

BECOMING A "COMPLIANT VICTIM"

Summarized by Nancy Davis, Ph.D.

1. The man selects a woman who has low self-esteem. Previous theory blamed the victim for picking an abuser, but research shows it is the abuser who focuses on someone that is easy to manipulate and has problems with confrontation and anger. Often the woman was abused in some way as a child, making them more vulnerable to manipulation. Usually this woman has had a major loss or crisis shortly before meeting the man, making her less 'on guard' to manipulation and more needy. In many cases, the man picks a woman who loves children and pets; because he can threaten to hurt the things she loves to control her. Some men pick women who are successful and of higher status than they are as a challenge, because they like to "bring them down".
2. When the relationship starts, the man does the following things to seduce her and assure that she comes to believe he is wonderful:
 - Spends a lot of time with her. Is slow at becoming sexual and is kind and loving in sex.
 - Becomes her friend. Listens to her and shares very personal things with her. "I've never told anyone this before"; "I've never felt like this about anyone". May give her a gift and say something like, "My grandmother gave this to me on her deathbed and I've never wanted to give it to anyone before I met you."
 - Unexpectedly and spontaneously buys her gifts, flowers, etc.
 - Compliments her a lot, especially in those areas where she has low self-esteem.
 - Lets her make decisions; gives her the illusion of control.
 - Does not show a predictable course of behavior.
 - Makes her believe the universe revolves around her.
 - Doesn't show anger or verbally attack her in any way. Does not show displeasure or disapproval. This is very important since if you do not know what makes someone angry, you do not know them.
 - Makes himself appear vulnerable and trustworthy. Often presents as a "lost little boy" who no one understands but her. Can convince her that all the other women in his life misunderstood and abused him and that she is the one who will love him the way he needs so that they can have a "perfect" relationship.
 - Constantly reads her to make sure that he is accepted.

- Often moves in too quickly; may ask her to marry him within the first month or two of dating.
3. The woman falls in love. The women these men pick are generally those who have had problems with trust. Now she trusts him and is extremely vulnerable to manipulation. During the courting period, others may warn her that he is cruel or abusive, but she will not believe this since she is only seeing his loving side, which he is showing her to win her over. Her unconscious often warns her in some way that the man is evil (through dreams or thoughts that come into her head that he is evil) but she ignores this.
 4. He gives her clues as to his real personality, but she ignores them. He often is much nicer to her in front of other people than he is when they are alone. He typically shows the woman his sadistic, abusive side on one occasion, to see what she will do. She tells herself that he was drunk or tired or upset, and his real personality is the sweet and loving one he has let her see. When he sees that he can con her and manipulate her belief systems and perceptions, he says something like, "Do you know what you're getting into?" "I'm really a terrible person" "I'm really evil". She, of course, responds, "No you're not, you're wonderful, you're good." If she sees signs of his evil side, she tells herself, "This isn't the real him". He then justifies his behavior, "I warned her and she's getting just what she deserves".
 5. Once the man is sure of the relationship or he marries the woman, he then shapes her behavior by the use of positive reinforcement (gratitude, compliments, or attention) and negative reinforcement (pouting, ignoring, or rejection). He begins to show explosive anger or disapproval. He may tell her he is leaving her home "Until you get it right", treating her like a child who must get his approval. Since she has only seen him acting in a pleasant and positive way, she believes the problem is with her. She is afraid of his anger and of confrontation and changes to keep his approval. She keeps waiting for the "real him" to return, i.e., the loving side that he used to con her into the relationship.
 6. He isolates her from friends, family and people who work with her. He does this by making fun of her friends, acting in an offensive manner when friends visit, and/or constantly harassing her. "I just gave up...it wasn't worth putting up with him to have friends or call my family. He would go on for hours and just wear me down". Many of these men get the women to quit their jobs so that they are totally isolated from anyone who can give them support. He pulls her into his reality so that she believes what he tells her to believe. "He made me believe what was right was wrong and what was wrong was right".

7. He begins to tear down her self-esteem in the way that he once built it up. He makes her feel that she is an "inferior" human being and it is her fault that his behavior has changed. The woman usually believes that his behavior is her fault, "I thought he did things to me because I made him do things to me. If I was better or nicer, I told myself, he would stop hitting me. It was all my fault." He is usually verbally abusive, physically abusive and sexually abusive. He feels he owns her just like he owns his car; his goal is control. As such, he may control what she wears, and if she works. He may tell her that she has to stand in a certain way when they are with other people, as a way of showing that he totally controls her. ("Hold your hands above your waist") These men tell the woman that they will never be able to leave the relationship...the more abusive may threaten to kill her if she leaves him (and, of course, some do kill them). He does not care how she feels about him as long as he owns and controls her. She is an object to control. He tells her that no one else will ever love her and makes her believe this so she thinks that she has no choice but to stay with him. He may threaten to torture or gut loved pets or children in front of her, if she tries to leave him.

8. In the sexually abusive relationship, where the man is a sexual sadist, sexual relationships progress from caring, mutual lovemaking through progressively more violent sex. The woman becomes an object and the man has stereotyped sex in which the woman has injury inflicted upon her. He "positions her" during sex, making her stay in one position time after time so that she will not enjoy sex and she is an object during sex. He may bite and pinch her during sex, put a pillow over her mouth so that she can't breathe, choke her, etc. The man may have intercourse with the woman for hours, until she is raw and bleeding, but rarely ejaculate. The man often prefers anal sex with the woman facing away from him to depersonalize her. Woman involved with these men state that they thought that the man would kill them during the sexual acts. The man gets pleasure out of her suffering, not just in the sexual area, but in every area of her life. These men often sleep deprive these woman, keeping them up night after night by harassing them and emotionally degrading them. "He showed me his gun during the day and the bullets in it which he said would blow a hole the size of a tennis ball into a brain. Then he would sleep with it during the night, and would sleep walk. When he did this, he would put the gun to my head and I was sure he was going to kill me. I stayed up all night to keep him from shooting me." (This victim was surprised to understand that the sadist had not really been sleeping, but had used this "sleep walking" to torture her.)

9. He is jealous of their children because he wants all of the woman's attention. He may use their children to torture the woman and cause her to suffer, since hurting the children may cause intense suffering.

10. The man may give the woman a different name as a way of depersonalizing them.

Women who are compliant victims appear to remain in the relationship because they are in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and, become so numb and withdrawn that they can't function well. Furthermore, the trauma of the relationship often causes the woman to regress to the emotional age of 3-4 years old; children of this age do not think of leaving their home no matter how the caretakers behave. The compliant victim is in a constant state of terror. The abusive man has such a hold on the woman that breaking the relationship usually involves the man being jailed, her family members threatening to take her children if she doesn't leave or removing her from the relationship. The sexual sadist may leave the woman because he has beaten her down so much that she no longer interests him or he abuses her children and she leaves to protect them. Some men leave when they believe that they have "killed" everything good and successful in their mate, i.e., her body, self-esteem, social relationships, health, ability to work and family relationships. At this point they may dump her and move on to another victim.

In the author's experience, without extensive interview questions, a compliant victim may never disclose to her therapist the real reason that she is so traumatized. "I thought I was the only one this had ever happened to." She takes responsibility for her abuse, experiencing intense feelings of shame. Furthermore, she may have amnesia for the majority of the sadist acts (as is common with traumatic events), or these acts may be so traumatic, she has no words to describe them. She typically will give a few clues to the therapist that she was a compliant victim, such as "My husband was very brutal during sex".

Intimate relations which are abusive relationships, but do not involve sexual sadism typically follow the same pattern in the initial stages of the relationship. This is true for abusive relationships in which either a male or a female is the abuser. However, in the more common domestic relationships in which physical and emotional abuse occurs, there are cycles in which the abuser appears kind and caring, and, as such, allows the victim to feel in control of the relationship. In other words, following an abusive incident, the abuser may give gifts, praise and/or be emotionally affectionate to the victim. Or, the abuse may continue until the abuser senses his or her partner has had enough and is considering leaving the relationship. At this point, the abuser switches his or her behavior and becomes loving and considerate until her or she has conned the partner into remaining in the relationship. In the sadistic relationship, however, there seems to be no positive cycle.

Some male sexual sadists may pick a woman that he controls to such a degree that he psychologically convinces her to help him torture and/or murder other victims.

Information for these interview questions was taken from:

Books, articles, workshops and personal communication by FBI Special Agent Roy Hazelwood, (retired); SSA Sharon Smith, Behavioral Science Unit, FBI Academy and the evaluation and treatment of numerous compliant victims by Dr. Davis.