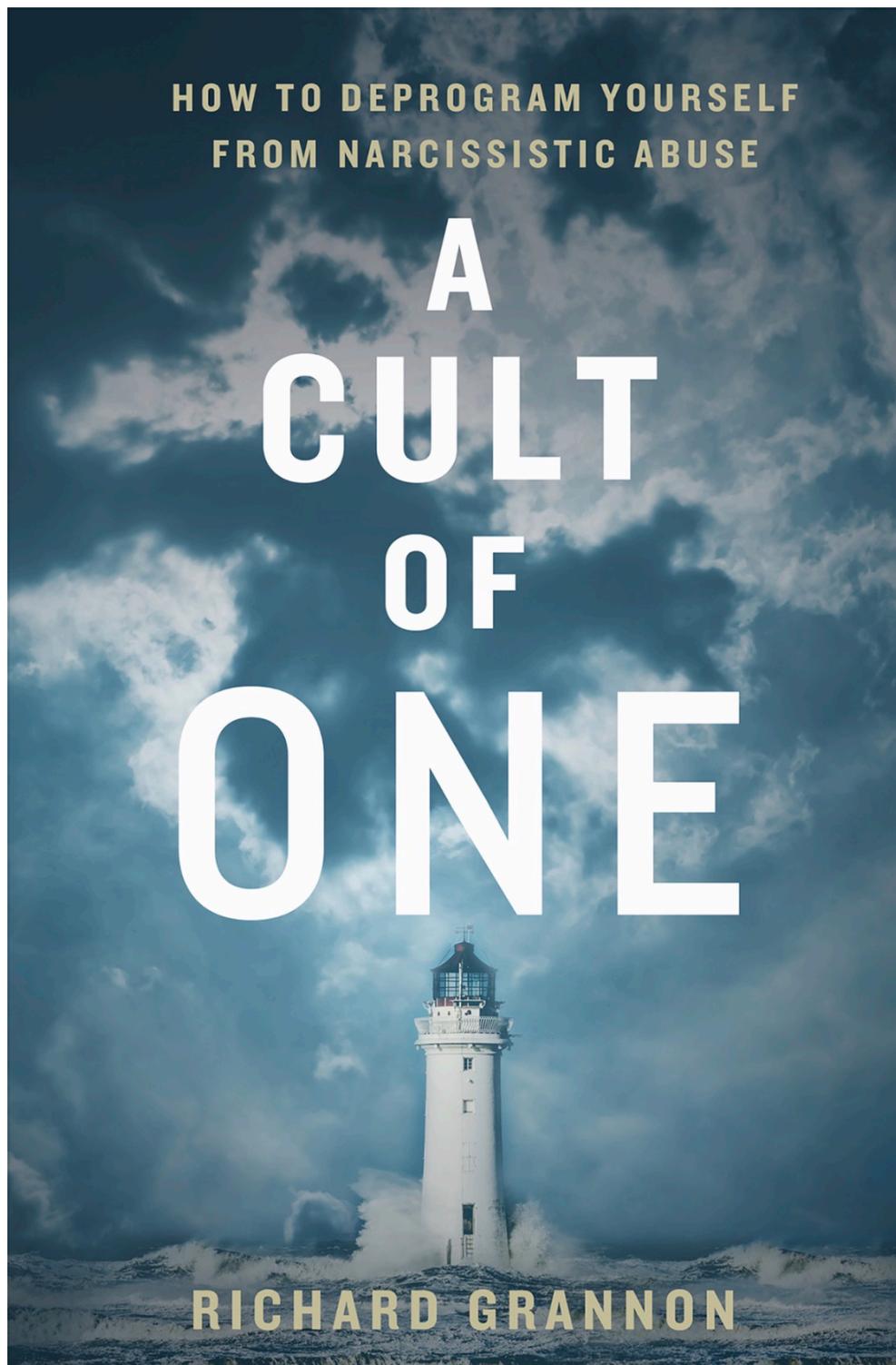


A Cult of One: How to Deprogram Yourself from Narcissistic Abuse (2022) by Richard Grannon



About Richard Grannon

Richard Grannon is passionate about helping others defend themselves, get back on their feet, and finally free themselves from narcissistic abuse. Drawing on numerous forms of psychotherapy, including NLP, cognitive behavioral therapy, zen meditation, psychodynamics, and more, Grannon's unique methodology offers a direct, practical solution to help narcissistic abuse

victims reclaim their self-worth. He was a self defense instructor, worked in the security industry, taught police and soldiers how to deal with the mental stress with combat. Many of those he taught had struggles at home. It grew from there.

What follows are quotes from the book above. These quotes stood out to me in my reading of the work. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor representative of the entire book. All quotes are to be read in this context and must not replace medical and/or other professional advice.

Note: Any typographical errors occurred through the transcription process and do not reflect what may be found in the book.

Note also: Where I have made **bold** text in the quotations below, it's to emphasise a point. My emphasis does not appear in the original text.

Note, finally: Beneath some quotations from the book, I have added commentary. These comments represent my own personal thoughts and, in some cases, clinical applications. They should not be taken outside that context.

Blurb

So many of us find it easier to love other people than to love ourselves. We struggle to put our own needs first and have a hard time asking for what we want, let alone going after it. Instead, we attach ourselves to selfish people, trying over and over to win love from those who simply can't offer it. If that sounds familiar, you may be the victim of narcissistic abuse. In A Cult of One, Richard Grannon exposes the insidious effects of narcissistic abuse and shares his own winding road to recognition and recovery. Through martial arts, mysticism, psychedelics, and psychology, spanning over four continents and forty-four years of life, Grannon discovered a systematic discipline for healing. Join him as he explains step by step—with courage, humor, and optimism—how to forge your own path to a better life.

Chapter 1: The Fight of My Life

"When I use the term "**codependent**," I mean a **person who is traumatised and brainwashed into needing to be a slave to abusive, psychopathic, narcissistic, tyrannical types of people and systems in order to feel in any way meaningful, visible, or alive.** I mean a person who has been so thoroughly and consistently abused and objectified that they end up colluding in their own self-eradication. That person may have internalised the abuse to such a degree that they will maintain or even further their self-destruction in the absence of the abuser."

"When we have two people in each other's spaces, we have weaknesses in key areas: boundaries, sense of self, agency, sovereignty, responsibility, assertiveness, directness, clarity, emotional regulation, and independence."

And where there are weaknesses in these areas there come the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' (for relationships): contempt, stonewalling, criticism, defensiveness. These come from the Gottmans in their research on what makes for successful relationships (and what kills them). Consider, also, what Dr. Edith Eger says in her book *The Gift: 12 Lessons to Save Your Life*: "The biggest disruptor of intimacy is low-level, chronic anger and irritation."

"When I visualise the two circles overlapping, sometimes I imagine a strong circle drawn with a thick line overlapping with a weak circle whose perimeter is drawn with dots. I think of the strong, dominant circle dwarfing and overpowering the smaller, weaker circle. This represents a codependent relationship becoming truly toxic and even abusive. The unbroken circle is independent. The overlapping circles—one being submissive and the other parasitic—are codependent."

"When boundaries are infringed upon and we are in each other's spaces or carrying each other's loads, I believe that the situation is always somewhere on the spectrum of toxicity and manipulation."

"Not my monkey"—get used to saying that if you want firm boundaries.

"any person who is not openly expressing their intent in an adult way and whose sense of self or purpose in the world is dependent on a singular other or multiple others is indeed codependent."

"through extensive abuse and trauma, a person is effectively "gutted"—only to then be "stuffed" with someone else's intent, purpose, and identity."

On fight, fawn, flight, and freeze...

"A **Fighter** approaches triggering situations combatively and aggressively as an enemy to be overwhelmed. A **Fawner** seeks to negotiate and trade his or her way out of a position of danger, making endless compromises to keep the peace. In a **Flight** response, we simply run away. This could be disappearing into our work or hobbies, avoiding conflict and responsibility, or physically leaving situations that become taxing. A **Freezer** is stuck in place, hoping the predator won't see him or her. This manifests as dissociating or becoming numb. This might lead to overeating, using drugs, watching too much TV, gambling, or anything that allows a person to get out of his or her own mind."

Chapter 2: How to “Trauma Bond” a Child

“A traumatic, unsafe household is a hellish penitentiary for a child. A dark, torturous space full of suffering, foreboding, and the shying away from shadows, lest they be a device of suffering or humiliation. If you were raised in adverse conditions, this will account for why you shy away from people, places, and scenarios. Why you can appear to be introverted or isolation-seeking, and why you struggle to ask for what you want.”

“People tell me I’m unusually sensitive. Maybe. Sometimes I wonder, though: maybe everyone else is unusually insensitive? It can’t always be me who’s at fault.”

This is a very interesting point ... What if he’s right? What if the problem isn’t on the foot of the one who feels deeply but the one who doesn’t feel at all? In her book *Good Inside*, Becky Kennedy talks about the DFK (**Deeply Feeling Kid**)—and it reminds me of Grannon’s point. In her own words: “Understanding DFKs requires going all the way back to evolution. For these children, **vulnerability sits right next to shame**; remember, shame puts humans into a primal defense state, one in which we are taken over by the need to protect ourselves. And we do that by **shutting down, attacking others, or closing people out**. When a child is in this threat state, the world feels dangerous; even a parent’s attempts to help can feel like an assault, which is why DFKs push us away at the precise moments they need our help.”

So what do you do? Well, if you care about your child, consider Kennedy’s advice: “Parents of DFKs have to practice “holding space” – meaning **literally staying present around the child and taking up space, so that the child sees her overwhelming feelings aren’t taking over the world around her and leaving her all alone**. Parents of DFKs have to commit to limiting the damage instead of solving the problem. They need to focus on the larger arc of a child’s struggle rather than fixating on what’s happening on the surface.” For Kennedy, one must not lose heart—“carry through because your child needs to see that **you are not overpowered by their dysregulation**. They must understand that they have a sturdy leader who can take care of them in times of stress. Your child may be, on the surface, asking not to be carried to his room, but on the inside, imagine they’re saying to you: “Please be the sturdy leader I need. I am clearly not in a place to be making good decisions. Please please please show me that my overwhelming feelings

aren't contagious."

"Where actual incest is a sexual infraction between family members, ***emotional incest is where the target is covertly coerced into offering the type of emotional support (or to be a whipping post) that should only ever be offered by a similarly aged adult.*** Both encroach on boundaries—one physical and sexual, the other psychological and emotional."

The term "emotional incest" leaves a sour taste in my mouth ... and perhaps that's the point. The offence is not sexual, but it has a similar effect—one of stealing the child's innocence and making her into the adult's 'plaything' ... except what's being played with is the child's emotions.

"The essence of codependency is needing other people in order to have a sense of self. There is such a thing as ***predatory codependency***, in which the narcissist codependent bullies, entraps, and cajoles the target or targets into giving them what they need: attention. There is also ***prey codependency***, in which the hyperagreeable Fawn responder sacrifices or martyrs themselves at the altar of the other's needs to get what they themselves need: a sense of significance through martyrdom. **Both are jealous, resentful, and flooded with feelings of guilt and shame.** The predatory codependent suppresses the guilt and shame, which are then sublimated (changed unconsciously) into feelings of aggression, fantasies of dominance and grandeur, plans for vengeance, and a need to dominate the other. The other is insignificant and utterly replaceable. The prey codependent suppresses their jealousy and resentment and is guided by strong feelings of guilt. They fight like hell to feel every single droplet of guilt. The jealousy is sublimated into sadomasochism, trying to do so much that others notice their selflessness, a desire to control and manipulate other people's feelings and reactions, and a need to be utterly submissive without restraint to the other."

"There is, for many people, a repetition compulsion in martial arts. A repetition compulsion is a Freudian concept that means we act out distressing circumstances again and again unconsciously. Many believe that there is also a blind hope for a different outcome. I believe many traumatised, bullied people are using martial arts to try to seek vengeance in the present on long dead ghosts from their pasts."

What an interesting point ... and perhaps a half-truth. I actually don't think this is a bad thing—"using martial arts to try to seek vengeance in the present on long dead ghosts". Why not? It's effective isn't it, as long as you come to it in good faith.

I've practiced Brazilian Jiu Jitsu in the past (complete novice—still a white belt) and found it wildly therapeutic

... once you get over the initial (unspecified) period of time where you're fighting to the death in a vain attempt to quench your ego. But I've also come across many who were just there to have a wonderful time and learn a new skill.

I've read reports on how the striking arts attract the most problems ... yet arts like BJJ attract more regulated and engaged people. Of course, it rests on the person's shoulders to determine how they show up.

Chapter 3: From Escape to Enlightenment

"Alopecia nervosa is a condition in which sustained stress leads to hair falling out in clumps. After being screamed at by one or the other raging parent seeking to dump their stress after some minor infraction (dropping a cup, playing too loudly, making a face they didn't like), I would fall into a state of frozen terror in which my limbs would go tingly and numb. I would struggle to breathe, and the bedroom I had been sent to would seem to expand to enormous proportions. The floor would tilt, and the distance from my duvet cover to the window would seem endless. Dissociation or freezing is often the first response of the psychologically abused child as none of the other responses are available to them. I remember feeling enormous guilt for existing and frequently wishing that my existence, and the stress it obviously caused, would cease."

"The formation of narcissistic personality disorder usually takes place between two polarities in which the child is simultaneously told they are bad and useless and that they are wonderful and gifted as long as they perform a function (one that is often inappropriately adult for a child) that benefits the hunger for narcissistic supply the parents feel. In my experience, whilst my childhood had left me feeling worthless and self-blaming, there were moments when my parents heaped praise on me. These moments were when I behaved as a "small adult" either by acting on stage or in social situations where I could seem to project an image of being "wise beyond my years."

"Parentification is when parents unconsciously push their children to take on a parental role and fulfil roles that should only be for adults. The child realises they must ignore their own feelings if they wish to feel close to their parents and take over adult tasks. GJ Jurkovic identified "narcissistic parentification" specifically as being the parents' efforts to unconsciously induce the child to conform to their own "ego ideal." *In other words, they force the child to be the adult person they wish they could be.*"

Children can't help but fall into the roles the parents frame them up for, especially if the parent is tyrannical. I recall once Jordan Peterson said something to the effect of

"You can make your children into exactly the same versions of each other, formed to your will, only if you're prepared to be incredibly tyrannical."

Of course, he wasn't advocating the latter. But it fits the picture, right? Kids become who they are as an outcome of what's happened during their upbringing. Many clients have become shadows of themselves because of their obligation to care for their family members, to become the parent to the parents and parent to their siblings, losing their innocence as a result. Often, in these circumstances, children achieve highly in later life ... and are often resentful. They begin to recognise how they came to be who they are and find it incredibly difficult to shift it. And yet I've seen many make the switch—the family often abhor their growth because they (the family) tend to lose out. Once boundaries are asserted they encroach on the expectations those who stood to benefit from the involuntary self-sacrifice of 'victim'.

I often tell my clients that asserting boundaries is like a castle building a wall—it makes the fortress stronger but doesn't guarantee it won't be attacked. With time, those who siege can be rebuffed ... but only when the person has a string army as well as an impenetrable wall.

A final note on self-sacrifice... For one to live a fulfilling life, one could argue voluntary self-sacrifice is pivotal. *Voluntary*. There's a difference between subjugating oneself for fear of being punished ... but what a wonderful thing to give to those you love, voluntarily and with humility, for the sake of that relationship. If one feels guilt and contempt and resentful for having done something for another, or thinks *What's in it for me?* then, obviously the sacrifice isn't voluntary. A more subtle question, however, is *Is my doing this for the other making them into a stronger person?* It's one thing to volunteer, to put yourself out, to feel good about doing that ... and quite another to do it at the expense of another's growth.

Teach a man to fish ... as the saying goes.

"**Neurotic naïveté** is a term I coined to describe, at first, my own tendency to insist on the most naïve perspectives of the world and ignore all incoming data that would alter that perspective."

The fifteen traits of people pleasers:

1. **emotophobia**: fear of negative emotions; never wanting anybody to feel bad
2. neurotic levels of **naïveté** (denial)
3. **neurotic desire to be liked** and addiction to attention, even negative
4. **external locus of control** (relying on outside permission) [or thinking that control lies elsewhere and not in your hands]
5. **inability to say "no"** (boundaries), especially if there is the use of guilt, shaming, whining, or any form of emotional blackmailing
6. excessive **conscientiousness** (taking as little space as possible because of lack of self-worth)
7. blurry sense of self (**no boundaries**), feeling other people's emotions and thoughts
8. emotional dependence (**codependence**): after abuse, some self-isolation (avoidance) and continuously playing the abuse from within—but two make perfect romantic woundmates, closed together tightly
9. **low self-confidence**, low self-worth (having been treated like a piece of shit and believing it)
10. **overintellectualisation**, rationalisation, and justification of the abusive situation
11. being **addicted to approval**
12. **emotional immaturity** [part of this is childishness (cf. *childlike*-ness) and the inability to understand how put feel in the context of relationships ... and, importantly, how *others* might be feeling]
13. **too altruistic and compassionate**, neurotically wanting to help or keep everybody happy all the time
14. **loneliness**, isolation (becoming a beggar)
15. **easily impressed** by new concepts, things, and people

"**complex trauma is typically associated with circumstances the client could not escape** where multiple stressors across multiple vulnerabilities were experienced in a way much more difficult for the client to identify. The cause of trauma is complex. And the symptoms of the trauma are more complex, too. Emotional dysregulation, a shaky sense of self, and hypervigilance about a world perceived to be very dangerous are all present. Present, too, are "emotional flashbacks," where emotions from previous traumatic experiences are unknowingly triggered and the sufferer feels intense negative emotions without knowing their cause."

A note on the above: trauma has been defined as one's inability to *escape*. *Feeling* is key here—there is a sense where you're backed into a corner and have no control and thus no option to escape. That's trauma.

And from Huberman Lab in Huberman's conversation with Becky Kennedy: "Trauma [is] an event or set of circumstances that

fundamentally change the way that the brain and nervous system work so that there's a maladaptive response going forward. It's not every bad thing that happens. But there are micro traumas sometimes called small t, more macro traumas, big T again could be multi event or single event. But years ago, a different psychologist, psychiatrist, was an adolescent psychiatrist at Stanford, said something in a seminar that just really struck me, which was that at its core, trauma is really about confusion over who's responsible."

Chapter 4: In Love and War

If you can see a consistent pattern of more than six of the following, it's time to stop kidding yourself and accept that your partner is at least an irredeemable shit if not an actual clinical malignant narcissist:

- excessive need for admiration
- bullying, exploitative interpersonal style
- vindictive
- entitled
- belief in their own specialness
- extremely envious
- obsessed with a fantasy-based version of themselves
- lacking empathy
- massive arrogance

"If you learned that love was abusive in childhood, then **having an abusive lover will feel a lot like home in adulthood.**"

"I cannot say for certain, but **I'm tempted to wonder if consumer capitalism hasn't truly rotted our minds at this point. Do we now see love, sex, and relationships as commodities to be consumed? That would mean we would adopt a consumer's mindset: people are not people but options** (like your favourite brand of car or clothes). They are not people but services and products. Love is no longer love but a consumer paying for the services rendered with time, attention, affection, and sex. How disappointed do people get when it doesn't work out exactly as they wished it would?"

As soon as we commoditise people, they become objects to be used. Cheap. Replaceable. And *used*.

Chapter 5: Building Better Boundaries

"The setting of a boundary requires a consequence, and a consequence requires an action. Words are not actions but merely the promise of them.

Boundary setting also requires some kind of a sacrifice. Why? Well, because the setting of a boundary, by definition, is outside the comfort zone."

Dr. Becky Kennedy on boundaries: "I think **parents actually have two jobs** [...] one of our jobs is *boundaries*. To me, boundaries are things we tell people we will do, and they require the other person to do nothing. That's really important because a lot of times we think we're setting a boundary when actually we're making a request. **Boundaries keep us connected to ourselves. They represent our values and our wants and our needs.** In a parent-child relationship, they also keep our kids safe. [...] But the other part of my job is [...] *empathy and validation*, which is a way of connecting to someone else where you see someone else's feelings and experience as real. You don't agree with it probably. You don't necessarily condone the behavior that's the representation of the feelings, but the feelings themselves you need to connect to. And I feel like those are our two jobs as parents, and that's really the way to be a sturdy leader and to be in a sturdy, healthy relationship with your kids." (Huberman Lab)

It appears that if, as a child, boundaries were not enforced, one feels unmoored. They may hear what's expected of them, but there's no follow-up. In narcissistic households, boundaries are constantly encroached upon, and children will grow up feeling untethered, lost, and indecisive. They carry guilt and shame but find it difficult to know oneself and one's own capacity to change their circumstance. Change comes hard ... and yet, when it comes, it's a beautiful thing to witness.

"The concept of **junk values** was coined by a journalist called Johann Hari. He posited the idea that **we live in a time where what is put on a pedestal and what is put up as a value is no longer; in fact, they are antivalues.** True values—truth, dignity, and courage—are discarded with contempt in our time. In their place are now junk values: consumerism, pleasure, promiscuity, and narcissism."

"if I subsumed myself in that world and only sought to pleasure myself as much as I possibly could, I would get very, very sick. I would feel unstable, my sense of purpose would diminish, and I would become mentally ill. I would experience emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and depression, and I would become, over time, quite distressed."

This is the paradox of living for pleasure—one feels 'good' when engaging in it ... yet the consequence kills in the end.

Boredom reigns when not constantly feeding the monster ... and purposelessness is felt deeper than one can quench.

"People are not people to the narcissist. There is only one person to the narcissist: *the narcissist themselves*. That is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever can be. They have a false self, and it is extremely exploitative, aggressive, manipulative, and predatory. You will hear many people wrongly claim that narcissists are self-centred, selfish, and egotistical. Technically, this is false. There is no self. There isn't even actually an ego there at all. There is only superego. The ego itself is obliterated. There is only superego, impulsive id, and that false self."

Unsure about this... Of course there's a self—it's obscured in 'parts'. We all have 'parts' that makes us who we are ... *parts* being elements of our personality (or as Dr. Richard Schwartz—pioneer of Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy—calls them: 'sub-personalities'). No matter who you are, you have felt conflicted—this is when parts come into play. Narcissists too. They just *blend* with the narcissistic part of themselves and find it difficult to see life objectively, out of that frame.

"we know full well that narcissists have CPTSD. They are classic primary Fight, secondary Fawn responders on the CPTSD spectrum. This is how they try to control love. This is how they try to control attention. This is how they try to control the actions of the people around them: a cocktail of flattery and threats."

What he's getting at: to **fawn** (to try as much as possible to attract attention—often associated with attachment trauma) and **fight** (always on the attack) are typical of narcissistic tendencies when complex PTSD (significant and pervasive, repeated traumas that shape the person throughout their life—often associated with attachment, bullying, or related violence of many sorts) is the issue.

"parents with BPD would have their abandonment anxiety triggered when a child starts to develop their own independence, authenticity, and boundaries. They hate it. They see it as a sign that the child will leave them. So they smash these boundaries down. The narcissistic parent sees these natural developments of assertiveness and the desire to explore the world as a threat to their grandiosity and a threat to their place in the dominance hierarchy, which is at the top, make no mistake. They also smash the child's boundaries down just to stop them from inflicting narcissistic injury. Both abusive parenting styles find it necessary to smash a child's boundaries: the BPD to avoid abandonment terror and the NPD to avoid narcissistic injury."

"if we are kind, if we are good, if we are giving, if we are Fawning, if we give ourselves away, **the predator will leave us alone.**"

True story: A woman fills up petrol and spots a tracksuited man in a hoody walk wildly towards her. Before he gets there she shouts out with a smile, "I love your shoes. Where'd you get them?" Confused, he answers and walks away. She breathes a sigh and thanks her instinct, later to pat on LinkedIn (cannot for the life of me remember who this was) about this experience. Fawn in action.

"If you've lived an entire life codependently in ultimate Fawn mode, totally agreeable, totally kind, never saying no, and always giving of yourself, you will find it very hard—very, very hard indeed—to do anything else. But you must. **Without a self present, we are not living.** Without a self present, we are not being honest. **We are not being authentic. We are not telling the truth. Because we can't.**"

I'm the consulting room, I've heard how those who people-please regularly feel inauthentic. There's a constant mismatch between who they feel they are and who they present to the world. And it's incredibly anxiety-provoking (dangerous) to do anything else.

"A true codependent doesn't live. They haunt their own lives. **[Codependents, people-pleasers, fawners] live as ghosts. They hang around. They're like kabuki actors at the back of a Japanese play, dressed in black, just there to help the actors, the narcissists, on the stage itself.** We must be brave and strong and learn to summon ourselves back into reality."

Chapter 6: Malaysia: Death, Rebirth

"When God is absent and we place ourselves in that space, we become bitter, irreverent, spiteful, arrogant, and pleasure-seeking."

On the day that I reread this quote, a pastor from my local church gave a sermon highlighting the folly of the New (now relatively old) Atheists' arguments to abandon God and live your life. The folly? Well, what could one fill in God's place? Inevitably it's a self-serving subjective moralism and pleasure-seeking drive. Nietzsche once said "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What

festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? ***Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?*** (*The Gay Science*)

Yes, we must. We become the arbiters of our own morality, inevitably one driven by selfish ambition ... which isn't 'wrong' per se. We must, after all, tend to one's own needs before we can tend to others. But that's not what we're talking about here, are we? Here we're talking about how one's own reason for living becomes the pursuit of pleasure, of what satisfies the here and now.

Consider, too, the biblical scholar Tom Wright: "the world has been full of movements which, instead of worshipping the God who made the world, have worshipped the world itself, or forces within it (money, sex, war, power – the usual lot)." (*Revelation for Everyone*)

A article I read recently—'Masturbating Ourselves To Death'—this point was clearly made: "If we take all the normal pushes and pulls of human life—that have historically knit communities together—and can swirl them inward on ourselves, alone, like solitary ball-bearings, then **what are we if not a bunch of habitual masturbators?**" (Marc Sims's *Et Cetera* Substack)

Years ago, too, I recall the speaker (Ravi Zacharias) saying how we once thought "art imitates life." Then, after a while, life begins to imitate art. Then, further still, life begins to stake its very existence on what that 'art' proposes to espouse. What do we see today if not this very thing? Social media. Streaming. Shorts. All slow suicide. Why? It reinforces slothfulness, laziness, boredom. We look to the screen to give us meaning and, by doing so, make ourselves vulnerable to being programmed by the algorithm to whatever the 'system' wants us to see and hear and feel and think.

Jack Carr in his novel *Red Sky Mourning* makes the latter point (regarding programming): "I've read articles that detail how our content in America is destroying the youth. In China, TikTok is focused on math and science and building a strong patriotic society. **Your 'freedom' also gives you the freedom to destroy yourselves, Mr. Reece.**"

A long(ish) commentary for a relatively benign point from

this book, but not long enough. Books can (and have) been written about this 'death of God'. Luckily, so too have books been written about the resurgence of faith in the youth. Let's pray the traction continues to move in the right direction—*Truth*.

Chapter 7: Exercises from and for the Heart

"I was suffering with some pretty extreme symptoms of CPTSD from the various incidents I'd been through in my life, but I really did not understand that at the time. I'd never really admitted the impact my sexual abuse and childhood experiences had on me, but the scars were large and deep. **Some of these wounds had not even become scars. They were still open, and they were still weeping.**"

A consuming one: "Some of these wounds had not even become scars." The assumption (both in therapy and the wider public) is that these are old wounds, scars. Except when they're not. Flashbacks are real. Re-experiencing symptoms are real. We feel like we're thrown back there reliving our trauma. No amount of 'snap out of it' will get us back. Until we find healing. That's where therapy comes in ... if one cannot heal on their own.

"I'd consumed a tremendous amount of literature on personal development, magic, spirituality, psychology, and philosophy. So I started asking myself questions. The larger-than-life, all-American life coach and motivational speaker Anthony Robbins likes to say, "The quality of the questions you ask determines the quality of the answers that you get." So I opened my notebook, and I wrote down the question, *What is change?*"

"I think it was [motivational speaker] **Zig Ziglar** who said, "***It is hard to hit a target that you cannot see, but it is impossible to hit a target that you do not have.***"

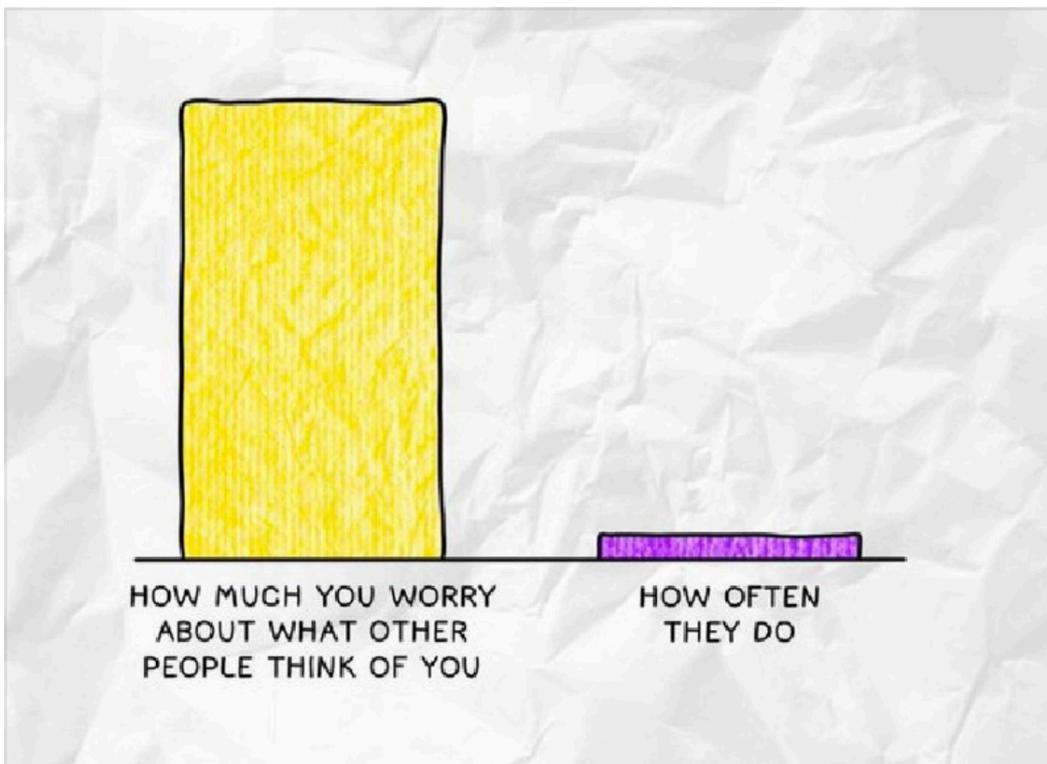
"Martial arts tend to be a syncretic adaptation of psychology, philosophy, and magic. The Chinese word most often associated with martial arts is kung fu. The actual word for martial arts in Chinese is wushu. **Wushu literally translates to "the art of war." Kung fu, more interestingly, translates to "hard work and skill developed through discipline."** This means that you can have good kung fu as a chef, a dancer, a golfer, a writer, or at any skill that you develop over time that takes discipline and consistent action. So I began to ask questions, good questions. *Knowing what I know about these things, what do I need to start doing in order to make real, lasting change and progress in my life now?*"

Knowledge is a necessary (and insufficient) first step to

change. Some might even argue it isn't even necessary because people can change without going anywhere near the reasons why they developed the habits in the first place (think addiction treatment—however, in my experience lasting change often comes through a combination of deep knowledge, trauma reprocessing, and immersive habit change). More importantly is disciplined action. I'm fond of telling my clients, "You are not what you think. You are not what you feel. You are not what you say. You *become* what you do."

"I think a lot of people who are dealing with issues around childhood trauma, CPTSD, and codependency really struggle to understand fully how other people see the world and how other people view them. **We, the ones struggling with CPTSD and codependency, have a tendency to be extremely hypersensitive and hypersentimental, and are quick to feel hurt.** We often seem not to fully appreciate the simple fact that most people, the normal people, simply do not have the time or the inclination to figure out who or what we really are beneath our surface act."

"In the adult world, it's good to remember that people have other things to take care of. We have bills to pay, relationships to hold together, and jobs to do. And all the other things that life throws at us. Don't be too hurt if people don't make a big effort to find out who you are and just take the superficial signals you have put out there. They are, after all, your signals."



"To those of us who were raised in adverse childhood environments though, this is something of a revelation because we are still stuck in our childhoods."

We're still stuck, hoping that some adult will see our pain and rescue us from it. But if we are seeking to mature emotionally as adults, we must let go of that, and we must remember: childhood is over, and nobody is coming to save us."

"You are the one you've been waiting for."

Remember this. There's nobody coming to rescue you. You must become both *rescuer* and survivor. There's no room for victimhood here. Holocaust survivor Dr. Edith Eger says, "victimhood comes from the inside. **No one can make you a victim but you.** We become victims not because of what happens to us but when we choose to hold on to our victimization. We develop a victim's mind—a way of thinking and being that is rigid, blaming, pessimistic, stuck in the past, unforgiving, punitive, and without healthy limits or boundaries. **We become our own jailors when we choose the confines of the victim's mind.**" (*The Gift*)

"Previously, I'd been resentful of people's tendency to judge a book by its cover or their tendency toward prejudice or even racism. But when I saw it from their point of view, I saw less evil intent and more just a lack of time, will, knowledge, or information on their part. They just weren't educated in that. And it was cruel, I would say, and impatient of me to expect more from them than they could give."

As tough as it might be to hear, nobody thinks about you as much as you think about yourself. This might mean you 'die' before you really get to live (if you were to take a Irvin Yalom's quote in *Love's Executioner* ... and apply it as such: "Some day soon, perhaps in forty years, there will be no one alive who has ever known me. **That's when I will be truly dead – when I exist in no one's memory.** I thought a lot about how someone very old is the last living individual to have known some person or cluster of people. When that person dies, the whole cluster dies, too, vanishes from the living memory. I wonder who that person will be for me. **Whose death will make me truly dead?"**).

For those who live in isolation, they're living a version of this 'death'. For the socially anxious, it's a rude (but somewhat liberating) awakening to realise people don't think of you as much as you think they do. For the depressed, well, this can further confirm you in your depression ... and entrench resentment because you think ill of your plot and want others to too ... yet that think less of you than you think.

These mental health conditions—though what I'll soon say will be very controversial to some—put on display various forms of narcissism. At bottom, the anxiety and depression and traumatic rumination have *you* at the centre. You believe you've been wronged, that you are on others' minds, that you cannot escape feeling like this ... and this forever confirms you in your plot (consider what neuroscientist Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett says in *How Emotions Are Made*: "I used to help my clients understand that they've been victimized twice: once in the moment and again because they've been left with emotional suffering that only they can resolve. Due to their trauma, their brains continue to model a hostile world, even after they've escaped to a better one."). But it shouldn't. Once you realise that there is hope, you rose from the grave and begin to live life.

Dr. Eger again: "In my experience, **victims ask, "Why me?" Survivors ask, "What now?"** [...] We ask "Why?" over and over, believing that if we could just figure out the reason, the pain would lessen. [...] when we ask why, we're stuck searching for someone or something to blame—including ourselves. **Why did this happen to me? Well, why not you?** Maybe I went to Auschwitz and survived so I could talk to you now, so I could live as an example of how to be a survivor instead of a victim. [...] **Victimhood is rigor mortis of the mind.** It's stuck in the past, stuck in the pain, and stuck on the losses and deficits: what I can't do and what I don't have. [...] approach whatever is happening with a gentle embrace." (*The Gift*)

Chapter 8: Deprogramming from Narcissistic Abuse

"Narcissists use some kind of lure to get us to consent to the main part of the brainwashing, which is the "shared fantasy." [...] With a parent, the bait would be parental love and acceptance. Who could resist that? [...] With a boss, the bait would typically be career progress, fame, money, or the fulfilment of your childhood dreams. [...] With a partner, the bait would typically be the fulfilment of your romantic pair bonding, intimacy, or sexual needs."

Consider trial attorney, Jefferson Fisher, on the 'tells' that narcissists betray:

Rewritten history: The conversation consistently shifts back to them. They rewrite past events to make themselves look better or justify their actions.

One winner: They elevate their own actions or

accomplishments, making them seem superior to anyone else's. Their achievements are always framed as the best. They downplay or dismiss others' successes.

Never enough: No matter how much praise or attention you give, it never satisfies them. They continue to crave more, leaving you feeling like you're always falling short.

Emotional dismissal: They dismiss your feelings as unimportant, or they downplay your emotions, making it clear that only their feelings truly matter.

Conditional apologies: On the rare occasion they apologize, it's usually followed by a justification that absolves them of any real accountability. The apology may feel hollow or deflective, as though they're the victim.

"Notice the similarity in each sign? Narcissists suffer from **main character syndrome.**" (Bonus chapter in 'Narcissists and Gaslighters' from his book *The Next Conversation*)

"*Narcissism* likely has the same etymological root as narcotic. *Narkos* means to numb and to induce sleep."

"you will feel very, very sad at losing the illusion of what you were promised."

"Accept that you will feel guilt, shame, and even struggle with the idea that you are being excessively selfish, perhaps even narcissistic. These are natural parts of overcoming the narcissistic relationship."

In my clinical experience, those who struggle with (involuntary) self-sacrifice

"Accept that you will feel like you are deflating and losing yourself. Accept that you will feel like an essential, core part of yourself has died. Accept also that these feelings are illusory, that they will pass with time, and that coming back from this type of attack is brutally challenging. It may be one of the hardest things you need to do in this lifetime in terms of a challenge to your sense of self."

"consider the state you were in when you first got into the relationship. Were you stable? Happy? Surrounded by good friends and living the type of life you wanted to?"

"Remember **you are carrying a part of that narcissist's narrative inside your head.** Not all your thoughts or impulses are truly your own during this time, so never act hastily or dramatically. **Take your time.** Write down the pros and cons of any decisions on a sheet of paper. Ask yourself, *Does this look like the kind of decision I would normally make or does this have the mark of the narcissist on it?*"

Chapter 9: Our Kung Fu

"five times a day, I would go through a list of things that I did want more of in my life. Usually, in my waking hours, I would be focused on all the things that I didn't want and all the things that were broken. So I would focus instead on what I did want, in thought, word, and deed."

A similar process can be found in life coach Brandon Epstein's book *The Success Code*. In it he talks about setting an alarm 5x/day and recording what you were thinking at the time the alarm buzzed, and what happened right before that thought. Once you took stock of thoughts you were better able to link them with behaviors that perpetuated them ... and shift those behaviours to lead to better thoughts. Epstein described how one could replace old beliefs with new ones, record oneself saying the new belief and listen back to it ... and understand (in preparation to change) the habits that aren't serving you. He recommends taking things slowly, practicing one thing each week and building from there (smells like *Atomic Habits* by James Clear). Actually, a good process I think. I have used it with clients to great effect. In particular, it helps highlight that although you might think all is going terribly, those alarms can highlight parts of your day that are neutral or even positive ... and link these with actions to repeat to boost mood and self-belief.

"I would visualize the things that I wanted to experience as though they were happening to me in that moment."

Again, reminds me of Epstein ... "Every night before I went to bed and every day when I was doing my cardio, I was setting a subconscious GPS destination to work toward. I visualized what I would look and feel like if I had a six-pack and imagined myself living in that 3D reality as if it was my present reality. While all my college friends drank beer, ate pizza, and partied, I stuck to the regimen. I had a singular focus: Get shredded. Do whatever it takes to get shredded."

There are also parallels here with Schwarzenegger—and others like him. **Visualisation is key when it comes to performance.** Setting your mind (mindset), framing what you're about to do next. Schwarzenegger has a story in his Netflix documentary *Arnold* of how he'd visualise himself becoming champ. He'd imagine what he'd do and feel and think

about. He'd done that since he was a boy and resolved to leave his small Austrian town and 'make it'. It happened through grit and an unshakable belief in oneself. A lesson we all ought to learn...

One clinically interesting practice that I think *could* apply here is to *visualise* yourself performing a task while in-session before practising on your own. Research cited in chiropractor Dr. Joe Dispenza's book *You Are The Placebo* records how visualisation had the potential to help at a physiological level: "In [a] study of 30 people over a 12-week period, some regularly exercised their little fingers, while others just imagined doing the same thing. While the group that actually did the physical exercises increased the strength of their little fingers by 53 percent, **the group that only imagined doing the same thing also increased the strength of their little fingers—by 35 percent.** Their bodies had changed to look as if they were having the physical experience in external reality over and over again—but they only experienced it in their minds. **Their minds changed their bodies.** In a similar experiment, ten volunteers each imagined flexing one of their biceps as hard as they could five times a week. Researchers recorded the subjects' electrical brain activity during the sessions and measured their muscle strength every two weeks. **Those who only imagined flexing increased their bicep muscle strength by 13.5 percent in just a few weeks, and they maintained the gain for three months after the training stopped.** Their bodies responded to a new mind. A final example is a French study that compared subjects who either lifted or imagined lifting dumbbells of different weights. **Those who imagined lifting heavier weights activated their muscles more than did those who imagined lifting lighter weights.** In all three of these studies on mental rehearsal, the subjects were able to measurably increase their body strength using *only their thoughts.*"

Now, neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Huberman: "*it's actually very easy to get neuroplasticity as an adult through traumatic or terrible or challenging experiences.* But the important question is to say, *Why is that?* And the reason that's the case is because when something very bad happens, there's the release of two sets of neuromodulators in the brain: *epinephrine*, which tends to make us feel alert and agitated [and] is associated with most bad circumstances and *acetylcholine*, which tends to create a even more intense and focused perceptual spotlight." (Huberman Lab)

Now, how on earth does the latter relate to visualisation? I'm convinced it stands as a powerful argument towards **the principles that undergird trauma reprocessing therapies** (and what are those who are used and abused by narcissists if not survivors of traumatic stress...): **novelty and emotion**. For example, if I were to combine elements of Clinical EFT with EMDR and IFS and Somatic Experiencing, I'll highlight a traumatic event through **sensation**, encourage the client to think about the most stressful part of that event through **visualisation**, while pairing it with another **novel focus on the here-and-now**. All this stimulates a **dual focus, centres attention, shifts mood** through attenuation of SUD, and has the effect of **rescripting** (assigning new meaning to) the event for the future. IFS then provides an avenue for deeper support once affect shifts, allowing for further integration.

Principles, after all, are more important in therapy than mastery of any one particular modality.

"I would state in positive terms only that which I wanted. I would never say, "I do not want hatred. I do not want depression in my life." I would say, "I want to experience more love in my life. I want to experience more compassion in my life.""

This is a good point. Once you say how much you *don't* want something, you're placing the focus on what you lack. If you don't want to be scared anymore, your focus is on fear. Shift that to something like *I want peace* and it's a whole different feel. One step further: *I'm at peace*. Look for times in your life where you see a glimmer of peace and note how it's here. This way you become more aware of the good and tip the balance in that direction. Over time you've overcorrected towards the fear ... now you're working with a different concept.

"In deed, I knew that I needed **a physical ritual**, like my Muslim brothers and sisters around me who were washing their hands and bowing to pray five times a day. Many times in my life I had seen the power of physical action, so I knew that there were physical actions I would need to take several times a day every day for these new neural pathways to be set."

"The tendency towards **solipsism** [selfishness] as a cognitive bias has always been suffered by humans."

"Nietzsche phrased it this way: "That is why I go into solitude—so as not to

drink out of everybody's cistern. **When I am among the many I live as the many do**, and I do not think as I really think; after a time it always seems as though they want to banish me from myself and rob me of my soul—and I grow angry with everybody and fear everybody.”

“I made sure that five times a day I focused on a list of things that I wanted and on some solutions and some practical steps to get to those things. I controlled the words I was using inside of my head, my inner dialogue. I altered my physiological state, which is extremely important because we are not a body and a mind.”

“Rule number one: Imagine the thing that you want to have happen in the first person, subjectively. Don't see it happening to you as though you're a second person, like you're watching yourself in a dream. See it occurring subjectively. You're in the picture; you're in the movie. You can reach out and touch, taste, hear, smell, and see everything that's going on in that scenario as though it's happening.

Rule number two: Imagine that it is happening now, not in the future. That is a classic mistake; don't make it. To the unconscious mind, there is only now. And it's the unconscious we are appealing to.

Rule number three: “The YES rule.” Whatever you imagine, pretend that your unconscious mind is saying yes. [...] **If your visualizations do not shift you emotionally and make you feel some sort of enthusiastic, excited buzz, they're probably not quite right for you.** You're probably editing your desires and trying to make yourself something that you don't really want.”

The latest point is an interesting one. It reminds me of psychotherapist Justin Havens's 'Dream Completion Technique' where one must consider a new, emotionally powerful ending to a nightmare. That way the ending is more likely to fit and transfer into the dream state. And it works. I've coached clients myself in that direction and continue to surprise myself on how endings you conjure up during the day can transfer in the night.

Chapter 10: Fighting the Demons of the Apocalypse

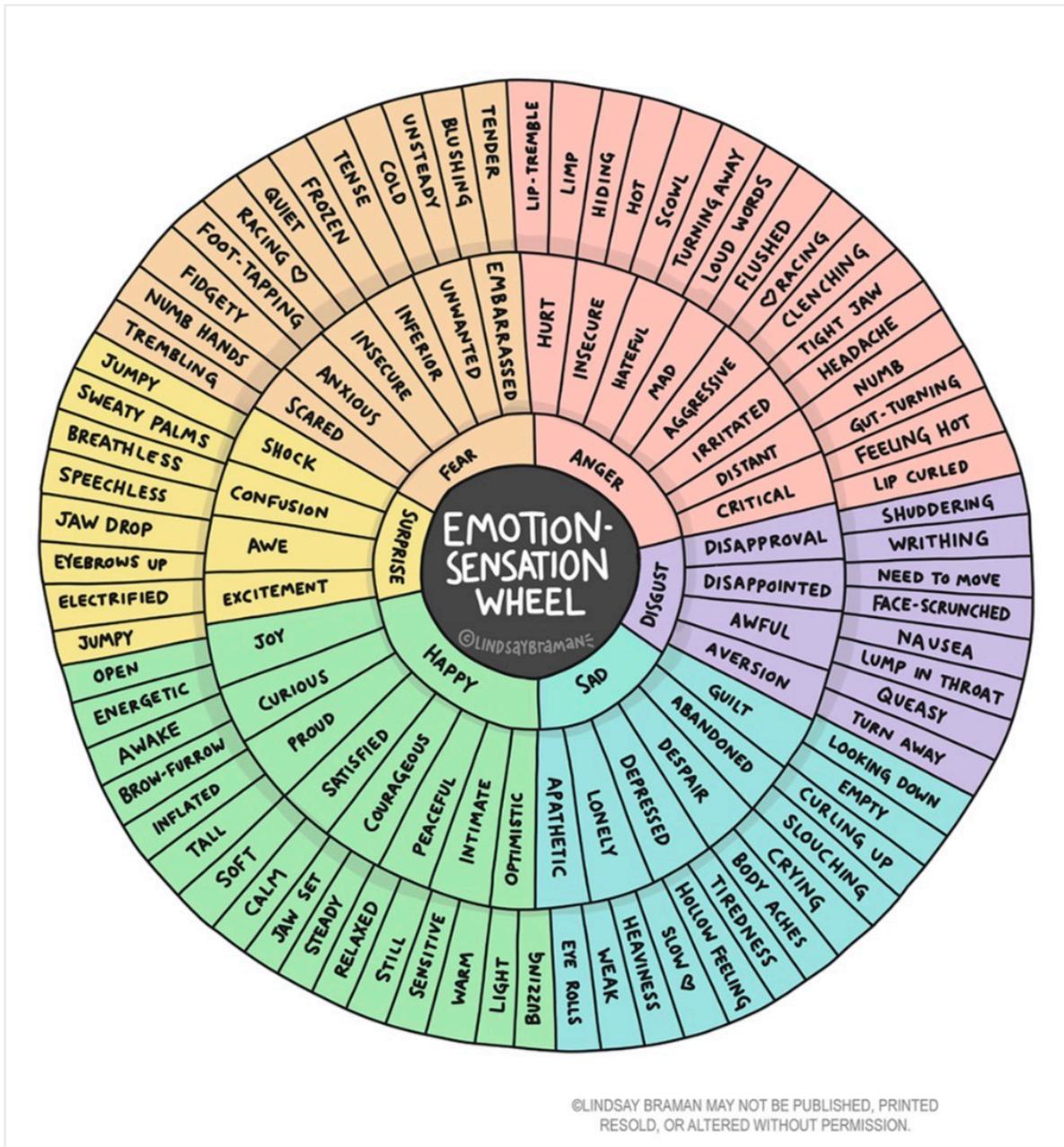
“People who have had their boundaries infringed upon in emotionally abusive relationships eventually end up with emotions that are up and down all the time.”

How else can one be? If one's boundaries are infringed upon, there's no consistency, no balance, no safety—just a constant vigilance with the question *Is this safe?*

“If you are stuck, fixated on a scenario that you can't move on from even though you've been grieving it for a long time, and/or you feel numb a lot, then

it's likely you are dealing with the issue of **emotional illiteracy**. The proper term for this is alexithymia."

"Think of an event in your life that you found painful or challenging. Using the colour wheel, try to identify the specific emotion you feel about that event as accurately as possible."



"When we are illiterate emotionally (**when we do not have the words to describe what we are feeling**), many of our actions seem **strange and volatile**. But when we are literate, we can see that our feelings and actions make a lot more sense."

"You can more effectively find conflict resolution with your partner if you aren't coming from defensiveness and anger. You can verbalise (which you can only do if you are more literate and have more words at your disposal) that, "When

you spoke to me like this, it made me feel indignant, hurt, sad, and disappointed just like I did when I was six and my father did such and such a thing." It's far more likely that your partner will be open to hearing you and possibly changing their behaviour than they would just from hearing, "You pissed me off."

Philosopher Dr. William Lane Craig said something years ago that's stuck with me: "You become defensive when you don't have a good defence. You become argumentative when you don't have a good argument." A firm foundation is key, and for this one must have the willingness, the curiosity, to learn, to build awareness ... of self *and* others.

""You've been brainwashed into seeing yourself only in a negative light like [the abuser] did. Your healthy instinct of self-protection has been driven into hibernation, and you can revive it by telling the critic ... to shut up. Or **you can imagine your adult self going back to the past and using your anger to shut them up** (like some loving relative or other adult should have)."

Limited parenting techniques work wonders here. Basically, it means you 'visit' the vulnerable part of you with your eyes closed, visualising. You 'show up' the way they needed you to in the past. You ask what was needed and, in your mind's eye, do it. Guidance in therapy is pivotal here.

""**When you've sufficiently angered, you can then shift into positively noticing yourself by connecting with the hurt, innocent child you were and by expressing compassion, unconditional love, and care for them.**" I help the client at this point to recognize and own their positive traits, accomplishments, and essential goodness and to reflect them to their child."

Schema therapy calls this 'limited reparenting'; IFS calls this 'the do-over' and 'unburdening'. Different therapies has different techniques, but the principle is the same: gaining mastery over stress.

"In Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo [...] before Echo falls in love with Narcissus she is already cursed. Echo was a beautiful wood nymph who was very talkative and had a great singing voice. Zeus was fond of frolicking with wood nymphs, and when his wife Juno turned up in the woods to see where he was, Echo kept her busy by chatting away with her to distract her so that Zeus could escape. Furious at this deceit, Juno cursed Echo by stealing her voice and condemning her to only be able to repeat the last few words someone else had said. Hence echo. [...] **codependents [often] have no voice of their own. They have to find a tyrant to attach to in order to "find a voice"** and to experience purpose vicariously."

"When our sense of self has been so weakened by trauma and abuse that we do not dare to be, we are in what I would consider to be a fully codependent state. We need to be told by others what to do, what to want, what to think [...] Under such circumstances, we would typically choose people who like telling others what to do, be, and think. People who have this tendency are often quite psychopathic, narcissistic, demanding, controlling, bullying, and tyrannical."

"Leaving behind codependency is like leaving behind a coping mechanism, an addiction, a false persona, and an abusive relationship all in one go. No one can or should expect it to be easy. But I believe it is possible."

"What going into therapy in the midst of an abusive relationship did for me was broadly twofold. First, it introduced another adult mind into the midst of an insane, codependent reality tunnel befuddled by lies, manipulation, and gas-lighting. [...] The second element that I found so helpful when speaking to this counsellor was his ability to challenge me. [...] We [must] have our views challenged. Especially if we are traumatised, trapped, or in pain. The extreme emotional ups and downs we experience when in these situations are able to warp our perceptions.

I typically advise against therapy unless an immediate threat is overcome ... or extinguished. This makes me rethink. I see his point—oftentimes one needs an objective adult voice in the room to help you think for yourself. And only then can one make the decision to change their circumstances. I submit, this is often the case for relationship therapy: one may find that they cannot continue in the relationship once they begin. Not always, but it can happen. Personally, I am ideologically opposed to coaching somebody to cease their relationship with another. I will help them see the impacts of this relationship and help them consider what alternatives exist, but it is up to the person themselves to make that change. No matter my advice, I will never live with the consequences of this kind of action ... therefore, I cannot advise for or against.

"Healthy narcissism" is absolutely key to the proper functioning of a sane person's ego. You should be self-serving and self-interested but not at the expense of others."

"My ex, when she saw me switch from anxiety, fawning, begging, or raging at her provocations to simply sitting in quiet, sad acceptance of her provocations, really began to panic. She instinctively knew that this heralded a major change in my perception of her and the relationship and that it would lead to me finding the clarity and courage to leave. In my view, it's not so much that codependents lack the strength to leave; it's that they don't see the situation with enough

clarity to realise that it simply isn't worth their time to attempt to resolve it."

Final reflections: This book is a personal reflection on the impacts of narcissistic abuse, from childhood to adult relationships. It's part-memoir part unapologetic exposé into the inner workings of these relationships and how they come about. Not a clinical read—highly story-driven and practical. You won't be getting a psychological study here (Grannon isn't a psychologist) but more a personal dive and lessons to avoid. Grannon calls out the complex trauma that underpins most narcissists, but doesn't excuse them. He talks about the difficulty their 'victims' face through codependency and offers an alternative. It seems that both these outcomes (narcissists *and* codependents/fawners/self-sacrificers) stem from trauma and it's largely impossible for narcissists to change (an interview I've had with the late neuroscientist Dr. James Fallon appears to confirm this, except he was talking about psychopaths mostly) and for their victims ... well, it's a hard road ahead and a total personality and value shift is required. For change to come one must call out what's going on, not play their game, disconnect, reshape your value system to accept the necessity of being 'selfish' for once, and do the slow work of rebuilding your confidence. There's no alternative. And Grannon offers no options for narcissists—overall, one must remove them from one's life and begin healing. Overall, a good book with good notes and quotes inside.

These notes were collected by psychotherapist and author Emil Barna in January 2026 in his efforts to assist with professional development and further education for himself and those who read them. But remember, they are but a glimpse of what the book is actually about—for more context, buy the book and make up your own mind. You can find out more about Emil by visiting www.barnacc.com

"A text without a context is a pretext to a proof text."

—Dr. Don Carson