

Is it really ABUSE?

Excerpts from *Why Does He Do That?*
Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men, by Lundy Bancroft (2002).

“The defining point of abuse is when the man starts to exercise power over the woman in a way that causes harm to her and privileged status for him” (p. 124).

Where does subtler mistreatment end and abuse begin?

- **He retaliates against you for complaining about his behavior.**
Suppose you complain about being silenced by his constant interruptions. He then gets a huffy, hostile tone in his voice as if your objection were unfair to *him* and says sarcastically, “All right, I’ll just listen and *you* talk,” and acts as if you are oppressing him by calling him on his behavior (p. 124).
- **He tells you that your objections to his mistreatment are your problem.**
He says such things as: “You’re too sensitive; every little thing bothers you.” “Not everyone is all nicey-nice when they’re angry like you want them to be,” or “You’re just getting angry because you’re not getting your way, so you’re saying I’m mistreating you.”
Through comments like these, the abuser can try to persuade you that: 1) you have unrealistic expectations for his behavior, and you should be willing to live with the things that he does; 2) you are actually reacting to something else in your life, not to what he did; and 3) you are using your grievances as a power move against him. All of these tactics are forms of discrediting your complaints of mistreatment, which is abusive. His discrediting maneuvers reveal a core attitude: “...you have no right to object to how I treat you.” And you can’t be in a fair and healthy relationship if you can’t raise grievances (p. 125).
- **He gives apologies that sound insincere or angry, and he demands that you accept them.**
The abuser may add angry insults and crazy-making denial about whatever she was already upset about. He feels she should be grateful for his apology, even though his tone communicated the opposite of his words; he in fact feels entitled to forgiveness, and he demands it. (p. 126).
- **He blames you for the impact of his behavior.**
He becomes upset and accusatory when his partner exhibits the predictable effects of chronic mistreatment, and then he adds insult to injury by ridiculing her for feeling hurt by him. If his verbal assaults cause her to lose interest in sex with him, he says, “you must be getting it somewhere else.” (p. 126)
- **It’s never the right time, or the right way, to bring things up.**
With an abuser, no way to bring up a complaint is the right way. You can wait until the calmest, most relaxed evening, prepare your partner with plenty of verbal stroking, express your grievance in mild language, but he still won’t be willing to take it in (p. 127).

I’ve heard that some forms of abuse can be very subtle.
So how can I tell if this is abuse?

- **He undermines your progress in life.**
He takes advantage of you financially, interferes with your job or your school, causes damage to your relationships, tells you that you are incompetent at something you enjoy (p. 127).
- **He denies what he did.**
A non-abusive partner might argue with you about how you interpret something he did; an abuser denies his actions altogether (p. 128).
- **He justifies his hurtful actions or says you “made him do it.”**
Here the abuser is using your behavior as an excuse for his own....He says he’ll stop some form of abuse if you give up something that bothers *him*, which is usually something you have every right to do (p. 128).
- **He touches you in anger or makes you fearful in other ways.**
Physical aggression by a man toward a woman is abuse, even if it happens *only once*. He raises a fist; he punches a wall, throws things at you; blocks your way; restrains you; grabs, pushes, or pokes you; threatens to hurt you. That is physical abuse. No assault in a relationship, however “minor,” should be taken lightly (p. 128).
- **His controlling, disrespectful, or degrading behavior is a pattern.**

Why does an abuser do what he does?

“The abusive man gains power through his coercive and intimidating behaviors...It isn’t the woman’s pain that appeals to him: most abusers are not sadists. In fact, he has to go to some lengths to shield himself from his own natural tendency to empathize with her. The feeling that he rules is where the pleasure lies.” (p. 152-153).

So, his partner should know that:

“Your happiness in a relationship depends greatly on your ability to get your needs heard and taken seriously. If these decisions are taken over by an abusive or controlling partner, you experience disappointment after disappointment, the constant sacrificing of your needs. He, on the other hand, enjoys the luxury of a relationship where he rarely has to compromise, gets to do the things he enjoys, and skips the rest. He shows off his generosity when the stakes are low, so that friends will see what a swell guy he is” (p. 153).

Everyone thinks he’s such a great guy. But he’s not always like that.

“The difference between the verbally abusive man and the physical batterer are not as great as many people believe....Most abusive men simply don’t *seem* like abusers. They have many good qualities, including times of kindness, warmth, and humor, especially in the early period of a relationship. An abuser’s friends may think the world of him” (p. 8).

Maybe he just doesn’t know how much he’s hurting me.

“An abuser is a human being, and somewhere inside him, buried under thick layers of entitlement and disrespect, there is a heart that knows that what he is doing is wrong” (p. 143).

You deserve to be treated with respect in your relationship. Are you?

If you see things on this list that seem familiar, you may be abused. Abuse won’t stop on its own. Call today to discuss your situation with a qualified counselor. All calls are free and confidential.

The Ripple Effect

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