

Women Who Emotionally Abuse Men

We've all seen it. And heard it. You're in a restaurant. There's a man there with his girlfriend. As people are eating and socializing, you can't help but notice. When the man tries to speak, he is cut off by his girlfriend. She mocks him when he tells a story that might make him look good, and finishes his jokes for him. When the waiter brings the menus, she makes fun of his selection. While she complains about spending money on him all the time, you can't help but notice that he is paying for all of her drinks. By the end of the night she is berating him outright, and as they exit the restaurant, the woman is in a full rage spiral, yelling about something unrelated to anything that has happened in the last three hours. No one says anything.

It's called emotional abuse. It's well-documented when men inflict it on female victims. Less well known is when women do it to men. While the emotional abuse of women is discussed on *Oprah*, in bestsellers, and everywhere in pop culture and in academia, there are virtually no resources for men who have been emotionally abused. Google searches turn up very few resources. Books on the subject are mostly broadsides that have not been properly researched and substitute academic rigor for attacks on feminism.

And yet every person I know—and I'm betting everyone reading these words—knows a man who has been victimized by emotional abuse. All you have to do is ask around. I did just that recently when I was researching the epidemic of men and suicide, and what I found was disturbing. One man, a friend from childhood, told a story that seemed like a kind of slow emotional torture.

When he met his future wife ten years ago, he was captivated

by her beauty, but also by her wicked sense of humor and ability to intelligently cut others, mostly pop culture figures, down to size. They were like a team, and had a child together. After a couple years, something changed. Her wit was now more often than not turned on him, first as sarcastic jibes and then as outright abuse. She complained that he didn't make enough money, and soon he felt like nothing he did was enough. She began to withhold affection, and her mood was so unpredictable that he felt like anything he said or did would be attacked. The sarcasm that once brought him a jolt of joy now cut him apart. More than once his wife called him in an incoherent rage about something he didn't understand. Strangest of all, she began to lie about certain things yet seemed convinced she was telling the truth. Weeks after a weekend in Las Vegas—which he had paid for—she complained that she was “tired of paying for our vacations.” After the divorce, she insisted on having their daughter on the days when he wanted to take her to play basketball, her favorite sport.

My friend had married an emotionally abusive person, and someone who may have even had a serious personality disorder. The effect on him was devastating. He was depressed and felt confused, and even mentioned suicide. He felt anxious whenever she was around. He's still dealing with it years after the divorce.

One of the few people who understood him was Dr. Tara J. Palmatier, the author of a forthcoming ebook [Say Goodbye to Crazy: How to Rid Yourself of that Crazy Ex and Restore Sanity to Your Life](#). Dr. Palmatier runs a website, [Shrink4Men.com](#). She's one of the few people in the mental health field talking about the emotional abuse of men. In [one post](#) on her blog, Palmatier itemized the ten behaviors characteristic of emotionally abusive women:

- Bullying
- Unreasonable expectations

- Verbal attacks
- Gaslighting (lying and then claiming he is crazy)
- Unpredictable responses
- Constant chaos
- Emotional blackmail
- Rejection
- Withholding affection and sex
- Isolating

The result?

You're constantly on edge, walking on eggshells, and waiting for the other shoe to drop. This is a trauma response. You're being traumatized by her behavior. Because you can't predict her responses, you become hyper vigilant to any change in her mood or potential outburst, which leaves you in a perpetual state of anxiety and possibly fear. It's a healthy sign to be afraid of this behavior. It's scary. Don't feel ashamed to admit it.

One of the difficulties with addressing the emotional abuse of men is that things today are so politically polarized it's hard to have a calm discussion about it. Feminists have worked so hard over the last fifty years to turn men from ogres into enlightened companions that they feel any concession that women are also capable of abuse is a betrayal of the cause. There is a massive infrastructure in academia, politics, and pop culture that serves to support women who are abused by men. This is a good thing, as violence against women remains prevalent and a problem. Yet abuse experts have argued that emotional abuse can be worse than physical abuse. A punch to the face leaves obvious proof, evidence to use with the police to put the assailant behind bars. Emotional abuse, which men can tolerate and excuse away as normal, can go on for years, leaving a person weak, desperate, and profoundly suicidal. They have lost themselves.

On the other side of the political spectrum, conservatives tend to scream that feminism is to blame when the discussion of abusive women comes up. Every woman who gets off a funny line about men instantly becomes Medusa. This trivializes genuine emotional abuse, and often masks simple misogyny. (This, sadly, seems the case with Paul Elam, Dr. Palmatier's co-author on *Say Goodbye to Crazy*. Palmatier is a brilliant analyst, but in video conversations with her, Elam comes across as angry and crude.)

Just as anecdotal evidence indicates that the emotional abuse of men is more widespread than the media reports, it also reveals that emotional abuse doesn't have much to do with politics. The abused tend to become abusers, a terrible reality that has more to do with the soul and psyche than who's running congress. Liberal and conservative women are caring and supportive partners. They can also—just like men—be pathological narcissists who torture their husbands and boyfriends.

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