

AFTER THE DISCOVERY SERIES

Is It Narcissism or Sex Addiction?

*Understanding the behaviour, the difference,
and what actually matters for you*



A guide for women navigating betrayal trauma
and compulsive sexual behaviour in a partner

CLARITY.
UNDERSTANDING.
EMPOWERMENT.
FOR YOU.



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CHAPTER 01

Why So Many Women Ask This Question

At some point, you started keeping a mental list.

- He lies, even about small things that didn't need a lie. A wrong turn he took, where he really went for lunch, whether he'd already eaten. Things so minor that the lying itself became more confusing than whatever he was actually lying about.
- He gaslights you, so confidently that you've started doubting your own memory. You'll bring up something he said, and he'll insist he never said it, with such certainty that you find yourself checking your phone for proof, wondering if you're the one who's losing track of things.
- He seems to lack empathy, especially when you try to explain how much you're hurting. You share something painful, and instead of softening, he seems to shut down, or worse, turns it around so that somehow he's the one who needs comforting.
- He manipulates situations so he comes out looking better than he is. Conversations that should have been about accountability quietly become about your reaction, your tone, your timing, anything except what he actually did.
- He feels emotionally cold, even in moments that should have been close. Birthdays, anniversaries, the quiet ordinary evenings that used to feel easy, now carry a strange distance you can't quite name.

And somewhere in the middle of all this, a word starts showing up in your searches at midnight.

Narcissist.

It makes sense that you'd land there. The behaviour fits. The coldness fits. The lying fits. Everything you've read about narcissism seems to describe the man sitting across from you at dinner, the one who can't quite look you in the eye anymore. You read a list of narcissistic traits somewhere and felt a jolt of recognition, followed almost immediately by a strange kind of relief. Finally, a word for it. Finally, something that explains why none of this has ever quite

made sense.

That relief rarely lasts long. Because the more you read, the more the picture starts to blur again. Some parts fit perfectly. Others don't fit at all. He seems to feel guilt, sometimes overwhelming guilt, which doesn't match what you've read about narcissists lacking remorse. He seems to genuinely love you, even while betraying you, which doesn't match either. So you keep searching, hoping the next article, the next quiz, the next forum thread will finally settle it.

Here's what makes this so disorienting. Addiction can produce many of these same behaviours. Not because he's pretending. Not because you're imagining it. But because compulsive sexual behaviour reshapes a person's actions in ways that can look almost identical to narcissism from the outside. The lying, the gaslighting, the emotional withdrawal, all of it can be present in both. Which means the checklist you've been using to try to understand him was never going to give you a clean answer, because the same behaviours can come from two very different places.

This isn't a small distinction. It changes what recovery could look like. It changes what you're actually dealing with. And it changes how you understand your own experience, because “I was married to a narcissist” and “I was married to a man in active addiction” are two very different stories, even when the day to day pain feels the same. One suggests a pattern that was always there and is unlikely to shift. The other suggests something that took hold of him and, with real work, can loosen its grip. Knowing which story you're actually in matters enormously for how you move forward.

You're not wrong for asking this question. You're not overthinking it, and you're not being paranoid or obsessive for needing to understand. You're trying to understand something that genuinely is hard to untangle, even for professionals who spend their careers studying exactly this. If it feels confusing, that's because it is confusing, not because you're missing something everyone else can see clearly.

This guide won't hand you a diagnosis. No guide can do that, and you should be wary of any resource that promises to. A diagnosis requires clinical training, extensive assessment, and time, not a checklist read alone at midnight while your chest is tight and your husband is asleep in the next room. What this guide will do is help you see the patterns more clearly, understand what's actually driving each of them, and give you a way to evaluate what you're living through that doesn't depend on getting a label exactly right. By the end, you'll have

something more useful than a diagnosis, a clear way of watching, waiting, and deciding what matters most for you.

THINGS TO NOTE

- The behaviours on your list, lying, gaslighting, coldness, manipulation, can come from addiction, narcissism, or both.
- You don't need a perfect diagnosis to start making sense of what you're living through.
- Confusion here isn't a sign you're missing something obvious. The overlap is genuinely real.

CHAPTER 02

What Narcissism Actually Is

Before we can compare narcissism to addiction, we need to slow down and get clear on what narcissism actually means, because the word gets used so loosely now that it barely means anything anymore.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder versus narcissistic traits

Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or NPD, is a specific, diagnosable mental health condition. It involves a persistent, lifelong pattern of grandiosity, a deep need for admiration, and a lack of empathy that shows up across nearly every relationship and situation, not just with a spouse under pressure.

Narcissistic traits are different. Almost everyone has some. Vanity, defensiveness, a need to be right, moments of selfishness. Having traits doesn't mean having the disorder, in the same way that feeling anxious before a big event doesn't mean someone has an anxiety disorder.

This distinction matters enormously here, because a man in active sex addiction will often display narcissistic traits. Lying. Manipulation. Self-protection. Blame shifting. But traits caused by addiction are not the same as a lifelong personality disorder, and the difference between the two often becomes clearest only with time.

Grandiose narcissism

This is the version most people picture. Confidence that borders on arrogance. A need to be admired. A tendency to dominate conversations and relationships. Grandiose narcissists often appear charming and self-assured, at least on the surface.

This type tends to be visible almost immediately. He's often the one who commands the room, tells the better story, needs to be the smartest person in any conversation. Compliments are welcomed easily, criticism is not welcomed at all. Underneath the confidence is usually a genuine belief in his own superiority, not a performance of it. He isn't pretending to think he's exceptional, he actually does. This makes grandiose narcissism relatively easy to spot from a distance, even if it's exhausting to live inside up close. Partners of grandiose narcissists often describe feeling like a supporting character in their own

marriage, there to admire, to manage his moods, or to absorb the fallout when the world doesn't reflect back the admiration he expects.

Vulnerable narcissism

This version is quieter and easier to miss. It looks like defensiveness, hypersensitivity to criticism, and a kind of fragile self-image hiding underneath. Vulnerable narcissists can seem insecure or even anxious, but underneath is still that same core need for validation and same difficulty truly seeing someone else's experience.

This type is often mistaken for something else entirely, low self-esteem, anxiety, even depression, because the outward presentation looks so different from the classic grandiose picture. He might seem to need constant reassurance, sulk when he doesn't receive enough attention, or interpret even gentle feedback as a personal attack. Where grandiose narcissism reaches outward for admiration, vulnerable narcissism curls inward, but the underlying need is the same. He still struggles to hold space for your feelings, because his own fragile sense of self takes up most of the room. Partners of vulnerable narcissists often describe walking on eggshells, not because he's loud or demanding, but because his moods and hurt feelings quietly become the emotional centre of the relationship, again and again.

Both types share the same foundation, a self-focus that makes real empathy difficult to access. The presentation just looks different, one reaches outward for admiration, the other curls inward around a fragile sense of self, but underneath, both are organised around protecting a version of himself that feels perpetually at risk.

Why only qualified clinicians diagnose personality disorders

It's tempting to want an answer, to read a checklist somewhere and finally understand what you're dealing with. But personality disorders are diagnosed through extensive clinical assessment, over time, by trained professionals who can rule out other explanations for the same behaviour.

Addiction is one of those other explanations. And it's a significant one, because as you'll see in the next chapter, active addiction can create a version of a person that looks strikingly similar to narcissism, without the underlying disorder actually being present.

You don't need a diagnosis to know how you feel. You don't need a clinical label to know what you've lived through. But understanding the difference between a disorder and a set of

addiction driven behaviours can change everything about how you interpret what happened to you, and what might be possible from here.

THINGS TO NOTE

- NPD is a diagnosable, lifelong condition. Narcissistic traits are common and don't equal the disorder.
- Grandiose narcissism reaches outward for admiration. Vulnerable narcissism curls inward around a fragile self-image.
- Only a qualified clinician can diagnose a personality disorder, over time, through proper assessment.

CHAPTER 03

What Sex Addiction Does to a Person

To understand why sex addiction can look so much like narcissism, it helps to understand what addiction actually does to a person over time. This isn't about excusing behaviour. It's about understanding the mechanism behind it, because the mechanism is different from what drives narcissism, even when the surface behaviour looks the same.

Compartmentalisation

Addiction requires a split. A person in active addiction learns to separate the version of himself who acts out from the version who shows up as a husband, father, or colleague. Over time, this splitting becomes automatic. He's not consciously deciding to be two people. The addiction has trained him to keep these worlds apart so neither one threatens the other.

This is often why he can seem so genuinely present in ordinary moments, cooking dinner, helping with homework, being affectionate, while an entirely separate reality exists just beneath the surface. It isn't performance in the way you might imagine. The compartments feel real to him while he's in them. That's what makes discovery so disorienting for you, you weren't living with a man who was constantly acting. You were living with two versions of the same person who had learned, over years, not to look at each other directly.

Shame

Underneath almost every addictive behaviour is shame, and it runs deep. Not the healthy kind that says "I did something wrong and I want to repair it," but a corrosive kind that says "I am something wrong." This shame doesn't stop the behaviour. It often fuels it, because acting out becomes a way to escape the very feeling the acting out created in the first place.

This creates a cycle that can feel almost impossible to interrupt from the outside. He acts out, shame follows, and the shame becomes unbearable enough that he reaches for the same behaviour to numb it, even though it's the source. You may have noticed this without having language for it, a kind of self-loathing that shows up in unrelated arguments, or a defensiveness that seems disproportionate to what's actually being discussed. Often, that's shame leaking out sideways.

Escalation

Addiction rarely stays still. What started as one behaviour often progresses, requiring more risk, more secrecy, or more frequency to produce the same relief. This isn't a character flaw. It's how compulsive behaviour tends to work, the same pattern seen in substance addiction, gambling addiction, and other compulsive cycles.

This is part of why discoveries often happen in waves rather than all at once. What you initially learned may not have been the full picture, not necessarily because he was calculating what to withhold, but because the behaviour itself had quietly grown beyond what even he might have expected of himself years earlier. Escalation also explains why “it's not that bad” rarely stays true. The nature of compulsion is that it needs more over time, not less.

Double lives

As compartmentalisation deepens, so does the double life. Lies stack on lies, not because he's a master manipulator by nature, but because one lie requires another to protect it. Eventually the amount of energy spent maintaining the secret life becomes enormous, and it pulls him further away from the relationship he's supposedly protecting.

This often shows up as a strange kind of exhaustion in him that you may have sensed without understanding, irritability, distraction, a sense that he was somewhere else even when he was sitting right next to you. Maintaining two lives is not effortless. It draws heavily on attention and energy that would otherwise go toward you, your children, and his own wellbeing, which is part of why so many partners describe feeling like they were living with someone who was only ever half there.

Emotional immaturity

Addiction tends to stall emotional development. Coping skills that should have matured over years often haven't, because the addiction has been the default coping mechanism instead. This can show up as an inability to sit with discomfort, difficulty communicating needs directly, or a pattern of avoiding hard conversations altogether.

You may have noticed this most clearly during conflict. Instead of naming what he's feeling, he shuts down, deflects, or turns the conversation back on you. This isn't necessarily a lifelong personality trait, it's often a skill that simply never developed, because for years, discomfort had a shortcut. Recovery, when it's genuine, usually involves relearning these

skills almost from the ground up, which is part of why real change tends to take far longer than partners initially hope.

Avoidance

Closely tied to emotional immaturity is avoidance. Conflict, vulnerability, and accountability all threaten to expose the secret life, so they get sidestepped, minimised, or deflected. This avoidance can look a great deal like coldness or disinterest, when really it's often self-protection.

This is one of the more painful patterns to live with, because avoidance so easily gets misread as not caring. In reality, it's frequently the opposite, a nervous system that has learned to associate closeness and honesty with exposure and danger. That doesn't make the impact on you any less real. But it does explain why pushing harder for connection in the moment often backfires, and why safety, not pressure, tends to be what eventually allows avoidance to soften.

Secrecy

Secrecy becomes second nature. It's not limited to the addictive behaviour itself, it bleeds into finances, schedules, phone habits, and unrelated conversations. The habit of hiding becomes so ingrained that it can be hard for him to unlearn, even in moments when honesty would actually serve him.

This is often what makes early recovery so confusing for partners. Even after disclosure, small secrecies can persist out of sheer habit rather than active deception, a password not shared, a receipt not mentioned. This doesn't excuse it, and it's reasonable to expect full transparency moving forward. But understanding secrecy as a deeply grooved habit, rather than only ongoing malice, can help you evaluate what you're actually seeing as recovery unfolds.

Loss of integrity

Perhaps the most painful part is this. Addiction slowly separates a person from his own values. He may still believe, somewhere underneath it all, in honesty and faithfulness and being a good partner. But the addiction keeps pulling his actions further from those beliefs, creating a widening gap between who he wants to be and how he's actually living.

This gap is often what partners sense long before they have proof, a feeling that something doesn't add up, that the man in front of them doesn't quite match his own stated values. That instinct is usually accurate. It isn't that his values were fake. It's that the addiction had grown powerful enough to override them, again and again, in the moments that mattered most.

Addiction reshapes behaviour around a compulsion. Narcissism is a more stable, lifelong pattern rooted in identity itself.

This is what makes active addiction so disorienting to witness from the outside. The behaviours it produces, lying, coldness, manipulation, self-protection, can look identical to narcissism. But underneath, the mechanism is different.

Understanding this difference doesn't make the pain any smaller. But it does change what recovery could look like, which is where we're headed next.

THINGS TO NOTE

- Addiction reshapes behaviour through compartmentalisation, shame, and secrecy, not through a fixed sense of superiority.
- Many of these behaviours are self-protective, not proof of malice, though they still cause real harm.
- The mechanism behind the behaviour matters as much as the behaviour itself.

CHAPTER 04

The Behaviours That Look the Same

By now you can probably see why this question is so hard to answer from the outside. Narcissism and active sex addiction can produce a strikingly similar list of behaviours, even though what's driving them underneath is very different.

This table lays it out clearly.

Behaviour	Narcissism	Sex Addiction
Lying	Common	Extremely common
Gaslighting	Common	Often used to protect the addiction
Blaming spouse	Common	Very common
Secret life	Possible	Core feature
Broken promises	Common	Hallmark of addiction
Manipulation	Common	Common
Selfishness	High	High during active addiction
Lack of empathy	Persistent	Often greatly reduced during addiction
Defensiveness	High	High, often driven by shame
Entitlement	Core feature	Often develops around acting out

Notice the pattern here. Almost every behaviour on this list can show up in both columns. That's exactly why this question is so difficult to sit with. You're not confused because you're missing something obvious. You're confused because the overlap is real.

But look closely at the language in the right column. Words like “often,” “during active addiction,” and “to protect the addiction” keep showing up. That's not an accident. It points to something important that we'll unpack fully in the next chapter, the difference isn't always found in what the behaviour looks like. It's found in what's driving it, and whether it's tied to a

compulsion or woven into someone's fundamental sense of self.

For now, it's enough to simply see this clearly laid out in front of you. You've likely spent months, maybe years, trying to make sense of behaviour that felt contradictory and confusing. It makes sense that you couldn't fully separate the two. In many ways, from the outside, you weren't supposed to be able to.

THINGS TO NOTE

- Almost every behaviour on the comparison table can appear in both narcissism and addiction.
- Overlap is the reason this question is so hard to answer through behaviour alone.
- Look for the language of compulsion, “often,” “during active addiction,” “to protect the addiction,” as a clue to what's driving it.

CHAPTER 05

The Biggest Differences

If the behaviours can look so similar, where does the real difference actually live? It lives underneath the behaviour, in what's driving it and what it's protecting. Once you know what to look for, the distinction becomes much easier to see.

Narcissism

At its core, narcissism protects self-image. The person often genuinely believes he deserves special treatment, not as an act, but as a real, internal sense of entitlement. His behaviour exists to maintain how he sees himself and how others see him.

He often struggles to accept responsibility, not because he's avoiding a difficult feeling temporarily, but because accepting fault threatens the self-image he's built his identity around. Apologies, when they come, tend to be shallow or strategic rather than genuinely felt.

He frequently exploits relationships without much remorse. People become useful to the extent that they reflect well on him or meet his needs. When that stops being true, the relationship often loses its value to him.

And perhaps most importantly, these patterns tend to be lifelong. They don't appear during a specific season of stress and then fade. They show up across friendships, work relationships, and family dynamics, not just within a marriage.

Sex Addiction

Sex addiction operates differently. The behaviour is driven by compulsion, not identity. It doesn't come from a belief that he deserves to act this way. It comes from a cycle he often feels unable to control, even when part of him desperately wants to stop.

Once addiction takes hold, it becomes the priority, sometimes without him even fully registering how much it's steering his choices. This isn't a conscious ranking of the addiction above his marriage. It's more like the addiction quietly rewires what feels urgent and what feels manageable to ignore.

He often experiences intense shame after acting out, a very different internal experience from the narcissist's lack of remorse. That shame is real, even if it doesn't stop the cycle from repeating.

He may genuinely love his spouse while repeatedly betraying her, which is one of the most painful and confusing parts of loving someone in active addiction. Love and betrayal existing at the same time doesn't make sense from the outside, but it's a common reality of this particular pain.

And underneath all of it, addiction creates a split, a widening gap between the person he wants to be and the person he becomes while protecting the addiction. That gap is often exactly where his shame lives.

Why this matters

Narcissism protects the self. Addiction protects the compulsion.

One is about identity. The other is about a cycle that has taken on a life of its own. Both cause devastating harm. But only one of them tends to soften with genuine recovery, which is exactly what the next chapter will explore.

THINGS TO NOTE

- Narcissism protects self-image. Addiction protects a compulsion.
- Genuine shame and love can coexist with betrayal in addiction, in a way that doesn't fit the narcissistic pattern.
- Narcissistic patterns tend to be lifelong. Addictive behaviour, while entrenched, is not automatically permanent.

CHAPTER 06

Can Someone Be Both?

Yes. And this is often the part that makes things feel even more complicated.

Understanding narcissism and addiction as two separate things doesn't mean a person can only ever be one or the other. In reality, there are several possibilities, and it's worth naming each one clearly.

Sex addiction only

A man can be in active sex addiction with no underlying personality disorder at all. His lying, secrecy, and self-protection are being driven by the addiction cycle itself. With genuine, sustained recovery, these behaviours can soften significantly, sometimes dramatically.

This is more common than many partners expect, largely because the behaviours addiction produces are so loud and so painful that they can overshadow everything else about a person. A man in this category may have gone into addiction with a genuinely empathic, remorseful, relationship oriented nature, and the addiction distorted that nature for years without erasing it completely. This is often the group where recovery has the most room to work, not because it's easy, but because there isn't a second, separate pattern competing against the healing.

Narcissistic traits only

A man can have narcissistic traits without meeting the criteria for NPD. He may be defensive, self-focused, or resistant to accountability without it being a lifelong, pervasive pattern. These traits can sometimes improve with awareness, maturity, and genuine effort, though they tend to be slower and harder to shift than addiction driven behaviour alone.

This category can be one of the trickiest to sit with, because traits exist on a spectrum, and where exactly someone falls on it isn't always obvious, even to a trained clinician, let alone to a partner living inside the relationship. A man with narcissistic traits and no addiction might still struggle to apologise well, still centre himself in conflict, still bristle at feedback. The absence of addiction doesn't mean the absence of harm. It simply means a different mechanism is driving it, one usually rooted much further back, in how he learned to see

himself and others long before you ever met him.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder only

Some men meet the clinical picture for NPD without any addictive behaviour present. The lack of empathy, the entitlement, the exploitation of relationships, these show up consistently across his whole life, not tied to any particular compulsion.

In this group, the behaviours you've been trying to make sense of aren't being produced by shame or compulsion at all, they're simply who he is, consistently, across every relationship he's ever had, not only this one. This is often the hardest reality to accept, because it means the coldness or manipulation isn't a phase, a symptom, or something separate from him that could theoretically be treated and removed. It's woven into the way he relates to people generally, which is part of why change here tends to be slower, more resistant, and far less responsive to the kind of recovery work that helps with addiction.

Both addiction and narcissism

And yes, both can exist together. A man can have NPD or strong narcissistic traits and also struggle with sex addiction. In these cases, the addiction doesn't create the narcissism, and the narcissism doesn't create the addiction. They exist as two separate, overlapping struggles, each one making the other harder to see clearly and harder to recover from.

This combination is often the most exhausting to live inside, because the two patterns feed off each other in ways that are hard to untangle in real time. The narcissism can make it harder for him to feel the shame that usually drives genuine addiction recovery, since shame requires a level of self-reflection that narcissism tends to resist. And the addiction can give the narcissism new material to work with, new justifications, new ways to deflect blame onto you or onto circumstances. Partners in this situation often sense that something is different, that recovery efforts seem to stall in a way they don't for other couples, even when all the right steps are technically being taken.

It's worth being clear about something important here. Addiction doesn't cause narcissism. A person doesn't develop a personality disorder simply because he acted out sexually, no matter how severe or prolonged the addiction. Personality disorders form much earlier in life, typically rooted in childhood development and attachment. What addiction can do is amplify certain traits that were already present, making them more visible and more damaging, without actually creating the disorder itself.

This also means the reverse deserves equal attention. Recovering from addiction doesn't automatically resolve narcissistic traits, and improvement in one area doesn't guarantee improvement in the other. A man can become genuinely honest about his acting out while remaining fundamentally unable to sit with your pain without redirecting the conversation back to himself. Watching both threads separately, rather than assuming progress in one means progress in both, is often what gives partners the clearest picture of what's actually changing.

This is exactly why time and genuine recovery efforts become such an important part of understanding what you're dealing with, because they reveal something that can be very hard to see clearly from inside the chaos of active addiction alone.

THINGS TO NOTE

- A person can have addiction only, narcissistic traits only, NPD only, or both together.
- Addiction doesn't cause narcissism, and narcissism doesn't cause addiction. They can coexist without one creating the other.
- Progress in addiction recovery doesn't guarantee progress in narcissistic traits. Watch both separately.

CHAPTER 07

Recovery Changes Everything

One of the clearest ways to tell the difference between narcissism and addiction isn't found in a single conversation or a single confession. It's found over time, in what happens after.

This is where genuine recovery becomes so revealing. Addiction, when it's being addressed honestly and consistently, tends to change a person in specific, observable ways.

- More honest. The compulsive lying that once protected the secret life starts to loosen, because there's less left to hide.
- More accountable. Instead of deflecting or minimising, he starts to sit with the impact of what he's done, without immediately turning the conversation back toward his own defence.
- More empathic. Where addiction once numbed his ability to feel your pain without also feeling threatened by it, recovery slowly rebuilds that capacity. He starts to actually hear you.
- Less defensive. Conversations that once triggered immediate self-protection start to soften. He can hear hard truths without needing to counterattack or rewrite the story to protect himself.
- More emotionally available. The walls that addiction built, the compartmentalisation, the avoidance, the emotional distance, begin to come down, slowly, imperfectly, but genuinely.

None of this happens in a straight line. Recovery is rarely tidy, and setbacks don't automatically mean recovery has failed. But over months and years, these shifts should be visible if what you're dealing with is genuinely addiction driven.

If none of these changes appear, despite genuine recovery effort, it may point to something beyond addiction alone.

It doesn't necessarily mean NPD. But it does suggest that addiction may not be the whole picture, and that whatever is underneath isn't responding to recovery the way addiction typically does.

This is why time matters so much here. Not because you owe him more time. Not because you're required to wait and see. But because time is often the clearest lens available for understanding what you're actually dealing with, more reliable than any label, any online quiz, or any single conversation could ever be.

THINGS TO NOTE

- Genuine recovery tends to produce more honesty, accountability, empathy, and emotional availability over time.
- Setbacks don't automatically mean recovery has failed.
- If none of these shifts appear despite real effort, it may point to something beyond addiction alone.

CHAPTER 08

What Matters Most for You

After everything we've covered, narcissistic personality disorder, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, the mechanics of addiction, the overlapping behaviours, the deeper differences, it might feel like you still don't have your answer.

That's okay. Because here's the truth this whole guide has been building toward.

You don't actually need the label to move forward.

Instead of trying to diagnose him, a question that even trained clinicians approach carefully and slowly, it can help to ask a different set of questions instead. Questions that don't require a degree to answer, because you already have the only expertise that matters here, your own lived experience of him.

Is he becoming safer?

Not perfect. Not fully healed. But genuinely safer to be around than he was six months ago, a year ago.

Is he honest?

Not just absent of new discoveries, but proactively, uncomfortably honest, even when the truth doesn't serve him.

Is he accountable?

When he's confronted, does he own it, or does the conversation somehow always end up being about your reaction instead of his behaviour?

Does he show empathy?

Can he sit with your pain without needing to defend himself, explain himself, or rush you toward being okay again?

Is he respecting my boundaries?

Not just agreeing to them in a hard conversation, but actually holding them, consistently, when no one is checking.

Is recovery consistent over months and years?

Not a single burst of effort after being caught, but a sustained pattern that holds up over real time.

Am I emotionally safe?

This is the most important question of all. Not is he safe in some abstract sense, but are you safe, in your body, in your home, in your day to day life with him.

Ultimately, these questions are more useful than finding the perfect label. A diagnosis, even if you could get one with certainty, wouldn't tell you whether to stay or go. It wouldn't tell you whether he's truly changing. It wouldn't make the exhaustion of the last months or years disappear.

But these questions will. They keep the focus exactly where it belongs, on his actions, on your safety, and on what's actually happening in front of you, not on a word you read online at midnight, trying to make sense of a pain that never needed a diagnosis to be real.

THINGS TO NOTE

- You don't need the perfect label to know what you need going forward.
- Safety, honesty, accountability, and consistency over time matter more than any diagnosis.
- The most important question is always whether you are emotionally safe.