

MY HUSBAND IS LYING TO ME: IS THIS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

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It doesn't matter the extent of the lie.

Anne Blythe, Founder of 'Betrayal Trauma Recovery'

Introduction

Often, women relate that one of the most painful and damaging aspects of emotional abuse are the unrelenting lies, manipulation, and gaslighting. Lies told to cover up sexual acting-out such as infidelity, and pornography use. Manipulation to deflect and protect other behaviors that they had promised to stop engaging in, or perhaps have never disclosed to the victim before at all. Gaslighting, to keep the victim unsure of her reality and to protect his emotionally abusive and sexually perverse behaviors.

Lies and Manipulation Make Emotional Abuse Difficult to Identify- tragically, lies and manipulation make emotional abuse even harder for women to identify. The vortex of confusion that surrounds a relationship that is governed by an abuser's manipulation tactics leave victims severely handicapped in their abilities to recognize reality.

Emotional Abusers Use Lying and Manipulation to Keep Victims Confused- many women report that they didn't realize that they were being abused for years, even decades. Fierce advocate for victims of abuse, Kelly Vogler, suffered devastating emotional and psychological abuse for years, hidden carefully by the lies and manipulation of her abusive husband:

"In my mind, I had always known abuse to be something that involved physical violence and that was not at play at all in my marriage. I never had any bruises or anything like that, so while I knew things weren't good and it was a very difficult relationship, I thought that's all it was." Kelly Vogler, Advocate Against Abuse

Emotional Abusers Are Accountable For Their Behaviors-

"This was not just us going through a difficult time. I had it in my head that I was overly controlling and so he was feeling pressured and embarrassed and that's why he would hide things because I was just too controlling or putting too much pressure on him." Kelly Vogler, Advocate Against Abuse

Tragically, many victims, in attempting to make sense out of a chaotic situation, blame themselves for his lies and other abusive behaviors. The responsibility lies *completely* with the abuser. He is fully accountable for his decisions to lie and manipulate.

Emotional Abuse, Including Lying, Is Never The Victim's Fault- it is never the victim's fault. Women deserve support and safety: join the Betrayal Trauma Recovery Group today. Women will often look to their own personality traits, schedules, perceived faults and flaws, family stresses, including financial or extended family relational issues, and try to pinpoint the reason that their partner is behaving in such an intolerably, cruel and confusing way.

"...We as victims, through no fault of our own, because we're caring, compassionate, kind people, (can be) run in circles..." Anne Blythe, Founder of Betrayal Trauma Recovery

Whether He Has a Diagnosis Or Not, Lying Is Emotionally Abusive- while some abusers may be diagnosed with various mental disorders and/or illnesses, many are not. Some women may find that if their abuser receives a diagnosis, it may seem more compassionate to justify or minimize his abusive behavior. Regardless of *why* he chooses to be abusive, women deserve safety.

Full Interview-

Welcome to Betrayal Trauma Recovery, this is Anne.

I have a wonderful guest on today's episode. She is sharing her story and it's a really good one, so stay tuned.

Before we get to that, we sometimes have issues with our website and I really want to thank everyone for their patience. When we have an issue with our website please go back and double-check. There was a little bit where people could not sign up for [Betrayal Trauma Recovery Group](#). If you have issues please go back and double-check. We're usually on top of it.

If you do see an error on our website or something wrong please email my assistant Kari at kari@btr.org so that we can get it fixed as soon as possible.

Speaking of [Betrayal Trauma Recovery Group](#), our members are reporting to us that they find BTRG to be so safe and to be a wonderful way to get support right when they need it. We run so many groups every week, you can hop on, generally-speaking, within a couple of hours of any issue that you have, and you need to talk to someone, and you need support.

We set it up for women who have a hard time getting out of their homes or have a hard time getting childcare or have a really hard time even functioning due to the trauma. You can hop on one of the sessions from the closet, in your car, in your driveway, or anywhere that you have cell reception. You can access it from your phone or your computer.

Please check out the Betrayal Group Schedule and join us. We would love to see you in a session today.

Just a heads up, today's episode, as I was listening back on it, I get really excited because some of these things are just cray cray town. I hear stories of this all the time, and I don't think I'm shocked anymore but I get very passionate. You'll hear that in my voice this week.

This is a two-part series so at the end make sure you stay tuned for next week where we'll share the rest of her story.

Anne: I have Kelly Vogler on today's episode. Kelly is an advocate against abuse in all forms. She primarily works with women in the faith community who have experienced abuse in dating relationships and marriage, offering support on the road from surviving to thriving.

She strongly believes in education on these topics and that the more you know the safer and wiser you can be, and I could not agree with her more that education on this topic is so important.

Kelly hopes that all of our churches will someday be the safe and loving haven that Jesus desires for all relationships. Although Kelly and I are both Christian, we know that many of our listeners are not, but you are still welcome here. Please join us, we are inter-faith and inter-paradigm and so we welcome everyone.

Kelly holds a master's degree in leadership education and development from the University of Nebraska and is a graduate of Union College. Originally from Massachusetts, she has called Nebraska home for the past 12 years. She taught leadership classes at Union College for eight years and now works as the Vice President of Operations for Agilx, a software company in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Emotional Abuse Is Not Always Easy to Identify

Kelly and I met through our mutual friend Sarah McDougal. If you have not heard our podcast with Sarah McDougal, you can search for that on the website and find it. We love Sarah and appreciate her fellowship.

We have Kelly who has also been through her own personal story, so let's start there, Kelly. Tell us your story. Did you recognize your husband's abusive behaviors at first?

Kelly: I certainly did not. In fact, it was probably three and a half years or so into our marriage before someone first told me that they could be considered abuse. Up to that point, I had always known abuse, in my mind, to be something that involved physical violence and that was not at play at all in my marriage.

I never had any bruises or anything like that, and so while I knew things were not good and it was a very difficult relationship, I thought that's all it that it was. That you get married for better or for worse and that we were going through a lot of the worst times. That's what it seemed like.

"Small" Lies And A Double Life

Anne: During that time were you didn't recognize the abuse, were you aware of pornography use, or any other consent issues, related to your sexual relationship?

Kelly: I was not aware of pornography specifically, but a few months after we were married, it became extremely evident that I had married someone who was living a double life. There were very huge and extreme lies that were going on, and it was about four weeks I think into our marriage when I first started to discover all of these.

For example, the one day that really stands out in my mind is one that started out just like any other day. I grabbed my things and I went off to work and he was in his last semester of undergraduate studies and was supposed to be graduating in just a few months after we were married.

I got to work and a little while later I realized I had left my charger for my laptop back at the house. I finished up a meeting with a client and I ran home to grab it and when I walked through the front door, he was there sitting on the couch in the living room.

I was very confused because I knew that he was supposed to be in classes at that time, so I had no idea why he was there. Obviously, I jumped a little bit when I opened the door not thinking anyone would be there, and I said what are you doing here? He was so flustered, and he started mumbling all about how he had a big test coming up for school that he needed to study for, so he was skipping classes in order to focus on that.

I remember in my head thinking well, the semester just started a few weeks ago, he really should not be at that point yet of needing to skip things to study for an exam when he's only had the class for a few weeks. As I said, it was in the middle of a workday, I needed to get back to work so I just said, "Alright, we'll talk about it later," and I left.

It took around two months or so after that to really try and figure out what exactly was going on. I knew he had a history of not doing very well in school, so I was immediately very concerned and worried about it.

Really, every time I tried to talk to him, he just never had any straight answers on anything. Eventually, time after time of trying to ask, "Well, what time are your classes?" or "Which day do you have classes on?" or "When do you have projects due here?" Just so I could keep up with it all. He couldn't figure it out.

It eventually got to the point where I said, "Well, why don't you just log in to your portal online so I can look at it with you and try and sort through all of this so that we're both on the same page and not confused here?" He couldn't do that either.

I told him, "Try and go to the IT department. Maybe you need to get your account reset." A couple of weeks later, he still couldn't do it, and I eventually sat down with him and said, "Okay, right here, and right now you need to pull up the site while I am sitting with you and log in."

After an hour or so of arguing about that, eventually, it came out that he was not in school. In fact, he hadn't been in school for about the last two years.

That entire time period that we were dating, engaged, and newly married I had no idea how he was actually spending his time. No one had any idea about this. His parents and everyone in his family thought he was attending classes and all his friends did as well. In all of our conversations, he was falsifying information along the way.

Infidelity and Pornography Use Are Abusive

After that, when I realized that such a huge part of our lives was just completely upturned and I felt like the rug was just taken out from underneath me, I started to question other things that seemed to be confusing or just kind of struck me as something just wasn't quite right.

Through that, what I did discover was that he had been having multiple affairs while we were dating. I don't know if any of that happened after we were married or not, but I quickly discovered he had slept with more than one woman, multiple times, all throughout the three and a half years that we had been dating.

While I'm not sure if pornography itself was at play, there was definitely sexual infidelity at work throughout the time we were together.

Anne: This story is consistent with pornography use. I'm not accusing him of pornography use, but I am saying the likelihood of him using pornography is extremely high. The other thing about pornography is that it's not something that is discoverable.

Even if he was using pornography and you never saw it and he doesn't own up to it, you would never know. There is no way to prove it or disprove it or whatever. If I was a betting person, which I am not, I'd definitely bet that he used pornography, for sure.

Victims Are Not To Blame For Being Manipulated

Interesting, wow. I think it's so fascinating that we as victims, through no fault of our own because we're caring, compassionate, kind people, he runs you in circles for months about not going to school and you're concerned and trying to help him out in all of that. Not once, probably until later, did you think, "Wait a minute, it's not that he can't log in or that he needs a password," it wasn't until a few months later that you realized it's because he's not even enrolled.

Kelly: Yeah, it never honestly crossed my mind that I would need to be a detective with my spouse. I did not grow up in a home like that. My parents have a great marriage and a great relationship, where they work as partners together. When I entered my own marriage that's what I was anticipating.

It quickly became evident that that was not the case of what was going on, and the story of that beginning part, that's just a quick brief snippet of things. We stayed married for close to five years and throughout that time there were three different occasions where I believed he was actually graduating from college.

He falsified grade reports that he would show me. I threw him a giant graduation party at one point with about 40 of our closest friends there.

After the party, he just blew up at me and he was so furious that I would go and do something like that. I was confused and I thought it was something that he was just embarrassed about, knowing that he had had trouble in school. Again, there is that aspect of going in circles and playing on that side of me, of knowing that I was trying to have that empathy to understand. Like, "Wow, maybe I overstepped my bounds here. I shouldn't have done that. I thought it was considerate, but it wasn't something he wanted."

Really, the only way I did discover in the end that he did not graduate was because I graduated from my master's program and we went to the same university. When I got the list of graduates, I saw my name there and his name was not there, and that was the only way that I had found out.

The Extent of The Lie Doesn't Matter: Lying Is Abusive

Anne: It doesn't matter the extent of the lie. Yours was huge. Some of them are a lot smaller, but either way for some reason just saying, "You know what, I'm not going to school. I'm not going to graduate," is beyond them.

It's a pretty simple thing to say. "I don't want to go to school. Instead, I'm going to work at the local cellphone store or whatever. I'm going to work at Costco." It doesn't matter. There are a lot of really great jobs that people can get that don't require a college degree. It doesn't mean you are a failure. Lots of people have great jobs that don't require a college degree.

At any point, during this time, he could've said, "You know what, I don't want to go to college. I'm not going to go. I'm going to get this other job." But it sounds like, in his world, for some reason that was not an option for him because people would look at him differently or whatever. He wanted the entitlements that come along with that. He also apparently didn't want to get a regular job, I guess because was he employed at all during this time?

Kelly: I'm actually not sure. He bounced around a lot on different part-time jobs, but it was never very consistent. The number one question I get asked about all of this, when I share these details, is what was his end game here?

You know, at some point someone is going to find out that he doesn't have a degree. The very first job that he got after he allegedly graduated, he ended up being fired from that job because he falsified his information and told them that he did have a degree when he didn't.

I think the most difficult part of this is to try and recognize that our brains just function very differently here. While we all recognize that this is not going to work in the long run, this won't be able to continue. That just did not connect for him somehow.

I think a lot of it was a pride issue. He was very set on attending med school, as shocking as that sounds. We paid for the MCAT, at least I thought we had, I'm not sure what he used all that money for now. He actually did not take the exam. I learned that months later, but he did forge MCAT scores and he had those mailed to our house so that I would open them up and see them in the mail.

Forgery, Lying, Manipulation, and He's Proud of It

The tricky part with all this is I think he's very intelligent, so I think he felt that not going to school would mean he's working a job that is below his potential. I do remember sitting down and talking about those MCAT scores and asking, "Well, why did we spend this money on this if you're not even in school right now? How could you even take the test if you're not in school

right now?" The national programs like this, they check those sorts of things so how did that even happen?

Eventually, through that, I discovered that he hadn't taken it, but the one point that sticks out in my mind is that he was so proud of the detail that he had gone to for the forgery.

I remember him showing me the paper and talking about how he measured out the margins and all of the indentations everywhere so that there was no way I would ever be able to guess that it had been falsified.

Anne: Wow. If he had only put that much effort into school.

Kelly: That's exactly what I said.

Lying And Manipulation Are Common Among Abusers

Anne: I had a conversation with someone who told me, "This abuse stance you take about pornography use is so extreme. It's so extreme. You know, these guys are really good guys who use porn."

I'm like, "I don't argue with you that some of them seem like really good guys, but if someone is willingly using pornography without their wife's knowledge and knowing that if she knew she would be upset, knowing that if I tell her that I use porn she is going to be upset, so I'm just going to wear my white shirt and tie to church every week, I'm going to participate, I'm going to act like I don't use porn for all intents and purposes and every time porn comes up I'm going to be like yeah porn is not cool." That is serious stuff.

This is not just like, "Oh, he's ashamed or he's embarrassed." It's very serious. It's a serious consent issue, and with your husband, people would be like, "Wow, this guy is a psychopath!" I'm sure a lot of people have said that to you when you tell your story.

Like, holy cow the extent he went to, but I don't think people realize that none go to this extent just to cover their porn use like quite a bit. Like, a lot. It's very common. I think it's interesting that people think it's extreme. I'm like, "No, it's actually pretty common."

Women are going through hell. A lot. It's very serious stuff when you're married to someone and they're willing to lie to you like that, about college or about porn or about anything else. Right? To that extent.

That Moment You Learn You're Not The Problem

Kelly: Absolutely, and it wasn't until I finally went to a counselor for myself and started to learn some of these things about how this actually was abuse. This was not just us going through a difficult time.

I had it in my head that I was overly controlling and so he was feeling pressured and embarrassed and that's why he would hide things, because I was just too controlling or putting too much pressure on him. One thing my counselor actually did recommend was to do a psych evaluation.

In my case, I have a little bit of a different scenario because where we were, I was actually the one who was financially stable. I had the education. I had the career, and he was the one who was floundering throughout all of it. Eventually, we got to a crossroads where I told him, "You're either moving out of the house now or you need to go and have this psych eval done so we can try and figure out what we are working with here."

When the results from that came back, they did say that he had a personality disorder and that it was likely an anti-social personality disorder which is sociopathy. In my case, I did get a bit of

that closure there, of having that medical explanation behind it a little bit, and having the doctor there in the room turn to me and say, "You need to get out now and you need to run as fast and as far as you can because he will never ever change."

Not many women get that. A lot of them have this inkling that something is wrong, but they don't get that official diagnosis piece. What I try and say to them is very much what you're talking about. Just the action of covering up pornography or other things.

At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter if you have that diagnosis or not. At the end of the day, that is not a healthy relationship. That is manipulative controlling behavior, and it doesn't matter what they're trying to cover up or what sort of diagnosis they may or may not have officially on a paper there, at the end of the day, it's just not right.

From a Christian Perspective: Letting Others Change While Seeking Safety

Anne: Exactly. The other thing I think is interesting is coming from a religious perspective, most of the religious people that I know believe in change, right. Especially Christians. They're like "Christ made everything possible," "With God all things are possible, nothing is impossible with Christ," etc., etc. To say that this person is never going to change, most religious people put up a little bit of a front, "But wait, that's what Christ is for. That's what the atonement was for." They get a little bit like, "No, I think people can."

I genuinely do think that people can change, so with that, I want to say like, "Okay, can you hold a space for both of these places. That someone can change but if they have not changed, they haven't changed, right?" Clearly, he hasn't changed yet, you would know.

The victim would know because he would act differently, he would come and he would admit every single thing, he would try to make restitution. There are so many things that he would do, but he hasn't done any of those things, so we know that he hasn't changed. There is such a difference between someone saying I will change, or I can change, and actually changing.

They are two totally different things, and the religious community hasn't really figured that out. They haven't figured out that just believing someone can change is not the equivalent of someone actually being changed.

Kelly: Oh, definitely. I think it goes back to how you see God's character, and I believe that God gives us free will. He is not going to force anything on us. I can sit and I can hope and pray all along that my husband will change, but if my husband is not willing to do that work and he's not willing to put in the effort for it, that's not going to happen.

Anne: Really, in a nutshell, if he's not willing to obey the Commandments; there is a commandment that says be honest. You cannot change, according to Christian philosophy, if you're unwilling to obey the commandments. That is the barrier to your change. Thus, God says if you don't obey the commandments you will be damned or stopped. If someone says, Yeah, I can change," but they're not willing to obey the commandments, they're not going to change.

Letting Him Choose, While Finding Safety and Healing For Yourself

Kelly: That's what I had to learn in my own marriage, it didn't matter that I was willing to do anything and everything to save it and that I was bending over backward with everything. We got to the point where I was working full-time, I was in grad school full-time, and I was telling him don't worry about any of the housework at home or anything like that because you just really need to graduate and figure this out.

Someone had to eventually tell me, Kelly, you know you can do all that, but at the end of the day, it is still his choice. It is still his decision to make. To make a marriage work, you need two people to be on board with that. You can't just have one person take on everything and for it to still work.

Anne: The other issue is do you really want to be married to someone who you literally have to do everything in order for them to do just menial tasks?

Considering Divorce When Religious or Societal Background Is a Strong Deterrent

Kelly: Yeah, that's a good question and I should clarify there. I certainly had my bad days where I didn't do anything at all and didn't always respond well to things, so this was not that I was this perfect Christian on a pedestal, and he was just absolutely awful.

I will say, that thought that you just mentioned that never even crossed my mind because I was raised in a very conservative Christian church that believed that divorce was not right and I never considered that divorce was an option throughout this entire time. The only reasons I knew divorce to be okay were if you were being physically abused or if there was an affair taking place.

To show you where my mindset was at that time, I actually insisted that we go to a marriage counselor right away. Right after that four weeks in when I found out something is not right here. I said, "Hey, I'm the good Christian wife, what do we do?"

We go to counseling. We try and figure this out. I expected the counselor to respond back and have some horror, I guess, about what had taken place or about the depth of the deception that was going on.

Instead he just kind of said, "Well you know, you guys are still kind of young and it sounds like he's just really struggling here and needs to figure some things out for himself along the way, and hopefully once you get through that, things will be good. You guys need to remember that you are married now so you don't tell anyone else about this. This is a marriage issue between husband and wife."

I stuck to that for four years. I didn't tell any family or friends at all what was going on.

It wasn't until about four years had gone by and I got to the point where I actually told my husband one day, I said, "If you cannot stop this, if you cannot stop this lying about everything then you need to go and find a prostitute to sleep with because if you do that then I know that I can file for divorce."

That mindset now, I'm completely horrified by the legalism behind that. Of thinking wow, is that the God who I serve who thinks, "Okay, as long as you check off this one exact specific box then it's okay to leave"?

Finding Safety Despite Misguided Support Systems

Part of that was continually said to me because I'd go back to that counselor at the beginning, and I went back and met with him on my own. I said "Look, I've now found out not just about the lying that has to do with school, there was financial infidelity at play here. I told him about the affairs that I had learned about. I said, "I didn't know about these until after I got married. They took place before the wedding, but I didn't find out about them until after."

Anne: Which is known as fraud right. Lack of consent.

Kelly. Yes. I said, "You know, could I get an annulment or a divorce based on some sort of thing of qualifying for basically being deceived into marrying him under false pretenses here? Or just the sexual infidelity?" He told me, "Well, no. That's not considered adultery because you guys weren't married at the time."

Anne: I hear this all the time! Or porn even, right. You're married and he's using porn. It's not considered adultery because—this is serious people, right. I do not want this in my relationship. I did not give consent and here this is happening, and I need more backup.

They are getting enabled through therapists, through clergy, through society. The expectations for a man are like, "Well, he can maybe hold a job and maybe struggle through school," but the expectations for a woman are so much higher. She's got to be able to keep the house clean, and look good, and make a good meal, and all of that other stuff.

Kelly: Absolutely.

Anne: Okay, we're going to pause there and continue Kelly's story next week. You will want to hear the rest of it. I appreciate her for coming on today's episode and we'll catch up with her again next week.