# Episode 4: You're not the narcissist I thought you were: the long game of manipulation.

INTRO

Welcome Back Survivors! To TUCK YOUR BOOBS IN: THE PODCAST that prepares survivors for the battle of overcoming trauma and helps you get your shit together after Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault.

Do you know someone who always makes it about them? No matter what the subject is. Or someone who always asks questions they already know the answers to, just to tell you “I told you so!” Or someone so obsessed with status, power, money, or control?

I’m your host Rebecca Cia and On this week's episode we are going to talk about the personality disorder that often disguises itself as Narcissism, and how to recognize it and deal with this particular brand of toxicity. So go ahead and tuck your boobs in and let's get started!

[Intro Music]

Alrighty, this week's episode hit home for me - literally.

I always thought one of my family members was a narcissist. I don’t really need to put them on blast, or spill the family T, so I may just refer to them as my toxic troll. You might have one of these in your life too. My Toxic Troll has a constant need to be validated, and always manages to turn the attention to themselves, or play the victim, even if they aren't involved in whatever is going on. Whenever you share information with them, they respond with “I know or I already knew that.” They are a known liar, and gas-lighting is their middle name.

If you follow me on instagram- you may have seen my IGTV post with my personal survival story- about being kidnapped, tortured, raped and almost murdered. And as many of you know I did know my attacker. My attacker fits the text-book description of a narcissist to a T - Self obsessed, entitled, arrogant and a constant need for attention and affirmation from others.

Now, he shares many of these characteristics with a particular member of my family. During my recovery, I discussed with my therapist- the many similarities I noticed between my attacker and my toxic troll, and I realized that the coping mechanisms and tactics I had been learning my whole life to navigate the toxic family dynamic, are very likely what prepared me to survive the attack. Had I not grown up with a person like this in my life, I don’t think I would have known what to do when it was literally a matter of life or death.

Realizing this sparked my interest in learning more about Narcissism, not only to gain a better understanding of what happened during the incident, but also how to better protect myself in the future and specifically from my family troll. I learned about how to recognize subtle narcissistic tendencies, such as fishing for compliments, judgment and shaming of others and even how they eat can be telling of how superior they feel. There is actually a great book that talks about this called “The Winner Effect”- by Ian Robertson. It goes into the effects that power has on our brains. It’s more about neuroscience, than the psychology of personality disorders, but much of what he talks about has many parallels.

I definitely recommend this book!

If you encounter a narcissist, In most cases, the best advice I have is to stay calm and consistent with them, until you can leave. Set a boundary, and back away slowly, and as soon as you are out of sight turn and run!

I am a huge proponent of cutting toxic people out of your life... Yes, even if they are family!! Which may be a discussion for another day, however I think one of my biggest pet peeves is when people say things like “But , that's your mother/father/ brother… etc” Having a familial tie- whether by blood or otherwise does not give them a free hall pass to abuse you. Period! And if I am supposed to respect this person because they are family - shouldn’t they also respect me because we are family? It’s a two way street, and if people are disrespectful, toxic, or abusive- the best and often only solution is to remove them from your life, no matter who they are.

When cutting ties with family it gets much more complicated when you wish to maintain a relationship with others who still have a relationship with the toxic person. Sometimes you want so badly to protect the ones you love from the toxic offender, however I eventually learned that it is not my job to convince any other adult that someone is toxic. You need to do what is right for you and they need to do what is right for them. As much as you want to protect them from also being hurt, they have to decide for themselves what they will tolerate. All you can do is share your insights and personal experience, and then be there for them if/when they are ready to leave also. But be prepared for the reality that this may never happen.

In my case, I have taken the proper steps to remove my toxic troll r from my life. Except for the rare occasions when we do happen to cross paths, unavoidably at a family function.

Now I haven't seen this person for a while but due to a bit of a family emergency, we crossed paths again. And this time I was faced with a particular flavor of their toxicity, and I found that many of my tools for diffusing situations and shutting things down with them just weren't working. It was more than frustrating. In fact, I was letting them get under my skin to the point where I started to lose sleep and felt myself become bitter, angry and very resentful. I even began having ruminating thoughts of how much I actually *hate* this person. It was affecting my ability to focus on my dad, who I was there to support after a heart attack and open heart surgery.

I then was reminded of a quote that snapped me out of it. "Hating someone is like drinking poison and hoping it kills the other person."

This was a humbling slap in the face [slap] and made me re-evaluate how I wanted to spend my energy. So I decided to redirect the negative energy into some righteous anger...

I began researching some of the characteristics and behaviors of the troll, so I could adjust my responses and make the rest of my time here a little less stressful, and so I could focus my energy on what really mattered- my dad getting better.

Well turns out this toxic family member isn’t just the NARCISSIST I thought they were...

They do tend to favor lying, gaslighting, and are controlling, attention seeking, and will exploit any opportunity to gain something. However, they also have a long list of other behaviors and some extracurricular activities that Tip toe into felony territory (like identity theft, falsifying documents, misrepresenting their legal qualifications, and tax fraud to name a few, that had me start to look at possible other diagnoses.

Have you ever heard of Niccolo Machiavelli? I had heard the name before - but I can't say I had ever paid any attention.Turns out the dude was a particular breed of toxic- he even has an entire personality type named after him. He is most known for being deceitful, manipulative, and dishonest for personal gain- in fact he even wrote the book on it. The book called “The Prince” was written by Machiavelli in 1532 about the history of power and gain in politics, where he himself was a proponent for lying, amorality, and committing crimes for personal and political gain.

Although the two personality disorders are not mutually exclusive- there are a few characteristics that Machiavellians Share with Narcissists- but there are several characteristics that set them apart.

In general both Mach’s and Narcs are manipulative, deceitful, they lack empathy, and are self-serving. They are both cunning at the art of deception and always have an agenda.

One key difference however, is that Narcissists are a bit more emotionally attached to their manipulations, in fact they often have emotional outbursts, or go into fits of rage. With narcissists, I always equated them to an over tired toddler; they often burst out into a temper tantrum when they dont get their way. My toxic troll tends to do this regularly, and one way I would combat this was by pushing back with a harder boundary. They would often retreat, at any sign of pushback, and I would feel confident that I had protected myself from their attack.

However I recently realized how mistaken I have been. This retreat was not a sign that I had … won the battle… or was victorious in establishing my boundaries. This is actually a Machaveilian trick.

Machiavellians tend to be less emotional, and much more manipulative, and they play the long game, often through a long and complex scheme usually involving many people- or pawns in their game. They use the pushback as fuel to keep fighting the longer game.

In the case of my toxic family member, my boundaries were rarely, if ever, respected and were often seen as a challenge to overcome. If I asked them not to do something, like personally attack me, or defame me publicly on FB for example, instead of stopping the behavior, they would just put more effort into hiding it.

For Machaveilians it's all about power! You know that game little brothers play to annoy their sisters- the “I'm not touching you” game. Where they put their finger close to your face, until you crack under pressure and scream “MOOOOOM!” and somehow you're the one in trouble for tattling, and he gets away with it because he technically isn’t touching you?! Super Annoying right?!

Now imagine this on an adult scale. It’s really friggin’ frustrating. When you vent your frustrations to your friends, these micro- manipulations seem pretty benign and you seem petty for even bringing them up. But in the long run, they wear you down and leave you feeling isolated, and defeated. This is the long game for the Machiavellian.

One of my favorite quotes by Jim Rohn is "There are two ways to have the tallest building in town. One is to tear everyone else's building down, and the other is to build your building taller."

Machaveilians tear everyone else down, so they can feel powerful. And the best way I have found to handle this type of person is move to another city and rebuild with a stronger foundation.

In my case I literally moved 3,109 miles away to the other side of the country to create some clear distance between me and this toxicity. I make a conscious effort to try to stay grounded and I work on building a strong resilient foundation through my daily practices. However, coming back, and being in their presence has triggered some unresolved emotions and made it harder to navigate their toxic patterns. And I get it, sometimes you can't escape your toxic trolls either. Maybe because they are co-workers or because you are working on trying to gain financial independence from them, or like in my case you are visiting another member of your family, and they just happen to be there.

**How can you tell if your toxic troll is a Machaveilian, not just your everyday average Narcissist?**

Machiavellianism is not clinically a personality disorder, but is characterised as a toxic personality trait. Here are 13 signs your toxic troll may be a Machavellian.

#1 They are an overtly Pessimistic Person- always looking for the mis-trust in others, this comes across as being judgmental or assuming a simple mistake by the waiter was malicious. - Ever heard the saying it takes one - to know one. Machiavellians are so conscious of being found out for the malicious intent they assume everyone else is also.

#2 They are often preoccupied with power, like a job title or social status, having control of things, and they are often focused on money! Watch how they treat the waiter or janitor- for example. They often look down on service oriented job titles. They may also ask people they have just met things like - what kind of car they drive, or how much money they make, or what clubs they are part of. They are assessing their social status and deciding whether this person will be an asset or a pawn to get what they want.

#3 They brag a lot- especially about their ill-gotten accomplishments. They are proud of the malicious acts and will brag about the results, and show no shame in how they achieved their goal. I can hear the malicious laugh of my toxic troll, when she successfully manipulated the bank into reversing charges to her bank account that were clearly hers!

#4 They seem to always know the right thing to say to you- but talk a lot of shit about others. (One thing I have learned in my hard-knock life is that if people are talking shit to you about others, they are talking shit to others about you!)

#5 They have a difficult time expressing or explaining their emotions, but can easily read yours. If you ask them what they want, especially in a heated discussion, they will avoid answering with anything that might expose their true feelings, or they will immediately jump to playing the victim to gain your sympathy. But you will almost never hear the words “ I feel “ come out of the mouth.

#6 Coercion and Transactional techniques- Sexual coercion is a big one- like guilting or blaming you for saying no, and they believe everything is transactional - meaning if I do this for you- you will do that for me!

#7 Gaslighting- Telling you “You are crazy.” or denial of certain events or details, anything that undermines your credibility, and paints them as the authority on the subject, and leaves you questioning your sanity.

#8 They Overpromise and Under-deliver. In new relationships this can show up as Love Bombing, or grand gestures with little or no follow through, unless they see a benefit for themselves. Or promising to do something because they are praised for taking on the task, but they rarely complete the responsibility, but are armed with many excuses.

#9 When challenged or called out they will play the victim- either to you, or to others when they talk shit behind your back.

#10 They will often use self-deprecation as a way to fish for compliments. For example, they may call themselves dumb, or fat, and then become silent and sullen, hoping you will fill the void with a reassuring compliment.

#11 They enjoy watching negative events- they will actually gain pleasure in another person getting fired for example.

#12 They are BIG FAT LYING LIARS- they lie often and exaggerate details, and will have an excuse waiting if you catch them in a lie. They also believe their own lies and will defend them viciously, with a complicated web of other lies. You can often tell, because they will offer very long and drawn out complicated stories to support their lies.

#13 They are always scheming- and they can be very elaborate schemes. You will often feel like you are needed and are helping them- later to find out you were just a pawn in their game.

**So what can you do if you are faced with Machiavellian, and you can’t simply cut and run?**

TIP #1- this seems fitting to go first…

**Put yourself first!** I know this can be difficult. As survivors we are often highly empathic, and we naturally want to give to others in need. But Machiavellians prey on this empathy.

Understand and evaluate your interactions with them and determine what you are willing to tolerate without compromising your boundaries, values or your needs. And remember Be sure to take care of yourself. Give yourself breaks, walk away and remind yourself of your boundaries and what you will and won't tolerate. Machiavelians can be infuriating to be around. It’s ok to feel angry, or frustrated- but give yourself a release. Take walks on your lunch break. Vent to a colleague or friend who understands what you are dealing with.

Which leads me to the next tip...

TIP #2

**Find a trusted ally**

It is important to talk with a friend who can provide impartial advice because they are not part of the toxic relationship and who can help you to break away from the situation. Choose someone who can point out the facts and can help deal with the emotional toll of the toxic relationship. Everyone needs supportive relationships. Turn to a trusted friend, or seek out support groups in order to get out of the grip of toxic people in your life.

Talking with others about the problems that have been caused by the offender may also help you to see the situation in terms of the facts so that you can respond more rationally.

I will caution you here though. If your Machaveilien or Toxic troll is part of your family, please be mindful in choosing your ally. You want to ensure that you won’t be putting your friend or family member in a difficult situation, having to choose between you and the Troll. It’s best not to turn to another family member, even if you feel like they are experiencing the same frustration as you. This leaves you both vulnerable to relatilation from the Machiavellian, or you might be putting someone in a difficult situation. Unless you join a support group- keep your venting limited to one person, and be sure this person understands their role, as your ally and advisor. They may need to step in and call your BS sometime too.

**Tip #3**

**Don’t be afraid to say NO to them**. Even if they are an authority figure. Being honest and kind is the only way to communicate this with them. For example, if your Machiavellian boss demands you work on Saturday, by either threatening to fire you, or by negotiating a transactional exchange, such as “If you don’t work Saturday, I won't approve your vacation.”

Your goal here is to Change the tone, and have an exit strategy. So, saying with a pleasant voice, but not fake because they can spot that a mile away:

“Thanks for the opportunity to earn some overtime, I really appreciate it, unfortunately I won’t be able to make it this weekend.” And then exit the conversation, by turning to another colleague and redirecting the subject, a well timed phone call. Or excusing yourself to the restroom. This is easier if you can do it in an email.

A word of caution, Avoid using the word but, and do not offer an alternative, unless it is a win- win for both of you.

By thanking them, you are appealing to their need for power, but more importantly changing the tone of the conversation. They will want to remain in the high value light you have just splashed on them with by telling them you appreciate them. They may often change the tone of the negotiation, by offering you an extra incentive- like double-over time, if this appeals to you- go ahead and take it. If not, it’s ok to respond with “Aww, That's very generous of you- too bad I have to miss out.” or if it’s in an email - you could simply ignore the message.

**Which bring me to tip # 4**

**DO NOT PLAY THEIR GAME**: A Machavelians greatest Super Power is getting you to play their game. It’s very difficult to resist this, because they always know the right buttons to push. The best thing to do is Redirect your frustrations into righteous anger. Instead of retaliating against them, use that anger to fuel a better cause. Like turning that energy into your workout fuel, or use it to crank out that project you have been working on. Your success is the only way to defeat them!

Tip #5 : **Sorry: But you must accept that there is NOTHING you can do to change them!** Machiavellians are like leopards, you can’t wash off their spots. And anything you try will not only fuel their fury, it will also be feeding them deep insights into what actually pulls on your heart strings- which they WILL use against you in the future!

Survivors are very often empathetic people, who just want to help others.

The machiavellian will exploit this at all costs! Unlike narcissists who prey on your fears, machiavellians prey on your sympathy.

**Tip #6 Set clear boundaries and DO Not Share personal details with them.** Being aware of your own vulnerabilities are just as important as setting boundaries. Know where you might falter and seek others who can help support you. For example, if you know you are prone to self depreciation and or being self critical, talk to your ally about this, and don't be afraid to ask for a little extra support.

**#7: Focus on their actions, not their words.**

This is great advice for anyone really. But A machiavellian is a master at convincing you he is honest and generous, but only with his words. Our natural instincts as humans are to want to reciprocate this generosity. And you will find you are giving , while he is only making empty promises about giving. I tend to trust people until they prove me otherwise… and I have been known to ignore the proof until it's too late. So I have now implemented a Rule of 3. I think people should be allowed to make mistakes, or be forgetful or have a flaky day. 2 times, might mean they are having a bad month, but if they haven't course corrected by the 3rd time, it’s a clear indication that it’s either deliberate, or we don't share the same values.

**#8 Know your own worth.**

A machiavellian can’t penetrate your boundaries if they can’t break you down. Being confident and authentic will deter the Machavelian from preying on you. They thrive on manipulating people's weaknesses and insecurities against them. Confidence and knowing your own self worth will make this difficult for them to do. But Balance this with authenticity. If you appear to have too much confidence or come across as cocky or with bravado, they will see you as a threat and you will immediately become an adversary.

Know your limitations, but don't share them with the Machavelian.

**My last TIP #9**

WALK AWAY. In fact, RUN if you can! Remove yourself from the Toxic relationship. You can spend a lot of wasted energy trying to navigate the machiavellian , or desperately trying to control the environment in which he operates, that you will end up sabotaging yourself. It is always best to just leave the relationship, and cut them out of your life. And YES even if they are family. Like I said you can never change them, even if they lead you to believe they are interested in what you have to say on the subject. If this is a work colleague you always have a choice, you might not like it, but in the long run you will feel a great sense of relief when you are finally out of reach of the Machavelian

If you are worried you are a Machavelian, you're probably not - because a machavelein wouldn’t admit they are worried about what others think of them. But you can take a quiz to find out how you rank on the scale, and even help out some over-tired PhD candidates in the process. Check the Description for the link!

Are you a machiavellian? Take the test!

<https://openpsychometrics.org/tests/MACH-IV/>

Please Share this with a friend who is struggling. If you have any questions or would like to add some of your own personal experiences to this - please leave a comment below or DM me @rebeccacia.co for any anonymous contributions.

Alright survivors- That's it for this episode of Tuck Your Boobs In- the place that prepares survivors for the battle of overcoming trauma and helps you get your shit together after Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault. As always- thanks for listening- Tuck Your Boobs In- You’ve got this!