**Pathologizing the Partner**

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A recent phenomenon I have seen in young people is the tendency to pathologize their intimate partners when expressing their valid concerns in relationships. To pathologize means to, declare someone with a psychological abnormality or disorder. Pakistan jumped on the bandwagon a few decades later to stress the importance of mental health but I think we have arrived and the hope is to have a mentally healthy society. The awareness of mental health in the new generation is encouraging and hopeful as it is newfound and growing by leaps and bounds. Working with couples and the increasing number who walk into my office for relationship counseling, I find the intention to work on relationships as a great step towards realizing that ruptures in any relationship are co-created and can be resolved in the atmosphere of mutuality working towards co-regulation.

My serious concern though is how easily a diagnosis of mental health disorders slips off the tongue of one partner toward another. ‘She is bipolar about everything.’ ‘He is narcissistic and a psycho.’ ‘We have a trauma bond’. The language in relationships these days is full of terms like, ‘gaslighting’, ‘trigger’, ‘phobia’, and many more that have a place in a mental health practitioner’s office and not within a relationship. Couples tend to express how they feel in the face of a relationship challenge through buzz words and have already received a diagnosis from an ‘insta (gram)-therapist before they seek professional support. I think that this inclination to diagnose partly comes from the unhinged information access on social media that seems to resonate with everyone at some level and partly from wanting to add weight to the distress they are feeling. It’s almost like if I can label my partner as toxic, I will be heard and my pain will be recognized.

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Couples need to understand that overusing clinical terms creates less safety in relationships and defenses go high in the other partner. There is a deeply embedded stigma attached to mental health that will take a long time to shift. By labeling your partner with serious mental health issues, you are sabotaging the chances of him or her seeking therapy or even if they do under pressure, there is a strong chance of mistrust and resentment towards therapy, and can be counterproductive.

Safety in relationships starts from creating an empathic non-judgmental zone so the first step is to express what you are feeling from an emotional inner experience rather than an irresponsible diagnosis of another rooted in judgment and an attempt to shame the other. Try to tell your partner that you feel angry when he pushes you and tries to control you rather than telling him he has issues with boundaries because he has narcissistic wounding. There is a chance that you may be right but let the therapist work on that so that it can be an effective therapeutic process.

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We are living in an era that loudly blows the trumpet for self-care and empowerment. While it is an amazing process that needs all the attention we can give it, cultivating empathy is equally if not more important to psychologically grow as human beings. Labeling our partners with various psychological disorders defeats the purpose. Don’t judge your partner through the lens of pop psychology. Selfishness is selfishness and is a subjective experience and highly debatable. Don’t call it narcissism.

Don’t indulge in analysis paralysis and keep it simple. You don’t need the support of buzzwords to have a voice in the relationship. Trust your inner experience and speak from the heart. Therapy-speak shows our growing interest in our mental health which is an amazing thing but let’s curtail using clinical terms in everyday relationships and connect to our deepest experience of how we are deeply impacted in relationships.

[Karachi's garbage: Wherever the wind takes it](https://www.nation.com.pk/28-Jul-2024/karachi-s-garbage-wherever-the-wind-takes-it)

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