

Experience of Des, Partner of 4 years:

Narrative Spans December 2015- June 2022

Clifford and I had a short sexual relationship in the winter of 2015. He broke it off after a few weeks and I took it that he had gotten what he wanted and we both moved on. We became involved again a year later when I returned to Tucson. I assumed it was just sexual as that is what I was shown previously. Over time our relationship implied greater intentions but I had trouble developing trust in those intentions as he sexualized everything we did and some double standards started to show pretty quickly in regard to expectations of me and lack of disclosures on his end. I expressed issue with the intense persistence of his sexuality very often at the beginning and again throughout our relationship and expressed need for space from it. He would apologize and say things and tell me stories to give me the impression that he cared about more than sex, that implied that it wasn't what his life and connection to me revolved around.

He flooded with me with big romance and dreams, talking quickly about kids and building a house together and expressing wanting to marry me at one point, things I would never have talked about or considered that quickly, trying to convince me that he was the real deal and in it for the long haul. He flooded me with gifts. He told me that I was more satisfying than everyone else, that he liked the sides of him that he could explore with me. He told me about working at high schools teaching sexual assault prevention, his late blooming, etc. All the while though, he never really let up on the sexual expectations. Everything was done with the expectation the he would get access to more sex through it.

Immediately after we were officially partners, he expressed issue with the forms of work I had access to. He gave me an ultimatum regarding my work and our relationship, implying that it was out of concern for me and that I could depend on him financially until something came along. Worth mentioning at this point that I was really struggling to pay my bills and I have always been very aware and honest about embedding my finances with people is incredibly destabilizing to my sense of stability and self reliance. Financial dependence is something I would never want in a relationship, a major trigger for me from growing up, but especially a month into a relationship that was already feeling very complicated.

Along with all the gifts and big displays of affection came criticisms. He would initiate conversations that implied I didn't know how to be in a relationship and would try to bestow understanding on me about give and take and generosity. He would give me gifts or treats all the time in a manner I couldn't afford to keep up with. He would tell me in some moments that it was okay, that I didn't have to give him anything. But on a regular basis he began calling me selfish and stubborn and imply that I was just using him. I became stuck in a trap where if I accepted the things he offered I was being greedy and taking advantage of him, but if I didn't accept I was withholding and stubborn and denying him the joy of generosity, because he wanted to help me with things. Versions of this pattern of trap setting existed throughout our relationship.

Another form of the criticisms revolved around my clothing. He had really strong opinions on dress and pushed his opinions constantly. He would fluctuate with aggressively pushing his preferences on me and criticizing my own preferences and anything he perceived as an influence on my opposing opinion. Withholding affection and acceptance until I showed some form of remorse for holding my ground and acceptance of his preference.

He was working at BICAS most of our involvement, which is where I met him. I frequented BICAS a lot over the years living in Tucson and it was a huge resource for me. Once dating, he started insisting that I come by when he would be able to help me. At first it was nice getting the extra attention on my bike with some quality time and then he started insisting that I get help from him during closed hours, so we could focus and it could be more date like. I didn't like him trying to limit when and how I got work done on my bike and it created a lot of tension between us. I also got so many perks for my bike through the process that it was hard to not feel like I was just being stubborn. He also insisted I was being stubborn and not appreciating the support he was trying to offer me. In this process I also lost the skill building space that I value so much about BICAS as he often just wanted to do the repairs so we could finish quicker. When he started to have major conflicts with people at work he explicitly asked me to stop coming in, that it would make things harder for him. Like, people would perceive him as slacking if I was around, even if I insisted I was just trying to be a patron and didn't need to interact with him. But it became apparent over time that, the reason was to prevent me from being exposed to other narratives and wrong doing on his part outside of his control.

He would often complain about coworkers particularly pertaining to these conflicts. But his details were often sided in his favor and I, too assuming of honesty, and never had access to anyone to

have another side, which stresses me out to this day. I told him a story at one point about being sexualized by him at BICAS way before we dated, in a specific way. When I said that, he turned ghostly white but said nothing about it. I very much later found out that in that same time window he had just been written up at work for an identical sexual harassment situation. I only found out about this a year later when he was facing getting fired. His reason for never telling me was because he knew it would make me trust him less, as we were already dealing with my withdrawal because of sexual trauma in the relationship.

The physical part of our relationship was exhausting. He would even pull me into strenuous sexual acts when I was feverish and achy while being sick. He would fixate on parts of my body, that I used to find pleasurable, barraging them over and over in ways that were incredibly painful. I quickly started to loose sensation in parts of my body and grew increasingly sensitive in others. Attempts to declare my discomfort were typically futile, or the results short lived, and my responses turned quickly into withdrawal and a deep immobility. I hit a point where I would cry every time I was touched because I couldn't tell if it would hurt or not.

Our conflicts always followed the cycle of my libido. Conflicts, confusing and over nothing, would be created anytime we weren't having sex. I developed extreme anxiety every time my libido naturally dropped in my cycle. I still have hysterical suicidal meltdowns every month with the natural fluctuation and while navigating lower libido when sexually involved with others. I still struggle with a lot of sensory issues and have major cycles of body pain, issues I have spent a lot of money and so so many hours trying to manage.

He would start fights with me for benign platonic interactions with cis men or if I tried to date one, treating me every time as though I had committed great offenses. But would actively encourage and try to set me up with afabs(assigned female at birth) or queers with an expressed interest in a threesome or to be included in some way. He would use language or fantasies in sex that were of scenarios that made me feel very used and unsafe. If I asked him to stop he would for a short time and then allow the fantasies to trickle back in until they had taken over our sexual experiences again.

He actively blamed me for sexual problems in our relationship, even after explicit boundary crossings by him, textbook assault narratives. He blamed me for my inevitable withdrawal due to not feeling safe with him sexually, never apologizing or working to reconcile the experiences and blurred

that into his constant disapproval of me, expecting me to prove myself. He blamed me for not ever initiating connection or time together but showed extreme disinterest in me when I did pursue connection because it didn't offer him the same experience of conquest or of winning the chase. I was just perceived as conquered and then told I was annoying and around too much and asking too much from him. He tapped into deep insecurities that I hold and used those to convince me that everything that was happening was my fault.

I could get support from him for the ways I felt bad in the relationship if I was vague and didn't explain why I was upset. But if I let him know that it was some action of his that was affecting me negatively I would be met with an emotional blow up and blame inevitably being twisted onto me.

Every time I did reach a moment of security in the relationship he would notice and immediately insinuate to me that I was taking the relationship for granted and not showing up for him in some way, that he was dissatisfied and couldn't prioritize me the same way any longer. He would tell me that he wanted to divest without really explaining what that meant for us. Then go try and start another relationship. When I would respond by divesting myself he would get emotional and insinuate that I was being a horrible partner and that I offer so little and don't show up for his needs. I couldn't count how many cycles of this we went through without the discrepancies between the different emotional expressions ever being cleared up. But each time this happened it seemed that I was entitled to less accountability from him in the long run while still being held to the same expectations of commitment on my end.

He compared me constantly with his other relationships and would complain about how harsh I was. Would talk up how sweet and kind his other partners were. That I was just another shitty conflict oriented punk and he resented me for it. He would use the imperfections of these social groups around us and criticize them endlessly. The criticisms would be relevant enough to concerns I have in these groups that it was easy for me to relate. Enough of this happened over the years that I had learned to hate myself and these communities that I came from who generally prioritize accountability and collective honesty and this fed deeply into my own silence. He blamed me for the end of a long term relationship because every time I connected with this person new lies he perpetuated would come to light and she ended up being my main support during a period of extreme gaslighting by him. I'm still figuring out how to unlearn the narratives that block me from these and other supportive groups.

I would become so distraught and confused from the gaslighting at times that I would become hysterical throwing my fists and head into walls and tearing my fingers and nails into my body trying to make the sensations and pain stop. This habit only stopped after I caused myself severe muscular issues in my shoulder that I am still affected by after years of somatic therapies for it.

Two years into our relationship he meets someone new and I have the impression that he is being honest with me about how it was progressing. He puts effort into making specific disclosures to imply he is trying to make amends from past conflicts. Our relationships with Clifford overlapped officially for a year and a half. That included him and I living together almost their entire relationship. I just barely found out that she had been told we were just friends, that he was like a big brother to me, and that I was obsessively in love with him(A line he has told me about many “friends”, too heart broken to keep talking to him). She had no idea, except maybe by intuition, that him and I were in a well known relationship.

He would come to me after time spent with this recent girlfriend and tell me she was a waste of time, that he loved me and wanted to show up for me and he wished he had been there for me during whatever hardship I was facing. The emotional high from that would last a week or two then he'd be complaining about me, finding some reason to hate me. He would take off to visit this person again, telling me that I didn't understand him, that she was something special and he wanted to invest more time in her. This back and forth of villainizing me, then her, happened on a regular basis, surrounding every visit with this person until our breakup.

We were in an official relationship for 4 years and little by little the extra things he offered faded out. The things that he used originally to create his persona as a valuable person and partner(supporting friends, cooking together, give and take around house needs, importance to ethics and social accountability, collaborations in the relationship and future building) faded little by little, until all that was left were his sexual expectations and his narrative that I wasn't good enough for him, and his increasingly obvious desire to do whatever he wants without care or accountability for the affect it would have on someone.

If I was distanced from him I could create a clear frame of mind to understand all these things but once in his presence it was hard to maintain because he was so emotionally overpowering. He understood this and was always very encouraging of talking in person because of it. I was able to

initiate a conversation at some point in the middle of our relationship where he admitted that he enjoyed and was aroused by crossing people's boundaries.

The Spring of 2021 is when we officially broke up. I was so ready to move on when we broke up. This person made an explicit choice not to care about me. I had my things I could appreciate and otherwise good riddance. But he would come to my space bawling and destroyed by my coldness and missing me and wanting our friendship, feeling like he made a mistake. It clouded the cleanness of my emotional break. He implied reestablishing our connection but always stopped short of actual investment just pulled me along on a string that he might actually care about me. After our breakup, when having sex or not, I had nightmares every single night for months about him and would wake in the mornings bawling and having panic attacks.

Shortly after we broke up that he lured me back into an sexual relationship with displays of huge emotion that always fled once he got the sexual experience he wanted. I realized he was not being honest with me about the parameters or even label of his relationship with his girlfriend and he couldn't tell me definitively that she knew what was happening between us. I told him repeatedly that I wasn't okay with my relationship being a secret to anyone. I never consented and he perpetually lied and skirted around the subject until my body removed itself from the situation via dissociation and sexual revoltion. He had been telling his girlfriend and others that we were just good friends. No one had any idea what our relationship used to be or was at that moment.

Later in the summer after our breakup, after I made it clear I wasn't available for sex anymore. On multiple occasions he lured me into close contact and used that space to initiate sexual contact with me. It was done in a similar manner to how he maintained friendship and sexual contact with me prior. Usually it was by him showing a desire for space or to share something with me, emphasizing that of course it was fine we weren't having sex, that was important to him to respect that. This was blended with him acting hurt and wounded and in need of emotional support/my friendship. But then he would instigate massage, knowing I deal with chronic pain and tension, and inevitably we would be having sex. Each time I said to myself, "maybe I wasn't clear enough" and I would clarify again that sex was out of the picture for us. But then it would happen again. He talked about feeling guilty when we had sex. He manipulated my need for connection, intimacy, and healing and in the end didn't show any care for what I experienced. I realized in the most disgusting ways what I was to him. The last time he

initiated contact like this I dissociated to a degree I had never experienced before. My life and body completely shutdown. I don't even know how to explain the experience.

January of 2022, I called him out for lying to me and not disclosing his sexual health and letting me know about other involvements while he was still having unprotected sex with me. I called him out for manipulating me into sex. I tried to get him to disclose more of his lies, but I was only ever offered the bare minimum of information, much of which was actually a lie.

During the call out he cried and hid himself and admitted to having a sex addiction. Admitted to a couple other "one-time" involvements with people I would likely find out about because of our social overlap. But he never volunteered any remorse or genuine apology without me coming at him aggressively like that. In all our years he never came to me in pain from the guilt or shame or embarrassment of what he was doing to admit anything and desire to change how he was. The tears were just enough to keep me in a state of compassion but I always knew the deceit wasn't going to end. He told me that he didn't know if he ever loved me or if it was just the sex addiction and that was also true with his current girlfriend. A small confession but not one tied to an actual desire in change, as the following year has shown.

I pin that conversation as his last opportunity to show me his humanity, that his priority would be to show up for the people that he was hurting, that the pain and grief he was expressing wasn't actually just about himself. He absolutely has not lived up to that.

I was working with him at Raging Sage still. He became involved with one of our coworkers. I asked him not to hook up with anyone we worked with, considering our past and overlap, and he lied to my face saying they were just friends. At this point in time I was distancing myself from him immensely, and as much as I could while living and working together avoided contact and connection. I didn't develop any friendships while working there because I didn't feel my internal chaos and instability could stand against his charisma socially. He told this person that he was still involved with me in a kinky triad, that I had a don't ask don't tell policy to prevent them from speaking to me about their relationship. I cried through every single shift for the last month that I worked there, often working alone with him and the person he was lying about being involved with.

He told me for over a year that he would be willing to move if it came to it. Instead he spent months crying about how hard it was to find housing, how he didn't have any money. All the while I had been watching him stuff his saving accounts as much as he could, buying all kinds of stuff for his motorcycle, wearing/owning all kinds of expensive camping and hiking gear. Ultimately I had to move out.

I broke my non contact once during a meltdown in June 2022 to remind him of how he had affected me and express concern for the experiences of others he admitted he had hooked up with. He offered accountability and reached out to one of them. He said to me, "my actions haunt me literally everyday. I'm doing my best to be a better person and be honest moving forward." When he sent me that message he was living with his girlfriend. He was telling his coworker that his girlfriend was stalking him and he was scared of her. Got this coworker pregnant and put them through an incredible misery. The details of this time period would not be done justice from my vantage point and will be gone into in their own narratives.

I recently got directly from Clifford a list of the people he cheated on me with throughout our involvement. The list included 28 names, "those that he remembered". As we were in an open relationship I new about 3 of those people. With those 3 people, he lied about using protection. Most of these were without protection. He loved to talk to me about how he really liked having lady friends, and established very early on that those platonic friendships were a norm. Every one of those friendships was on that list. At the end of our partnership when we were still having sex, the way he used "friend" to describe me was vomit inducing. He would throw a lot of these names around in front of me. "Oh so n so is probably not poly, I think she's monogamous..." "Getting drinks with so n so after soccer." "I promise, we're just friends." The depth of lies is truly maddening.