

SPLIT WIDE OPEN

To the world, she is confident and assertive, but in her personal relationship, she is a pushover. Does 'she' sound like you?

SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

Scene 1: She walks into the boardroom confidently. Powerful and convincing, the client is bowled over. Another successful project in her kitty. Other women in the room wonder, "Gosh, I wish I could be like her." **Scene 2:** She's having dinner with her partner at an exquisite restaurant. They start arguing. He abuses and pushes her away while everyone watches in shock. He leaves abruptly. She is left to handle the mess, and is fighting hard to hold back the tears. The waitress passes a look to say, "What a whimpering fool! What is wrong with her?" Two scenes. Same woman. Confused? Read on...

At a glance... How can one person who is strong and assertive at work, be a pushover when it comes to her romantic relationship? Offers Seema Hingorrany, clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, "There is definitely a duality evident here. While she asserts herself at a

formal work setting, in her romantic relationship, she is bossed around because the attachment to her partner is so high."

Two halves, one person...

A woman in such a situation finds herself groping for balance. So, does she really lead two separate lives? Definitely, opines Smitha Sathe, 27, social worker, "I was in a relationship where I would just give in, even though he was mistreating me physically. And trust me, I'm quite assertive at work. I just couldn't shake off the insecurity of losing him. I was a doormat." She finally opted out of that relationship after she landed in the hospital with injuries.

So why am I with him?

Why do a career-focussed strong woman get into a relationship where the self-esteem takes a beating? Very often, the fear of losing her partner or too much attachment can be the causal factors. "Sometimes, women tend to overcompensate. They feel their assertiveness can threaten their partner. So, they display docile behaviour. Low self-esteem can be a problem too," points out Hingorrany. Experts also point out that power equations vary with settings. While success at the workplace can give her a high, her personal equation with a partner may be skewed.

Finding a resolution...

Every relationship merits some compromise but if you find yourself unable to handle the pressure, it's time to reevaluate it. As Sohini Mhatre, 26-year-old HR executive shares, "My self-esteem took a nosedive. The submission in my relationship started overpowering my work." She adds that she walked out of the relationship eventually. Hingorrany has the last word advising that under no situation is abuse acceptable and one should know when to say 'enough is enough'.

Warning signs

When you feel ... You're playing two distinct roles Tremendous pressure and stress Conflicted about your dual roles You have to overcompensate

Way out

Self-introspection Being honest with yourself Evaluate the longterm impact of your relationship

