

Silencing/Gagging

There are a number of types of silencing that occur within abuse.

One is a type of self-silencing. It occurs within the relationship and causes women* to keep quiet and often to withdraw from friends and family. The other types (stonewalling, legal silencing) happen post-separation. Let's look at them all in order.

SELF-SILENCING

Many women suffering from invisible wounding (i.e. abuse that leaves no physical wounds or bruises) may feel terrible shame. They are emotionally confused and psychologically upset and don't know how to express what is occurring to them. Often this is out of fear that they are somehow to blame and also because they simply do not understand that they are being [gaslighted](#) and subtly controlled.

Many a woman can think back to the times when, after a huge argument with unacceptable verbal abuse, or a slap across the face, she should ideally have spoken out. Instead she touched up her make-up, put on a smile and then attended a work, social or school function with her partner, as if nothing ever happened. The alternative would have been to draw attention to the fact that something was amiss and once back behind closed doors, to have to suffer the fall-out and his retribution.

One day though the time comes when things have escalated and she wants to speak up, call out that he's abusive and leave him. However, because she was originally too ashamed or too scared to admit to her family and friends there was any problem in her relationship, and instead played into the false 'happy family' façade, she may feel caught in a dilemma. Because she has no bruises or witnesses, plus he's saying he will deny it to anyone if she tells, suddenly she thinks: Oh my gosh. Who is ever going to believe me? There may be other considerations too.

In my case for example, I was hit in the face by my abusive partner on a Christmas Day. This was not the first time, but it was the first time in front of my daughter. Out of fear of upsetting what was left of the Christmas period for my excited young daughter, after initially threatening to call the police (and him begging me not to) I dusted myself down. By Boxing Day, to the outside world, no one in my wider circle would have known there had been any problem.

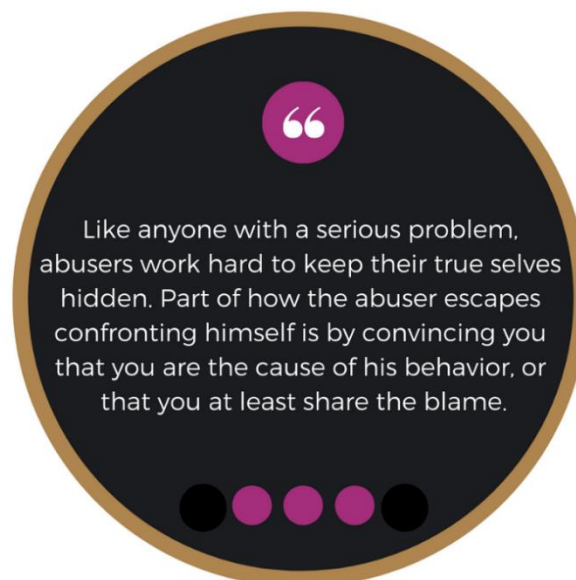
No bones were broken, the swelling, bruising and redness tended to and covered with make-up. My close family knew but no one else would have suspected and now he was telling me (yet again) that 'he loved me like no one else he'd ever loved' and saying how desperately sorry he was that he had lost his temper.

It's so easy to get swayed. A form of cognitive dissonance sets in. You know it's wrong. You know it's not the first time, but the apologies, combined with the practical considerations of doing something about it right then and there, are too great. Christmas would have been spent giving police statements. His family (children from his former marriage) would have found out, Christmas plans would all have been in ruins for all of us. So, you (misguidedly) put it off either thinking, 'I'm too worn down to cope with this right now, I'll give him one more chance' or 'I'll do something about this as soon as Christmas and New Year is out of the way' - and you never do.

This is one very common scenario for women across the world with an abusive partner.

Women (like me) become trapped by their own desire to put a brave face on it for too long; coerced into a position of powerlessness, silence and shame. In our distress we wonder if some of our own behaviours have led, or contributed, to his behaviour.

This then is a good juncture to make one thing very clear – something that I totally understand now and wish I had known at the time:



If you are the victim of abuse, you DO NOT share the blame. Please do not be like me and many other women and berate yourself for not leaving or staying silent. It's not your problem for not leaving or recognising what was happening sooner. **It is his problem for being an abuser.**

Post-separation there are two other major forms of silencing.

- 1) **Stonewalling** – refusing to engage. You can read two excellent articles on stonewalling [here](#) and [here](#). If you have been stonewalled, it is a classic power play but it can also be a hallmark of narcissistic abuse.

- 2) **Legal silencing** – injunctions, threats of litigation, defamation lawsuits or in some cases non-disclosure agreements.

STONEWALLING

“Narcissists manipulate by devaluing and discarding their victims to humiliate and control them. This includes covertly and overtly putting their victims down, subjecting them to stonewalling, emotionally withdrawing from them and invalidating them, as well as abandoning their loved ones without giving them any sense of closure or explanation”. – [read more here](#)

According to marital expert John Gottman, stonewalling is one of the four behaviours which are signposts that a marriage will fail and end in divorce. For further reading you might like to see the section on ‘Is it Narcissism?’ on [the website](#), plus see the many articles on Narcissism under the Resources tab. There are also some book choices in the Book section.

The silent treatment invalidates and punishes you – which is the abusers mission. This article from an expert on Narcissistic abuse, [Melanie Tonia-Evans](#), explains it perfectly: The narcissist is likely to be using the silent treatment for one or more of the following reasons

- She/he knows it affects you horrifically.
- The time ‘away’ is being used to pursue, investigate or indulge in other narcissistic supply.
- She/he feels a significant ego feed from receiving your calls, texts and emails and not responding. ‘I can affect you this much because I am IMPORTANT.’
- To gather evidence about you, in the form of your messages, to show to other people regarding how ‘crazy’ and ‘bad’ you are.

If you are caught up in this, you will feel like you are losing your mind! And that’s the way the narcissists wants it, because it vindicates them. It makes them more entrenched in their delusion that they are the victim and it’s you with the issues, while he or she plays the ‘martyr’ who needs to pull away.

Naturally, the obscene thing that the narcissist did that preceded their silent treatment, when you stood up, asked for accountability or challenged them, is conveniently dismissed.

That’s what the silent treatment is all about – punishing you for upsetting the narcissist’s game: ‘I am not here FOR you or to grant you anything; I am only here for what I can TAKE from you.’

Pinch to enlarge

That’s how it works. They manage to reverse the abused and abuser roles with dexterity to cause the maximum damage, whilst feigning a position of blamelessness and distress to the outside world. Stonewalling is an insidious form of punishment and control.

LEGAL SILENCING

As a speaker at an event I attended recently said: **“You don’t get to abuse a woman and then use the law to stop her from being able to tell anyone about it”**

Yet many men do. In fact this is a major tactic of abusers and if you are still with a controlling partner, it’s best that you know this now.

I endured almost three years of psychological and physical abuse and was then punished with legal threats as post-separation control for leaving him, probably because he feared that unless he controlled me and everyone's opinion of me, his abuse and what I knew about him and his dealings might be exposed.

It's one thing for any man to do this but quite another for someone in a position of public trust to use their power and position to then threaten massive cost sanctions and use unenforceable legal threats to intimidate someone they have abused into silence about it. Because my ex was a lawyer who ran his own law firm he used his power and position to assist in his control, and therefore in his abuse.

Some women endure this for years – even decades.

Thanks to people like Zelda Perkins and the #Metoo and #Timesup movements, the fight back has begun and we are making great strides in calling out these types of silencing tactics for what they are, whether in silencing by employers or silencing by abusive partners.

Personally, I have managed to raise awareness of this issue with the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) over the last 5 years and, to their credit, they have issued warning notices to the profession. Also the burden of proof at the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) will soon be lowered from the criminal standard to the civil standard, which will make it easier to bring sanctions. However, we still have a long way to go until every regulator and employer is able to spot the signs of abuse of power against women - and more importantly to ensure that they actually enforce their rules, regulations and laws.

Until that happens, and more training is undertaken to appraise people of the tactics of abusers, essentially some powerful and wealthy men are going to be able to **continue using the civil law to perform the criminal act of coercive and controlling behaviour**. It is therefore imperative that this information is shared widely and that any law enforcement people reading this website understand this ability (and deliberate desire) of abusers to cause others to 'look down the wrong end of the telescope'.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) are well aware of the propensity for this to happen, as can be seen by guidance like this in the [Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Prosecutors](#):

"It may not always be straightforward to identify the primary aggressor and true complainant in a case of domestic abuse. It is possible in some cases that a primary 'complainant' of abuse or violence may have acted in a manner in which they are then seen as the perpetrator".

And

"The offender may make a counter-allegation of abuse, or argue that s/he acted in self-defence, making it difficult to identify and distinguish between the primary victim and primary aggressor. The police should explore the nature of the relationship between the individuals; the context of the offending, including any previous call outs, allegations and/or

convictions involving the individuals; and, whether there are any other factors at play which may impact on an allegation, such as civil or family proceedings”.

And see [8. Impact on the Victim and Understanding Behaviours](#)

... but, still there is an unwillingness or failure by the courts to believe that it is happening on the scale that it is.

HARASSMENT

As you can see from Melanie Tonia Evans' words in the last section:

- To gather evidence about you, in the form of your messages, to show to other people regarding how 'crazy' and 'bad' you are.

As stated before, they will seek to reverse victim and abuser roles. In my case my abuser logged the time and date of every contact post-separation. He could have just blocked me or ignored them but then he wouldn't have been able to display control. So he read them, logged each contact - contacts which didn't even reach two figures and were totally understandable and justifiable given his monumental deceit and fraud against me - then used the list to claim that I was harassing him and he was in fear.

Just the mere mention of massive cost sanctions, knowing that it would be me up against the lies he had spread (smear campaigns are another common tactic of abusers), plus it would pit me against the legal firepower of the law firm he ran, was his tactic to try and intimidate and silence me and to punish me for leaving him, even when he knew full-well the threats were unenforceable. It did work at first and totally traumatised me as I believed I might end up in prison for telling the truth, but then I got stronger and recognised it for **the abuse of power** that it was, so I actually picked up the phone to ask him to be accountable.

He then switched tactics and called the Police, who obviously had to respond to a call from a lawyer. Luckily they were well trained. They listened to me, looked at evidence and spotted what was going on. Other women might not have been so lucky. I was so outraged by this injustice that I ended up taking part in an HMIC and HMCPSI (Police and CPS Inspectorate) report into false accusations of Stalking and Harassment.

You too can fight back, see the campaigning section on the website coercive-control.com

So, the reality for the majority of women is they are silenced by both **the threat** of litigation and by the actual launching of civil law suits. But again: **“You don't get to abuse a woman and then use the law to stop her from being able to tell”**

This has to stop.

Ultimately, it's all about the same thing; **Power and Control** and make no mistake, when abusive partners try to control using their power and position, some women do take their own lives. In the UK, 30 women take their own lives EVERY SINGLE DAY as a result of abuse.

DEFAMATION

Defamation lawsuits are another favourite tactic of the 'post-separation controller'. Even when whatever has been said is obviously the truth or fair comment/honest opinion, a wealthy abuser can nonetheless launch a legal action trying to intimidate his partner into silence and to make her account of events seem untruthful and vengeful, by doing so.

He just needs to claim it has caused serious harm to his reputation. I think if someone chooses to hit a woman or otherwise psychologically and emotionally abuse her (and perhaps her children) it's pretty obvious who the recipient of serious harm is.

In defamation though the onus is on the person making the statement to prove that it is true and not on the person who brings the lawsuit to prove that it's not. [You can read about it here.](#)

This, plus just the launching of the action alone can cause friends, acquaintances, colleagues and strangers to question where the truth might lie. They might ask themselves 'Who on Earth would go to the expense of a lawsuit if they weren't truly upset or affronted and genuinely defending their reputation from a mistruth?'

The answer: **controlling men – that's who.**

They will either bring the action to try and put the fear of God into you (further control) and then try and settle out of court (often using Non-Disclosure Agreements in the settlement) or will proceed with the action hoping in doing so that this casts doubt on the evidence of the truth-teller – or that when it reaches court there simply won't be enough evidence to prove it. In civil cases the 'balance of probabilities' applies and a Judge may believe that a professional man in all probability is a man of integrity, so you see the problem.

This is why it is so important for victims of abuse to read the page about The Law on my website and understand about evidence gathering.

Denials about abuse (and accusations that the woman is being vindictive by making them) set up a clear path for all sorts of victim shaming comments from onlookers like: "There's no smoke without fire" or "It takes two to tango." The abuser then leverages this uncertainty, and perhaps a lack of hard evidence, and starts planting further doubt in the mind of the fence-sitters. If there is unequal power and position between accuser and accused, you can guess whose side people usually come down on!

All this does is show an ignorance of the tactics of abuse and the lengths abusive men will go to in order to control a partner/ex-partner or control public opinion. It also makes those who back up the abuser (regulators, legal advisors and friends and family) complicit with the abuse and prevents the perpetrator from having to confront his behaviour.

Monica Lewinsky was so lucky to have had a dress in her wardrobe that had not yet been taken to the dry-cleaners. Everyone can recall the 42nd President of the United States of America saying, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." [Watch here.](#) If she hadn't had the dress with the semen stain on it, who would you have believed after his denial?

NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreements)

NDA are also known as Confidentiality Agreements.

Although there are legitimate uses for NDAs, controlling bosses have been using these as a weapon of choice to silence women from exposing their misdeeds or misdemeanours. The public perception is; 'Well, she didn't have to sign or take the money' which again shows a huge ignorance about the power differential that often exists that forces these women to agree to keep silent.

Sexual abuse, intimidation, racism, bullying or other forms of disclosable behaviour should not result in anyone being gagged.

Super injunctions are even worse. [A super injunction](#) is an injunction that you are not even allowed to mention exists.

Currently there are a good number of live cases in England where a woman is being silenced in this way, and that's without the hundreds of NDAs and other threats of legal action that have also already been used which sometimes prevent a person speaking out for their entire lifetime.

What's the answer to all this silencing? How can it be stopped? The answer is: **by raising awareness and giving the bullies no place to hide**. Sunlight is the best disinfectant of toxicity.

The Women & Equalities Committee is currently (2019) dealing with the misuse of NDAs in the workplace and in discrimination cases. This has led the SRA to issue much more strict guidance about their use. Hopefully the Committee will soon be turning their attention towards the silencing of women by other means - something which the [Centre for Women's Justice](#) and Barristers at Doughty Street Chambers are also raising awareness about. Many abusers are being enabled in their pursuit of abuse of women by the lawyers who draft the threats or NDAs on their behalf. There needs to be greater awareness about this subject.

If you have been affected by an NDA seek legal advice. If a clause in your NDA forbids you from even doing that, it may no longer be legally enforceable. Do your research.

Indeed, if you have been affected by any form of gagging threat you can contact [Whistleblowers UK](#) for some advice. There are new Whistleblowing laws (April 2019) which cover the EU, so until we Brexit there are additional protections now, or you can make submissions to the Women & Equalities Committee. Their number is in the resources section. This is not a problem that is just confined to employees and victims of sexual harassment, it is a common weapon of choice in post-separation control too and must be called-out.

[Watch Zelda Perkins talk about NDAs here](#)

[Six tactics Narcissists will use to silence you](#)

[Stonewalling and the Silent Treatment](#)

[Nicola Stocker wins her Appeal at The Supreme Court](#)

***Please note all of these behaviours can happen in same sex relationships or where the female is the perpetrator but research shows that women are predominantly the victims of domestic abuse and controlling behaviour.**

Nothing on these pages should be construed as legal advice. You must always seek the advice of a regulated lawyer.

©Copyright 2019 coercive-control.com