

INWUD Narcofeminist Blog Post - Anonymous

Trigger warning: rape, sexual abuse

I am sharing my story in the hopes that it can shed some light on the complicated relationship between sexual trauma and drug use, and how women who use drugs support each other in navigating this.

I was in a sexually abusive relationship from the age of 15 to 18. The relationship didn't start with abuse and assault, but it slowly became that way. I knew what was happening to me was wrong, but I didn't understand it. In my mind rape was something that happened on a night out or by a violent stranger. I thought intimate partner violence (at the time I knew it as domestic abuse) only happened in married couples. I didn't know the warning signs, and I only realised I was being raped and abused once it had become violent and explicit, and had become a normal part of my life.

After the relationship ended, I was in denial. Nobody knew what had happened to me, I couldn't bare the idea of my own weaknesses, I was convinced that it all was my own fault. My relationship with sex became complicated. I was a new person, I had escaped the relationship and locked it away in my mind and needed to find ways to protect myself. I dressed provocatively as a defence mechanism, if I made myself sexy, then I had the upper hand and nobody could hurt me by sexualising me. Because of the trauma I experienced I was terrified of emotional attachments with men, but I also craved sexual validation from them. But there's a catch, every time I would have sex my chest would tighten up, it felt like I couldn't breathe and tears would come pouring out of my eyes. My body was betraying me.

This is where drugs came into play. I began taking stimulants and drinking to excess so I could have sex without panicking. Alcohol would help me relax and I wouldn't panic. Stimulants kept me awake, which helped me get drunker and feel even less. Staying awake was particularly important to me, as the first few times I was raped were while I was asleep. This type of drug use quickly became chaotic for me, as I needed to get really drunk and high to be able to avoid the panic. It was expensive and would result in horrible hangovers, making working and studying really difficult. I had replaced my abuser with a self-inflicted cycle of abuse.

I wanted men to find me attractive, I wanted them to be impressed by me, I wanted them to think I was beautiful, and above all else, I wanted to prove to my abuser and to myself that I was worthy of love. I refused to fall in love with these men, they could have me for one night, temporarily refill my confidence and I could go about my life like normal. Once the fear and insecurity crept in, I needed reassurance and would go out again. This was not sustainable, I was putting a bandaid on a gaping wound. The trauma quickly began to manifest itself outside of my need for validation in severe anxiety and depression, I would go through periods of not being able to leave the house, and having panic attacks and intense suicidal thoughts.

In my early 20s, some of my friends had gotten into harm reduction and drug policy. Up until then, I had never really thought about drug safety or taking care of myself. To me, drugs were always this mysterious fetishised nighttime activity that you kept a secret, not something you would talk about. They started talking about nightlife harm reduction, how to lower drug-related risks and taking care of your mental health. For the first time, I had people I could talk to honestly about my drug use and they helped me realise what I was doing to myself. They helped me find different ways to use drugs and move away from a binge mentality. Before meeting them, my drug use was almost explicitly focused on preparing myself for sex, and after meeting them I began doing that less and less. They changed my life and helped break the self-destructive cycle I was in.

All of the abuse happened when I was underage and these were my first sexual experiences. I was robbed of ownership of my body and was trained to believe my sexuality existed to service men, and that I should be thankful for the attention. My formulating sexual and romantic experiences were dictated by a man taking advantage of me and my teenage insecurities. My womanhood played a major role in my teenage insecurities, I didn't fit into the typical beauty standards, I was tall, chubby, and loud. I was bullied in school for my lack of femininity. This insecurity and discomfort in my own body were part of what made me vulnerable to my abusive relationship. He knew I was vulnerable and took advantage of that, he convinced me that I needed him and that I was nothing without him.

From being bullied for not being feminine enough to being abused to using my femininity for sexual validation, my relationship with my womanhood has been painful and complicated. I was incredibly lucky to meet women harm reductionists in my 20s because I would never have been able to process these issues and find my way to a safer, more stable relationship with drugs without them. Without spaces like these, where women who

use drugs can talk to other women who use drugs about sexual trauma and the resulting complicated relationships between sex and drugs, I'm not sure I would be alive today.