from the lack of emotional empathy alone, the covert narc is not predisposed to love and create healthy relationships.

One of the myths about narcissistic people is that they don't know themselves. Meanwhile, covert narcissists have a certain knowledge of themselves, resulting from experiences in love relationships. But this information is not processed in a way to reflect reality. Covert narcissist knows what he's doing, but he's focused on himself and his own benefits, and someone else counts only when he can be useful. But narcissist doesn't realize it. He sees himself as someone who has the ability to sense what a partner wants and willingness to meet his partner’s needs to please another person, help or protect. He is proud of this, considering himself a good man, and even too nice, which he thinks makes others want too much – in his opinion they hurt him and exploit him. He blames partners and although he likes to judge and label others, he does not even allow the label of narcissism to himself. Such insinuation would threaten his false self, hurting himself straight into narcissistic injury. A covert narc wants to be loved and sometimes, when he feels mentally weaker, he reflects on his choice of partners. Nevertheless, although he wants to be loved, he hurts his partners – in other words: he wants something other than he experiences, because his actions contradict these desires. Deep in the unconscious, love is inherently associated with mental pain. The negative emotions in him affect his attitude towards others. Narcissism is such a thick psychic wall that it's hard to see it and destroy it by oneself. The covert narc will sooner associate his perceived goodness with something more acceptable than narcissism, for example with the characteristics of highly sensitive people with the sensation seeking trait (the so-called HSP with sensation seeking), or with the so-called People Pleasing Syndrome. He can be perceived as willing to please someone and by the way the covert narc had to please parents as a child. In fact the covert narcissism and People Pleaser syndrome are associated with similar behaviors associated with manipulation. However, there is a basic difference between the people pleasing syndrome and covert narcissism, such as that in the first case someone likes to give pleasure to better / more important / stronger others or even devote himself to them for his own benefit, such as preventing rejection or due to a tendency to dependence; and in the second case, it is done with a desire to gain a sense of superiority over others, to have control over them and to make them dependent. Thus, the pathological wizard puts his own person first, above the diminished others. Covert narcissist, however, will sooner justify the failure of his relationships by the fact that “bad others” use his goodness because he is too nice than he will face his own covert narcissism and everything that is associated with it.

In the case of covert narcissism, the instinctive automatic patterns of thinking, emotional response and behavior are stronger than free will. They were shaped in childhood to help to survive and in adulthood they were unwittingly repeated and trained to perfection. This does not justify in any way the fact that covert narc hurts his “loved ones”. But in adulthood, he still operates from the position of a hurt child. Covert narc did not know true love in his family home and his false ideal identity requires appreciation. So he tends to confuse admiration or adoration with love. Someone with the features of covert narcissism sabotages his chances of love, because as soon as the relationship goes
well, he will find a way to spoil it. Such people spend their lives helping others, feeling they are their saviors, although in reality they hurt their “loved ones”, just as they were hurt in their childhood.

A covert narc, who lacks healthy self-love, needs someone who will be his main Source of supply of life energy. He chooses a partner who is exceptional in his eyes (beauty, social status, achievements, etc.) so that gaining the feelings of such a person will increase his self-esteem. He wants to merge into unity as soon as possible so that thanks to the co-experienced feelings of the other person he can feel himself more. He gladly takes feelings felt by his partner, which can energize him. At the speed of light, he creates a pseudo-close relationship in which a partner becomes addicted to him, loses himself and gives in. Narc will be constantly focused on maintaining control, pulling out as much as possible from the other person. **Controlling and manipulating** the partner is an exhausting job, but it is also a part of the pleasure of the narcissist. Shaping the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of an attractive Source gives him a sense of strength and vital energy. But when the Source becomes too submissive and loses its power, or can no longer be controlled, it ceases to be attractive to the narcissist. Because in the “love” of the covert narc there is no such thing as "my dearest one". The partner is an object, a tool to meet narcissistic needs. The moment he blends with the narcissist, he becomes his Avatar, not a living person. The covert narc does not respect people, healthy dependence and trust in love are impossible for him. **Although he can fall in love, he cannot feel and keep love** because other people are only a temporary prosthesis of his ego.

As you can see after this description, the covert narcissism deviates from the common notion of narcissism, differing from the grandiose narcissism. You can live with someone with such character traits and not be able to recognize narcissism in them. It is worth being aware of the existence of this variety of narcissism, because getting into the clutches of such a predator with - seemingly - dove heart, leaves deep scars on the psyche.

- **Unconscious concept of oneself**: feeling inferior, doubting oneself, feeling of shame, fragility, hypersensitivity to failures and criticism.

- **Socially**: low professional engagement, many superficial interests, nagging, chronic boredom and low tolerance of boredom.

- **Interpersonally**: incapable of trusting others, jealous of others' talents and achievements, needing emotional support, promises-breaker, incapable of creating a deep emotional bond, violating boundaries of others, no respect for their time.

- **Ethically**: it changes values for benefits, a pathological liar, a tendency to disregard social norms.

- **Sexuality**: autoeroticism, sexual partners treated as objects, addicted to sex, paraphilies, escalating perverse behavior, infidelity, non-monogamy, Madonna-whore complex, risk taker etc.
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Part II. Narcissistic love cycle

Narcissistic love cycle – 1. Idealization

The relationship with a narcissist is characterized by three phases, which form a single or repeating cycle. The first phase is idealization. Seeing a partner through pink glasses is typical of the state of infatuation. Nevertheless, in the case of a covert narcissist, such idealization is a particularly significant because he has created in his mind an image of the ideal partner and he wants to fit the person he meets into these unrealistic expectations. By perceiving the positive qualities in the chosen source of narcissistic supply, it is confirmed that he has chosen someone perfect. He subtly creates his uniqueness by telling something that distinguishes him from others or boasting about something original that he has. He carefully examines the viewer because he wants to imagine what impression he has made. His need to be respected and to get the confirmation of his uniqueness can be seen in the expectations of his partner’s reaction - for example, he likes it very much when the partner admits he is right. But he is also curious about his partner, one can even get the impression that he is moving too quickly on topics that are still too personal to share them freely at such an early stage. But he does it in such a charming way that the other person usually falls into a trap. The covert narc asks a lot of questions in order to gather as much information as possible, which will allow him to choose the right mask, in which he will play the personification of someone's dreams of a perfect partner. He will use the same information in the next phase of the cycle against the partner.

A typical procedure of this phase is love-bombing, which aims to make the other person dependent and even addicted to him. The covert narc puts a lot of effort into quickly establishing a pseudo closeness - his partner may even feel that things are going not only too quickly, but it is too beautiful to be true. And in fact the covert narc creates an illusion in which one can feel like in a fairy tale.
While gaining someone's favor, the covert narc tunes himself into another person and “reflects” someone else’s needs. He likes to emphasize it as something special - a soulmate relationship that distinguishes this one unique bond. At this stage, he can actually intensively receive emotions from a person whom he idealizes and believes he has just met someone perfect. A certain dose of cold empathy allows him to be interested in his partner, discern his way of thinking, "read thoughts", adapt to his partner’s way of seeing the world, choose the right words. And thanks to learning ways to show empathy (when he is comfortable with it - and in the idealization phase he is), he shows curiosity and insincerely "mirror" preferences, dreams, dislikes of the other person - intensifying the bond. He watches carefully what the other person needs, he is a great observer of every move and meaning of the sentence. He makes it clear that he is close to what is important to the partner, that he understands, thinks the same; he appreciates the partner, flatters him and wants to share interests. He has many interests, but superficial ones. He does not deepen them because of fear that he will not be perfect or he abandons interests when the changed conditions reduce the chances of achieving the mastery. He easily changes views, likes or interests to merge with another person. He also changes his values as it suits him. Actually, in each subsequent relationship at the stage of idealization, he puts together as a puzzle his new "I", adapting to the new person - in effect still not knowing who he really is. However, such readiness for a flexible fit is deceptive and occurs only when it suits him. In fact, a covert narc sees only his interests and he is not able to sacrifice anything for a partner, nor really give up anything. The other person is a Source of narcissistic supply, not a separate living person with own needs and feelings. The idealization phase is a beautiful time for a Source of supply, who feels appreciated, praised, cared for and tossed with gifts. The Source of supply is often surprised by pleasant surprises, has great sex and shared time, receives messages for good morning, good night and many more during the day - because a covert narc needs to know that he is constantly in someone's head. And he is, the partner cannot even say how much he is happy. The Source of supply is convinced this is the right man, this is The One. The covert narc compares the Source of supply to his previous love partners, which he points out to shortcomings emphasizing that the current partner is better than them in every aspect. In this way, the covert narc manipulates the emotional needs of the Source to make him or her feel appreciated. And he can create himself as the perfect partner to gain the trust of the other person, and then be able to control his partner more efficiently.

If such intense romantic interest happens at the very beginning of the relationship, it is worth being alert. Perhaps you are the object of narcissistic love-bombing. True closeness requires time and gradual deepening of emotional intimacy. If someone accelerates too much from the beginning, or even pressures the partner to keep up with him, the dynamics of the relationship can be toxic. If someone agrees to this, he must be aware of the fact that over time there will be more and more manipulation and less and less personal freedom. However, it is difficult for many people to resist the charm of a covert narcissist - who of us does not want to feel adored and loved? And the covert narcissist knows exactly what emotions he should play with to win this game.

It may happen that in this all-encompassing love-bombing the partner will feel or see that something is wrong. In the initial stages of love, the narcissist shows himself as someone open, tender, warm and trustworthy. Because he is only a human, he can sometimes forget about playing the role and then for a moment he will show his different face. But the "enchanted" partner will probably think that it cannot be true. If he has love deficits himself, he will not listen to intuition. Often the body
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says something, intuition suggests, but someone in love often does not want to listen to it and ignores the signals to continue to get the narcissist's attention and "love".

Narcissistic love cycle – 2. Devaluation

After the period of idealization, when the narc made the partner dependent and the goal was achieved, it may happen that the Source of supply has become too submissive. In such a way the Source loses valuable personal resources and narc feels bored. This is the moment when he can look around for sexual objects if he has not already done so. They will diversify his monotony of being in a relationship and provide a fresh boost of energy as its secondary sources. At such a moment, the partner is devaluated, and the covert narc shows its dark side. But the devaluation phase can also occur when the partner sees the first unclear features in the image of the so far ideal beloved one and begins to mention it. It does not have to be even a criticism, because the covert narc is oversensitive and capture the slightest change in expression or tone of voice, and even in the attention devoted to him (for example, he likes to call his partner when the partner has an important meeting, at work, with family or friend, to distract him from others and remind about himself). And he easily takes personally something that was not directed against him. He may even not like someone else having a different opinion, because it threatens his created myth about the wise and wonderful himself. Anything that hits the truth about him or threatens a false "I" is treated as an insult, disrespect and criticism. He does not like himself and he is his greatest critic - he often hears an inner voice telling him that he is not good enough. It is very difficult for him that someone sees his imperfection. He puts a lot of effort into creating a mirage of his own uniqueness. Criticism, even constructive in the form of a developmental challenge, suggests that there is room for improvement, which is not consistent with his view of reality. In his eyes, others are bad and hurtful, and they should change. In addition, his lack of boundaries makes the covert narc thin-skinned and he takes everything personally, which makes him very emotionally reactive and self-defensive. When criticizing a covert narcissist, or even paying his attention to his mistakes, one must keep in mind that he will become the object of the narc's hidden anger. In the case of a covert narc the most often manifested in a passive-aggressive form. In response to criticism, the narcissist may show disregard by humiliating and diminishing his partner. Disregard, contempt and arrogance are his defense against shame. You can, even without intention, so deeply touch the narc that he will react with disproportionate rage. This means that the narcissistic injury was touched - the former psychic wound began to fester, releasing pain and shame, and the narc for a moment doubted whether he was as magnificent as his false "I" indicates. But such momentary doubt has nothing to do with reflection, narc blames the partner for the whole situation and will destructively try to take revenge. Although he may want to ease the crisis after such an event, if he still sees a chance to get something more out of his partner. However, he does not forget the words of criticism that deeply hurt him. Nor does he forgive them, although he may say he did. He holds a grudge and cannot forgive because he has not forgiven the hurt from his childhood and lives with a psychic scar under which negative emotions pulsate. And as long as they are there, they destroy the psyche and cast a shadow over relationships with others. The criticism of the partner kindles hatred, the covert narc devaluates the partner, despises him and wants to punish him and see him suffering. And because he does not forget, any triviality can give him the opportunity for revenge.

One of the methods used by the covert narc is triangulation. It is connected with the appearance in the life of a narc of someone negative towards his partner. It may even sometimes seem that this
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person occupies a higher position in the eyes of the narc than his/her permanent partner. The covert narc creates such situations so that the partner starts competing, proving that he is better. The narcissist believes that he has control over the other person's feelings and in fact he is good at it. He has already gathered so much information that he knows perfectly well what the partner's sensitive points are and where to go in order to trigger his emotional reaction. The influence on the emotions of others is also connected with the mechanism of projection. The covert narcissist removes from his ego bad aspects of mental experiences by projecting them on the partner, which makes the person who has become the recipient of the projection the persecutor, enemy and abuser. The projection is a reflection of narc's autobiography. The partner is blamed for mistakes and defects of the narc, which he is not able to tolerate. This is because the oversensitive covert narc "feels" that there are demons hiding deeply inside him - but no way he allows himself the thought that he can be egocentric, egotistical, controlling and manipulative. He unconsciously blames his partner for his former narcissistic trauma and puts his unacceptable thoughts and feelings into him. For example, he accuses his partner of being controlling - because he does not admit his own need for control. He reproaches him for being jealous because he considers himself exceptional and therefore worth the jealousy, while he is the one who envies others. He projects his inner sadness, longing, loneliness, powerlessness, guilt and fear on the other person. He considers these feelings to be "weak" because they do not give him strength and he cannot deal with them in a functional way. Although at the beginning of the relationship he could have texted that he was missing the partner, now he doesn't like when his partner shows his longing because he does not like this state of "weakness" and he fears being dependent. He is annoyed by his partner's manifestation of emotional needs, because having them makes him feel dependent and he dramatically defends his sense of freedom. He does not like it when his partner needs attention because he wants to put himself in the center of it. By transferring-projecting his negative feelings to his partner, he is making the partner similar to his "hidden self" - until the partner becomes insecure, jealous and weak. Or he will enter into the given role of persecutor and start behaving in a different way than he is used to, but according to the narc's scenario. It's difficult to throw off someone's bad emotions, which have been transferred through the projection mechanism. The partner, interwined into an emotional symbiosis, starts to have more and more doubts about himself. The projection mechanism is one of the defensive mechanisms that protects the psyche from the possibility of discovering the true source of narc's mental pain. When you are convinced that your own mental discomfort has been caused by your partner and you blame him, you cannot see how life's experiences have contributed to your current well-being and what is today a real trigger of emotional response. And if you already have a guilty one, you don't have to think about it, and thus there is no chance to solve the real problem that is hidden behind the projection mechanism. Each time the covert narc uses projection, it strengthens more and more this rigid pattern of reaction.

Devaluation may also occur when the Source of narcissistic supply wants to fulfill its passions etc. out of the relationship and thus gets out of control of the narc. The covert narc does not like to lose control, so he may try to weaken his partner and prevent this from happening. Besides, although he may claim to encourage his partner to self-fulfillment, the covert narc is jealous of others' achievements. He himself dreams of greatness, which he rarely realizes for fear that he will not succeed. Therefore, his actions contradict the words and he can create relational "dramas" in order to distract his partner from other matters and weaken him. In the devaluation phase, he destroys his partner's chances of success, reduces his achievements, enjoys the other person's failures.
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When something good happens in a partner's life or the partner has some worries and therefore experiences joy or sadness, the covert narc suddenly starts to attract his attention. He takes away the other person's own life, putting himself at the center of important events. If the partner is not confident enough in his actions, feels anxiety or doubts, the covert narc will take advantage of this "weakness". He will emphasize his superiority, sarcastically instruct, criticize. He does not care about what the partner is going through, considering that his troubles are his fault, just as the problems of the narcissist are also his partner's fault. And even if the partner starts to insist on his rights, he will hear that he needs too much attention or that he is too emotional, and that no one else would stand with such a person. The intention is to make the partner feel worse, not good enough and hypersensitive, while showing only normal human emotions. In this way the narc arouses feelings of guilt and every opportunity is good for him to provoke uncertainty. The partner often feels guilty about focusing on his own affairs. And just as he was pleasantly surprised once at the stage of idealization, he is still surprised, but in a negative way. The covert narc does it so cleverly and in a subtle way that his partner is not aware of the manipulation. He is convinced that the loved one understands him and supports him without noticing that every time he could do something for himself, the narc creates a situation that hinders it.

Although the partner may have already lost his sense of security and safety, there are also nice moments in this phase of relationship. Thanks to these flashes of the old-days sun, the partner can somehow survive in relationship chaos, hoping that everything will still work out somehow. However, one can already see that what the covert narc was saying at the beginning of the relationship, when he tuned in to the Source to charm it, has nothing to do with reality. At that time he said that he shared interests or was willing to try something new that the partner was interested in - now the common activities mostly concern what the narc wants. And the covert narc is still developing its range of possibilities. A typical mechanism of this phase of relationship cycle is gaslighting. It consists in the narc telling his partner that there is something wrong with him, that he is behaving or thinking irrationally. The narc concentrates on pointing out mistakes to his partner ignoring his own ones. Gaslighting often concerns infidelity. With his behavior or words, narc can provoke suspicion in his partner, casting him as a jealous person, and making him jealous, while the narc either betrays or intends to commit infidelity - but claims that the partner is unfaithful or has irrational suspicions. He will lead the conversation in a way so that the other person feels confused and guilty. His own shame is transferred into the partner's mind. He denies that he has done or said something until the partner loses track of what was really going on; he insists on his own version telling the partner that he is wrong; or he claims that he was just kidding and the partner is hypersensitive. Narc blames, raises doubts, undermines his partner's self-esteem, making the partner increasingly want to be the beloved person again for the narc. He becomes more and more easy to be controlled and often gives up his own important matters in the name of love.

Covert narcissism is related to something that in psychology is called object constancy. It refers to the ability to maintain an emotional bond with a physically absent person and to the ability to maintain positive feelings for someone when you are angry with them or hurt. The constancy of an object helps to see a person in different colors, not only in black and white, helps to combine love, anger, aggression, sexuality and the need for autonomy. The inability to combine contradictory feelings makes one see extremes, the partner is either idealized, or devalued when a narcissist sees any flaws in him. It is also difficult for the narc to find himself in love and at the same time to integrate his sexuality and independence. He is unable to combine an ideal image of himself with a
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negative image hiding behind a facade. And the greater the pathology, the more the image of the partner, relationship and social environment becomes zero-one. **Covert narc does not have the satisfaction of the bond with a love partner, because these relationships must be superficial by nature.** Narc is more self-centered than he is in relationship with the real other person. **The lack of constancy** of the object causes the covert narc to lose all the positive feelings after every narcissistic injury that his partner is blamed of. And when he is distant from the Source of supply, it is difficult for him to remember how he felt when he was in its physical closeness. He only remembers this at the next meeting. Among other things, it is the lack of constancy of the object that helps him to have sex with others when he does not see his permanent partner for some time. The state of mind he is in when he is with his main Source when they are together, escapes from his memory, but he knows how he feels when he is with someone who is next to him when he is separated from his partner.

In the devaluation phase, the covert narcissist lies, betrays, degrades his partner, expecting him to still love him. It is very important for him to get as much as he gives and preferably more, because he feels used easily. **He does not know his own boundaries and does not respect other people's boundaries,** he presses on them, crosses over, experiments how strong his power is. He is a **pathological liar** and introduces **double standards, he feels entitled** to do things which he often perceives as unacceptable in another person. He puts a lot of energy into rationalizing his behavior, but **he does not regret how he behaved and does not try to improve.** It is difficult for the partner to imagine the true nature of the covert narc, because from the beginning of the relationship **the illusion of openness, closeness and trust** was created. He feels confused, but his vigilance is dormant. Because the covert narc is an excellent actor. As long as it pays to play. If the partner starts to show dissatisfaction, the covert narc can manipulate his feelings by **silent treatment** or **threatening to withdraw love and emotional intimacy** (fake, but the other person does not know it).

All this is to make the partner feel the lack of closeness and desire it more strongly.

Many partners of covert narcissists stay in the relationship, because the **trauma-bond** is difficult to break. Over time, the same person appears to them as if in two forms, good and bad, like Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. They are endlessly trying to solve this inner conflict and combine this extreme duality of nature in one person. The covert narc automatically recreated his own painful childhood story, this time experienced from the perspective of a partner who has become weak and unhealthily dependent on someone who hurts him. It's a situation that creates strong tension and triggers the "fight or flight" reaction in the brain. The partner, who lives in the illusion created by the narc, wants to fight, wants to believe that there is still **hope** that the relationship can be fixed. He has invested a lot in it and still sees potential. Remembering his beloved at the beginning of the relationship, he still carries in his heart the image created by the master of illusion. He does not believe that he could have been so wrong. The difficulties that have arisen can therefore be explained by the fact that every relationship experiences worse moments, the overcoming of which will tighten the closeness. Only that in the case of relations with a covert narc, even the phase of idealization was only the illusion.

**Narcissistic love cycle – 3. Discard**

The devaluation starts with subtle comments and gradually grows, intensifying until the narc's partner starts thinking that the relationship is not going well and that he does not deserve such a treatment. Because the covert narc "reads in thoughts" what the partner wants, he guesses what he
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thinks and what his needs are - he perfectly catches this moment and takes control. He tells his partner that he thinks that the relationship is not going well and that no one will love his partner as he does, but he has to leave; or that he will still stay if the partner does this or that; or he doesn't say anything, but suddenly he starts to behave like in the idealization phase, but not so intensely. This is intended to change the attitude of the partner who, feeling that he may lose his relationship with the narc, will start to wish to protect it, will agree to the conditions, or will succumb to the returning memories of the idealization phase and stay in the relationship. Only that the idealization that is now taking place is on a lower level and the old, initial "fairy tale time" will never return. This cycle can be repeated many times and each time the return of idealization is getting weaker. A crisis is growing in the relationship, but it is possible that something will make narcissists want to maintain the relationship despite the devaluation of the partner and the cycle will start again. This happens when the narc still sees the potential benefits of maintaining this Source of supply. He can fix the relationship crisis because he can apologize. But his lack of the ability to have real empathy means he does not feel sorry for hurting his partner's feelings, nor does he intend to improve his behavior. He apologizes because he understands that this is necessary or appropriate if he still wants to have access to his Source of supply. He is also an expert in justifying his own bad behavior, for everything he has explanations to convince his partner that he had no other choice but what he did. Narcissism is associated with a tendency to boredom, and routine bores narcissist. He needs stimulating challenges, so the relationship with the covert narc looks like riding a roller coaster. When he is bored by his partner, he is burned out. He doesn't understand what's happening to him, but he notices a decrease of his energy. He blames his partner for draining him from his energy and it arouses a sense of resentment and bitterness in him, which makes him act destructively. Meanwhile, the partner does not take away his energy, but stops being perceived as a good source of energy in the eyes of the narcissist. Narc himself is not able to fill his inner emptiness, so he is already gathering strength for the attack of the next victim.

The covert narc loses interest in a partner who has been deprived of strength/became too submissive or can no longer be controlled. If the latter takes place, the narc must retreat before he gets exposed. Sometimes, however, it is the Source of supply that first leaves the covert narc, which he desperately tries to prevent. Because when the myth he created about his splendor falls, he feels as if he was falling apart inside. There is dysphoria and a feeling of powerlessness, contradicting his grandiose fantasies. Narcissist may then be in a depressive mood, not related to the loss of a permanent partner, but resulting from self-centeredness. This can happen especially at the beginning of a relationship, when he was still feeling the euphoria of achieving his goal. Euphoria easily goes into dysphoria when the target breaks free from his trap and leaves. Perverse sex is often an antidote to depressive moods, and hungry for positive energy will satisfy his sex drive with anything. If the covert narc feels that he might be rejected by the current Source, he is able to apologize and promise anything to prevent it. He gives promises that he has no intention to fulfill, prolonging the relationship - until he takes control of discard and unexpectedly break up with the partner whom he has just promised to improve his behavior. But the covert narc does not take responsibility for his actions. Discard by a covert narcissist usually comes at the least expected moment and what is characteristic, without giving a reasonable reason. People usually want to know what caused the decision, but the narcissist does not explain and if he says something, it sounds illogical. He will leave a dazed partner trying to guess the real reason in order to be able to understand and close the
situation more easily. But not being a narcissist himself, it will be difficult for him to understand what is going on in the head of a covert narcissist who does not understand himself.

When the covert narc leaves the relationship, he wipes memories in his mind as if he had a magic eraser. He mastered the switching of perception of another person from idealization to devaluation. He sees people in black and white colors, which is why, despite the long relationship, he can easily cut himself off from someone he has slandered in his own eyes. The bond he creates with a “loved one” has weak strength, which is related to the lack of stability of the object. After breaking up, he quickly forgets how he felt when he was with his partner. And the inability to empathize prevents him from empathizing with his situation. There are no longer any good associations with the abandoned partner in the mind of the covert narcissist. Narc has no regrets about losing a person, he only lacks text messages that assured him, that someone’s heart beats behind his phone screen. He does not miss a person who did not count as a human being. The partner used to be a good source of energy, now worthless. A covert narc needs a new Source of supply to feel alive. **Without it, he feels dead inside, without energy to live nor passion for activity.** So he immediately finds someone who feeds his narcissistic hunger. He spends his life starving like someone addicted to a substance. And the Source was like a drug, which with time ceased to be enough. If he doesn't find a new main source right away, he'll feed on sex and once he has gathered his strength, he will soon form a relationship with someone again. And just as in the idealization phase he assured his Source that it is better than the ex-partners he labeled and called disturbed or alcoholics, so after the breakup he will thus talk about the former partner of the new Source of supply. But no one, neither this nor any other Source of supply, can fill the void in the soul of the covert narcissist. He is insatiable, always hungry, he is never fully satisfied. Demons nestling in the soul of the narc will constantly demand more. Hungry for a truly deep interpersonal relationship that the narc is unable to create and maintain.

The tactic used by the covert narcissist is so insidious and veiled that the ex-partner usually does not understand what actually happened. The intentions and behavior of the narc are unclear, the ex-partner struggles with internal conflict. He may also feel confused, not knowing why he was behaving differently. In contact with the narc, he may have caught some of his bad habits or still bears feelings unfamiliar to him from the time before the relationship, transferred via the projection mechanism. In addition, he supplied the narcissist with life-giving energy, so for him it was a strong energetic connection. When the narc disconnected from the power source, the partner is still emotionally connected. His thoughts fly around the lost person and his world. He remains in the energy field of the covert narc. He feels emotionally abused, physically, mentally and spiritually exhausted. He stops trusting himself and his choices. He loses trust in others. He put everything in this relationship, took it seriously, and perhaps sacrificed a lot for his partner. For a covert narcissist, however, this is nothing personal, he would do the same with anyone who would let him get into the intimate space.

One of the manipulation techniques sometimes used by narcissists is the so-called **hoovering**, that is sudden - usually after a long time, reminding the ex-partner of himself, in the form of an SMS or some gesture that would be romantic and persuasive enough to give hope for a new better start. Only that the **narc does not change.** The only thing that can happen to a former partner who falls into the trap of hoovering is another disappointment according to the narcissistic cycle pattern. Not every narcissist wants to return after discarding a partner. The one who uses hoovering does it when he feels extremely empty inside and his ex-partner is the easiest source of energy available to
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him. With the current flourishing of online dating applications, however, it is easy to fill the emptiness and boredom, while providing oneself with strong sexual sensations. For example, according to research, the most users on Tinder represent the so-called dark triad of personality (machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy). Therefore, the best solution for a former narc’s partner is to completely break off contact, say goodbye to the hope of being together again and rebuild himself. Covert narc, who does not exclude returning to his ex-partner - perhaps someday, when another Source fails him or simply out of boredom - he may want to end the relationship in a way that leaves the door open. Usually, however, discard is brutal, without taking into account the feelings of the rejected partner. Contact with the difficult emotions of an abandoned partner reveals the true face of the covert narcissist. Narc does not have to charm him anymore, so he uses passive-aggressive techniques, for example, he responds with sarcasm, scoffs and hurts with words, he shows haughtiness and arrogance. He gets rid of his partner as if he was throwing garbage and the whole past is falling apart like a house of cards. A trampled and humiliated partner may experience cognitive dissonance - not understanding how it is possible that a good and loving person suddenly behaves extremely differently. He wants to see some human features in his beloved, but narc is a predator for whom the partner is easily exchangeable.

There is no way the covert narc imagines how someone feels being with him. Defensive mechanisms associated with the covert narcissism serve precisely to prevent awareness of the painful truth about himself. Therefore, what I have described may look different from the perspective of the covert narc - as an egocentric oversensitive person who wants to be loved, he sees the guilt of other people. He creates his own narrative, in which he is the good one and the other is ungrateful, abusive and harmful. He is still strengthening his false self. A covert narcissist would like to love, but he just can’t love. His version of love is a never-ending pursuit of his absent love for himself, for which other people’s hearts, minds, souls and bodies are used. The faces of the partners are changing, but the dynamics of the relationship remain the same. Idealizing, devaluation and discard. The phase that should be added to this cycle is quick and easy Exchange of a partner for a new object.

Slow down – listen to your intuition

There is a widespread belief that narcissism is resistant to therapy. Moreover, narcissistic people usually do not want psychotherapy. What’s a pity, because we have only one life and it would be worth a try. Covert narcissism has disadvantages, but also has advantages (for example, creativity, helpfulness), and integrating them and modifying certain behaviors could be a chance for a more valuable life. In the case of a covert narcissism, methods used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and bond therapy (improvement of attachment style) might help. It’s just that the covert narc would first have to confront the painful truth about himself and want to change, which is not easy for anyone, and in the case of narcissism, defense mechanisms trained for years are a strong barrier. And although covert narcissists hurt others and ruin their mental health and often their lives, in fact their own life is the greatest tragedy. They live in a world of illusion focused on the ideal self-image, and therefore on something that does not exist and they treat other - real people - as toys that can be thrown away when they get bored of playing with them. They are not capable of healthier love for someone or for themselves, which deprives them of chances for a truly deep and lasting relationship, love connection, care and protection.
It is difficult to clearly determine who will become the target of a covert narcissist. Generally, people with covert narcissism look for a "good quality", meaning someone with features they don’t have. Some choose strong and confident people, but others prefer someone who will be easier to manipulate. Research shows that the targets of covert narcs are energetic people, curious and who like excitement. Also those that are dedicated, responsible, investing in relationships, tolerant, empathic, loyal, but also those for which the spiritual sphere of life plays an important role. With great probability, then, it will be a romantic soul thirsty for love, waiting for the fairy tale Prince – his or her soul mate. And if you are a loving person, ready to do a lot for love even at your own expense, you attract those who need love the most and are focused on abusive taking. Knowing the specifics of the disorder and traits of a covert narcissism will not be enough to deal with a covert narc when one appears on a life path. You need to arm yourself with healthy self-love and learn to set boundaries. Assertiveness, i.e. calm but firm saying “no” helps in this. It will also be useful to be able to make a decision not to enter into a toxic relationship, or not to fix it during the devaluation phase. The performance played by the covert narcissist could not take place if the target person was drawn in to symbiotic emotional unity, giving up her own individuality for emotional benefit. That is why it is necessary to learn to balance closeness and to create in emotional closeness the common "We" zone as well as the space for functioning as an autonomous adult to fulfill own activities. Thanks to this, if one falls into the predator’s trap, it will be more difficult for a covert narc to maintain control. And this means that even if you lose your head for a covert narcissist, he will not leave behind the ruin of another person.

The breakup, although it is an extremely difficult experience, for many people it is also an opportunity for internal growth. Although for former partners of the covert narcs it is a particularly difficult time. The realization of the narcissistic character of someone they loved reveals a painful reality. On the one hand, it helps to solve an inner conflict and understand. On the other hand, the revelation of being just an Avatar of the lost soul of a narc is extremely sad. It’s important to experience regret for the lost illusion, to accept what happened, to understand and forgive to release the burden from the soul and do not carry on the sense of being hurt – in such a way the ex-partners of a covert narc can create space for personal growth. Rebuild the trust that has been ruined, learn from the life lesson and move forward with life, wiser after this experience.

Someone who experiences love-bombing at the beginning of the relationship may find it difficult to recognize whether it results from the partner's narcissism or only from the enthusiasm and strong fascination of a newly-met person. However, this can be distinguished based on the response to the request to slow down. When you say this to your partner without narcissistic tendencies, he will probably apologize and show understanding. A covert narc will make the other person feel guilty and ashamed.

In contact with a narcissistic person, it is important to listen to what intuition suggests. The mind and body that accumulate knowledge from life-long experiences, know in advance and recognize something that you are not yet aware of. So listen to what intuition says and what signals the body gives. If your partner claims that you have a strong sense of control and you know that this is not true - maybe you are becoming the object of projection of other person's characteristics. If you are blamed of jealousy, and it has not even appeared in your mind - it is possible that he wants to sow doubt in your mind. The foundation of a healthy relationship is a sense of safety. If you feel insecure, it's time to think about what causes anxiety in interactions.
Also introduce your partner to friends you trust. What is important in love is what we feel and what we want, but our close friend can see something that is not seen when being emotionally engaged. Someone who stands aside and is neutral towards a potential covert narcissist - sees more. A friend may pay attention to the person's toxic behavior or his bad influence on your well-being - do not underestimate this, but reconsider it.

Note how the partner talks about his Exes. There are basically two options for a covert narc. Either the former partners are bad (they are often negatively labeled, because the covert narc is very judgmental), or they are his best friends. Those who are in the first category are people who do not serve him as a source of vital energy and are treated with contempt, and the second group are those who, maintaining friendship gave him permission to use them as secondary sources of narcissistic supply.
relationship. Let’s take a look at what you have to consider if you fall into the trap of a covert narcissist.

**Covert narcissism and sexuality**

At the beginning it is worth looking at the covert narcissism from the side of human psychosexual development. A child coming into the world experiences various stages of fascination with his body. From infancy, the oral phase begins, during which the child is still passive. Between 1 and 3 years of age he passes through the so-called anal phase, when he takes pleasure in feeling the anus and learns to control the process of excretion. Between the 3rd and 5th year of life there occurs the so-called phallic phase, when the child is interested in his external genitalia. Masturbation may then appear and the correct passage through this phase leads to inhibition of early sexuality and entering the next period - the so-called phase of latency. Then, from the age of 6 to maturity, a person focuses on acquiring skills, including social skills needed in relationships with other people. With the entry into puberty the so-called genital phase begins, during which the adolescent gets pleasure from stimulating the reproductive organs.

From the point of view of the development of narcissism, an important moment is the so-called **Oedipus complex during the phallic phase**. The boy identifies with his own gender and accepts social norms. Incorrect passage through the Oedipus complex leaves a lot of traces in personality and affects psychosexual development, including the **fear of women**. The consequence of the difficulty of entering the phase of the Oedipus Complex is the **formation of a perverse psychosexual structure**. Destructive tendencies or fantasies related to the desire of penetration are aroused. At this stage, the father is important, who - if he is absent, cool, distant or violent - prevents the boy from passing correctly through the Oedipus Complex. Also, the role of the mother is not insignificant, because perverse people were not able in childhood to get through the separation process and achieve a separate identity, including gender identity. **The result is a denial of the gender gap and creating defenses against dependence**. A boy who experiences problems in a phallic phase of development with the Oedipus Complex (it is called fixation), will not enter as it should be, in the next phase of development, i.e. the period of latency. This is important because the latency phase precedes later, more mature sexuality, so that it does not become perverse. **Fixation on the phallic period shapes perverse sexual preferences** and a tendency to duplicate emotional problems that accompanied disruptions in the passage of the Oedipus Complex. This includes inappropriate superego formation and bisexual conflicts, which are reflected in the emotional and sexual life of an adult.

**Libido, or sex drive, goes inward, and then the ego becomes a sexual object.** In addition, at some developmental stage, children have a feeling of omnipotence and greatness. According to the principle that governs human psychosexual development, the most important is the moment when the child becomes aware of his own individuality (being separate person from a parent) and dependence on others. Because in the family environment of the covert narc building a healthy identity and autonomy was not possible, **the child did not give up the false belief in his own omnipotence**. During this time he suffered a **narcissistic trauma** that ruined his sense of self-worth by highlighting his weaknesses and limitations. In self-defense, he focuses his impulses on himself. Not only libido is transferred to itself (i.e. interest, curiosity) but also aggression, hence the strong **fluctuations in well-being** that go from self-omnipotence to inferiority and narcissistic depression.
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When the libido is not directed outside, other people lose in the narc’s eyes the impression of reality. For many narcissists, they are like characters from a movie or computer game, and relationships with them lose their importance.

Autoeroticism is a strong aspect of the covert narc’s sexuality. It does not refer only to masturbation, but let’s start with that. When a covert narc masturbates, he makes love to himself - his fantasies are complex and revolve around a false image of himself. He uses fetishes for sexual rituals, because these fantasies are object-oriented. Hence the tendency to paraphilic behaviors, e.g. fetishism, or in a specifically selected form, transvestitism (dressing up, among others, to enhance the excitement and sensation). The covert narc often becomes addicted to masturbation accompanied with pornography, which - as instrumental sex separating sexual excitement from emotional intimacy - strengthens his focus on the object. But autoeroticism in the case of covert narcissism is manifested above all in the fact that while having sex with someone, covert narc makes love with himself. In other words, the libido is directed at himself - that is, the false ideal "I" of the covert narc. Having sex with a narc, the partner becomes the object that the narc masturbates with. Someone’s body is just the tool he needs to make autoerotic fantasy expression without empathy possible. Dehumanization is treated in psychology as a defense mechanism that causes others to be treated impersonally. This allows the expression of hostility, aggression, humiliation, using people for narc’s own benefit. Dehumanization of others also protects the covert narc against the emotional stimulation with the perception of a real feeling in human being, which could be overwhelming for a covert narc. Dehumanization of sexual partners by a covert narcissist can be compared to the dehumanization of others by soldiers during the war, which allows them to kill opponents. Therefore, the covert narcissism resembles PTSD post-traumatic stress disorder typical of former soldiers fighting on the front.

The covert narc uses sex as a specific defense mechanism. Narcissism is the result of childhood trauma, as a result of which a person suffers mentally. Narcissistic trauma/injury, or painful childhood experiences, are corrected by changing them into positive emotions in sexual fantasies. The sexual partner is dehumanized in them, becomes an object, which leads to perversion or paraphilias. Thanks to these fantasies the narc triumphs and feels strong, in contrast to the feelings experienced in childhood. Covert narcissism is associated with a tendency to perverse sex and paraphilias (sexual preference disorder). Kinky and paraphilic tendencies of covert narcissism are sometimes explained as a kind of defense mechanism (so-called sexualized reversal in the opposite direction). Thanks to it, a narc transforms his fear and depression into excitement and pleasure. Physical sexual pleasure temporarily desensitizes mental pain, but does not cure it. The covert narc is unsatisfied, so the number of sexual stimuli increases, because the current level of activity is no longer sufficient.

Covert narcissism is associated with a tendency to chronic boredom. The inner emptiness causes the need to fill it with strong and new stimuli. In turn, the anti-social aspect of narcissism is associated with a tendency to dominate, searching for new sensations and risky behavior. In his childhood with his parents or a parent whose covert narc was afraid of and could never be sure of what reaction he would encounter, he unconsciously linked the pleasure of intimacy with risk, adrenaline and disappointment. In sex, he looks for a thrill, adventure, danger, surprising and forbidden / incompatible with social norms / immoral situations. Ge gets into several relationships at once, or one after the other, keeping aside contacts with other sexual objects from which she draws vital
energy. He has sex with anonymous partners, without trying to meet them; participates in orgies; uses paid sex; shows dominance and power; uses utensils that increase the intensity of sensations and applies permissive practices for the dehumanization of the sexual partner, objectification, depriving him of typical human features. He readily uses psychoactive or psychedelic substances to enhance the experiences. They give him more power and high, but they also help to dehumanize another person, open the other person and deprive the other person of the will - and thus it is easier to treat someone as an object that gives him his body in a changed state of consciousness. The covert narc crosses subsequent boundaries giving vent to his sexual instincts. He draws power from proving sexual performance with numerous partners who are like sexual gadgets, inflatable dolls. He feeds his eternally hungry ego in a pathological obsession to strengthen his false self. He doesn't care about sexually transmitted diseases, because when he is feeling well he feels all-powerful and indestructible. He does not care if he infects other sexual partners, because he does not take responsibility for his actions and their consequences for others.

Compulsive sex and too high frequency of heterosexual relationships can, however, trigger in covert narcissatiety and boredom and transfer his preferences to increasingly perverted forms of sex, to representatives of his own sex or transsexuals. Although narcissistic personality disorder is one of the most common personality disorders in the group of men with sexual dysphoria (time-varying discomfort associated with cultural role or physical traits), what does look like as a sexual dysphoria in sex life of a covert narc, does not have to be a part of a larger problem of gender identity (like the desire to change sex). With high probability it comes from the deep narcissistic pathology as a desperate attempt to stabilize the fragmented "I". Men with covert narcissism show tendency to autogynephilia, i.e. arousing fantasies based on self-image as a woman (so-called erotic target inversion). It is claimed that autogynephilia is a form of narcissistic erotic autoeroticism and a manifestation of self-concentration. It may coexist with gynandromorphophilia, i.e. sex drive directed at transsexual women who have preserved male genitals. To some extent, this is due to the intimacy desire that is difficult to realize, which is indirectly experienced through anal penetration, as giving the other person access to his intimate inner self (interior). At the same time, a person with covert narcissism can gain the feeling that he can be whatever he wants and experience the role of the gender stereotypically recognized as weaker and demanding care. So he can at least in such a way allow himself to be passive and weak in sex, and at the same time be a party who deserves special treatment. As an actor in this momentary role, a covert narcissist can feel safer than as a man constantly maintaining control. Covert narc does not emotionally attach to sexual partners, does not respect them and does not even need to know their names, and sex is only sex for him and does not serve to deepen intimacy.

A covert narcissist, with an uncertain and fragile sense of self, would like to be stronger, better than others and does not like to be subordinated. Social norms, including those on monogamy, are reluctant. A healthy relationship should be balanced in giving and taking, which is sometimes a compromise. But the covert narc does not like to give up something for a partner, because he interprets it as a loss of control over his life. He strives to maintain sexual availability to confirm his attractiveness and feel good. In a monogamous relationship, he feels as if he was tied up in a chain, so he initiates sex outside the relationship to restore sense of control and dictate his conditions to other people. In a love relationship with a covert narcissist you have to reckon with infidelity. When the narc stays for longer with his romantic Source of supply, this Source becomes less and less attractive to him. It is difficult for him to sexualize and to dehumanize someone with whom he has
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created a kind of emotional bond. The bond reflects the attachment of the child's first life bond, usually with the mother, and in adulthood, the romantic partner symbolically takes over the place once occupied by the mother. Despite the weak strength of the bond that the covert narc creates with the romantic partner, it may be awkward for him to treat his main Source of supply as a sexual prop of perverse feats. In the sphere of sex, the Source becomes a kind of holiness because the narc is not able to combine the substitute of the closeness created with her with the instrumental treatment of someone's body. This has to do with the so-called "Madonna-whore complex" (more on this subject in the article on the blog). The partner is seen as a Madonna who personifies devotion and care, and narc shares with her routine sex, or sex in general is marginalized in everyday life of a couple. The "Whore", or sexual object outside of a romantic relationship, embodies sensuality, debauchery and filthiness. With her, sex can be exciting and unpredictable. This is due to the abnormalities in passing through the Oedipus Complex, also it’s the result of family of origin rigor, fear of female sexuality and smeared gender roles. This dualism of perceptions of femininity and sexuality makes the covert narc choose Madonna as permanent partner and want other sex objects for sex. Only sex with human-objects really excites the covert narc. And even if Madonna starts to have perverse sexual practices with the covert narc, over time she will stop being seen as Madonna and the narc will start to move away. Addiction to pornography and instrumental sex with others reinforce his tendency to separate sex from love, which is why he often has to support himself with Viagra or other stimulants while making sex with his regular partner. But pathological infidelity also helps him to saturate his ego with conquests and to create triangulations to arouse anxiety, uncertainty and jealousy in his partner. Permanent partners of covert narcissists are mentally devastated when they discover the size and variety of forms of infidelity of the beloved, who declared exclusivity and monogamy.

If the object of perversion and sexual fantasies put in action becomes a love partner, he can share pervet interest for unconventional sex or be already so much "enchanted" and submissive that he would agree to something despite himself. It is worth noting that men who are partners of narcissistic people are more open to sexual news and suggestions than women. For a women partner of a covert narc, narc’s behavior more often becomes a reason for judgment and criticism that hits a sensitive point of a narc and causes a defensive reaction (devaluation of the Source). If the Source agrees to erotic diversification, sexual addictions and perversions will escalate and not all fancies will necessarily be acceptable. And even if, after a while, it is likely that sex with a permanent partner will appear boring and the covert narc will experience increasing difficulty in sexualizing the life partner with whom he shares thoughts, conversations, joint daily activities and plans. It is hard for him to combine the substitute of emotional intimacy, which he looks for in life, with the need for instrumental autoerotic sex. Closeness and sex are so separated in the mind of the covert narcissist that they contradict one another. In the long run, pick up both of these benefits from one source is unlikely. While cheating on a permanent partner, the covert narc maintains a certain amount of stability in the area of relationship and diversifies boredom by the instability and unpredictability of other sexual relations with human objects.

The sexuality of covert narcissists can vary slightly. For example, there are those who, in a stable relationship, temporarily give up sex or maintain routine sex with their permanent partner, and in the intervals between subsequent romantic relationships they throw themselves into a vortex of promiscuity and perversion. Or those whose perverse and paraphilic behaviors and debauchery persist constantly, regardless of being in a relationship with a romantic partner. The thinking of a sex
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addict which the covert narcissist is, is based on a lie, covert narc has learned sexual patterns, he will continue to do what he did all his life. Sex with an object gives him a boost of vital energy, which works on so-called reward system in the brain, associated with, inter alia, the development of addictions. And as it happens with addiction, after some time you need more to get the same effect. Covert narc’s sexual behavior escalates, and the search for new sexual stimuli and sensations is endless and is becoming increasingly extreme. He is not able to control his sexual behavior for a long time, limit their destructive forms or stop them for good even if they hurt his life partner. Sex obsession and fantasizing are his main coping strategies, including projection mechanism and blaming. For sex, he is willing to neglect other spheres of life and even sacrifice his relationship. For the life partner of the covert narcissist, the words "you saw what you were taking" do not apply.

Covert narcissism - sexuality:

• Dehumanization as a defense mechanism (people-objects)
• Sex as a defense mechanism
• Autoeroticism, inward libido
• Perverse behavior
• Paraphilias
• Sex addiction
• Addiction to masturbation / pornography
• Infidelity
• Non-monogamy
• Madonna – whore complex
• Fear of women
• Smeared gender
• Sex more important than love
Describing life with a covert narcissist, I assumed that the partner is a woman, because it is usually for women that the sexuality of a loved one is a greater challenge. A woman, therefore, meets a man, falls in love with him and very quickly becomes close. She doesn't know that she is dealing with a covert narcissist, so she trusts him and thinks that he is her soul mate, THE ONE. And sex is a hidden control tool for a covert narcissist and serves, among others, to impress and manipulate the romantic partner. A covert narc usually tries to be a perfect lover, because this is how he confirms his own uniqueness. He achieves this uniqueness thanks to virtuosity in erotic techniques. In the idealization phase, as part of love-bombing, a covert narc collects information needed to create a mask, in which he wins the favor of the selected person. He'll make her trust him, open her emotionally and sexually, give him her body and life. Sex with a new partner usually occurs quickly and the covert narc wants to make her addicted to him by giving her the best sex in her life. But even the multiple orgasms he gives her have nothing to do with the desire to please her. They are part of building the image of a narcissist as an outstanding lover. The covert narc does not forget about hugs, eyes contact and tender words. Over time, however, one can feel that, despite having good sex, something is missing in these moments of making love. Because sex with a partner with whom a covert narc has built a bond is mechanical. The narc is more focused on the technical aspect than on the emotional closeness that sex co-creates in a healthy relationship. He prefers to treat sexual partners as objects, not as people who have their feelings and boundaries. In what he calls "love", he
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treats his partner like an object – Source of narcissistic supply, and he shows similar preferences in the sphere of sexuality.

In sex with a permanent partner, after a period of praise and making her addicted to him, the covert narc begins to use vulgarisms and erotic gadgets to turn up the atmosphere, proposes dressing up to add spice, begins subtly and tests his power over another person. There may be objections from her side, which will trigger a phase of devaluation (I write about the phases of the narcissistic cycle in Part II). Some partners, however, agree with the ideas of their narc-partner, because - as he assures - they are soul mates connected to each other, destined and energetically tuned. The partner therefore agrees, feeling special for her beloved, with whom, as narc says, he wants to try some erotic experiments for the first time. A sexual rollercoaster begins, which is a power play for the narc. The covert narc does not know his boundaries and does not respect boundaries of other people, does not respect that the other person may have fears, resistances, different tastes and her own boundaries. In sex, he will cross them and violate them, playing with someone, testing how strong his power is over someone, experimenting with someone's body and feelings. His violence has unobvious form, because he manipulates thoughts and feelings of the other person, drawing her into the mind game. He creates his own narrative, according to which he does not do anything wrong, and his actions are even beneficial to the victim (for example, that he opens her up to new techniques, helps her to free herself from stereotypes, liberate her sexually, etc.). The partner will not notice how it has happened that she does things that she does not feel like doing.

When she becomes submissive and the narcissist is certain that he has made her totally addicted and dependent, he starts to get bored, because she is no longer a challenge for him. He is looking for other sexual objects or he is reaching out for a "spare wheel", i.e. someone he holds in reserve. Or suddenly he becomes indifferent and even mentions about his reduced sex drive. He does it to make his partner feel desperate and initiate sex contacts. He plays with her, breaking her when she tries to go back to what was between them. He compares her to someone who excites him more; he says he prefers anal penetration, which she can’t give him and the strap-on, though he wanted it before - now it's not the same as a real penis. Or he says he prefers to spend time with pornography than having sex with her. Or he blames her for being bored because she agreed to have sex too quickly. He can also use the intimate information against her, which she told him in confidence at the stage of love-bombing. Gaslighting used in the devaluation phase of the narcissistic cycle, is also used in the sphere of sexuality - to make her feel more and more worthless, sexually unattractive. He does the same if he tries to be faithful. Over time, he then feels isolated from other sexual objects, his secondary energy sources, and begins to hate his partner for it. He is strongly frustrated and the repressed impulses are boiling in him. He may eventually refuse her sex to frustrate her, or say the words quoted earlier to oppress her and punish her. Lack of interest in sexual intercourse with a permanent partner may also be due to Madonna – whore complex. In turn, if the partner does not want sex, a covert narcissist can dehumanize her, turn her into a sexual slave and even rape her. Impulsive actions are a kind of catharsis, and after that the covert narc can start with a blank white card. After such situations, he usually uses gaslighting so that the partner would understand that he had no other choice. Sexuality in romantic relationship with a covert narcissist is a cycle of validation and abuse. After alleviating the situation, the narcissist uses love-bombing and gives the partner back his favors. Until he wants something again.
In sex, which started a relationship as an expression of love, the partner is destroyed over time. In need of strong and diverse stimuli, the covert narc wants erotic triangles, swinging, sex with many people of different sexes, including transsexuals, he would like to watch someone else having sex with his partner or vice versa, makes a pressure for an open relationship and sexual promiscuity. He proposes and makes pressure on his partner and although he doesn’t like to negotiate, he can go as far as to promise something in return. He makes promises he will not keep, and if his partner opposes - he will punish her soon devaluing her. And although men often crave Madonna, who will become just for him a whore in his bed - it just doesn’t work in case of a covert narc touched by Madonna-whore complex. Covert narc can’t fantasize about perverse sex with his Madonna. He may want to experiment with her to test his power, but he keeps being more attracted to people-objects outside of the relationship.

Knowing that he committed infidelity in his previous relationships and the detection of infidelity may have resulted in rejection, he may come up with an open relationship proposal to eliminate the threat of potential rejection that would hurt him badly. Most often, however, a permanent partner who loves a covert narc, treats the offer of non-monogamy very personally. She doesn't know everything about the narcissist's complex psyche and sexuality, so she feels rejected. She does not understand why a loved one wants to have sex with others, since she loves him so much and tries so hard. She internalizes pain, shame and suffers. Her self-esteem can weaken so much that she agrees to let other sexual people-objects into the relationship or to extreme forms of sex, to keep a partner. But the mental pain can be so horrible that she agrees to an open relationship, not to experience it anymore and not to risk losing her beloved partner. And while the covert narc ensures that she is the only one important to him and others are only for sex, she goes crazy with despair when he makes appointments with others. For a permanent partner of a covert narc, there is actually no good solution. Because even if she has the inner peace to let him do what he wants as long as she maintains a bond with him, their relationship will be empty and painful. The paradox is that a covert narcissist often falls in love with a person with moral or possessive principles, which means that he unconsciously provokes what he is so afraid of. So he has little chance of creating an open relationship with his permanent partner, unless the partner gives up against her will. If she disagrees, the narc will leave her or cheat. Because he is a player. Life is for a covert narc a game to win and feel greater strength. If he wants energy from sex with others, he is ready to even destroy his own relationship.

These are just some of all possible sexual behaviors associated with covert narcissism. It is rare that a covert narc does not maintain any sexual relations, even when he is with someone in a stable relationship. Escaping the inner void into perverse sex provides his false identity with energy, passion for life and attention of others. But covert narcissists may vary, some prefer more conquests, others prefer pornography or paid sex, and others derive from the full range of possibilities as long as they have enough life time. However, there is no such force that any permanent partner will make a covert narcissist stop treating people as objects. He has sex with them, but he makes love only with his own perfect ‘I’. And that’s why sex, which in a healthy relationship strengthens the bond, in a relationship with a covert narcissist moves partners away from each other. And ultimately it is more important to a covert narcissist than love.

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