

# If Everything Is ‘Trauma,’ Is Anything?

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The man had been effusive, at first — sending compliments, engaging in witty back-and-forths, making a playlist that included that song by Mazzy Star ([you know the one](#)). And then, suddenly, he wasn’t.

As it turned out, the guy had sent that same playlist to multiple women. He’d allegedly sent at least one of them an unsolicited nude photo. As he woke up next to one woman, he was planning that night’s date with another. Like so many online daters before him, [Caleb](#) was a creep.

But in the language of TikTok — and, perhaps, the language of our current moment — he was more than that: [He was pathological](#). Caleb, better known at this point as “[West Elm Caleb](#),” a 25-year-old furniture designer in Brooklyn who was the subject of viral mania last month, was accused of “love bombing” women by showering them with interest, “gaslighting” them by making them think he liked them, then abruptly ghosting them, leaving his “[victims](#)” to bond over their “shared trauma.”

There are plenty of words to describe somebody like Caleb: deceitful, [manipulative](#), inconsiderate, liar. There is in fact a [word](#), one we can’t print here, created entirely for men like this. But in the souped-up language of today, none of those words seem like enough. “All pain is ‘harm.’ All ‘harm’ is ‘trauma.’ All ‘trauma’ comes from someone who is an ‘abuser,’” said Natalie Wynn, a philosopher turned popular [YouTube personality](#). “It’s as if people can’t articulate disagreement or hardships without using this language.” And so, Caleb became a “predator.”

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