

## How sociopaths are different from the rest of us: They cannot love

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At 40, I'm at the top of my game. I'd been a magazine editor, then started a successful writing business. I dated for 20 years, so I'd been around the bases a few times.

I was educated, responsible and obeyed the law. So how in the world did I end up married to a con man?

This guy took \$227,000 from me, cheated with six different women during our 2-½ year relationship. He had a child with one of the women. Then, 10 days after I left him, he married the mother of the child. It was the second time he committed bigamy.

I wasn't his only victim. My husband was with about 30 other women before and during my marriage. Many of them were asking for their money back. Three women testified at my divorce, along with the parents of the wife before me, who died. I believe she died of a broken heart. From the five of us, he took more than \$1 million.

Every word out of my husband's mouth was either a lie or an excuse, and he didn't care how any of it affected me. When I finally discovered what he did behind my back, my head was spinning. I told my therapist about his outrageous betrayals. She said, "He sounds like a sociopath."

A sociopath? What's that?

I spent the next 20 years finding out. Here's the short answer: Sociopaths are people who do not have the ability to authentically love.<sup>1</sup>

Now, this may sound like no big deal — we all know self-centered individuals. But sociopaths are significantly impaired in making emotional connections with other human beings<sup>2</sup>. So what happens? They view people as objects to be used. They manipulate and gaslight you into doing what they want.<sup>3</sup> Then, when you are no longer useful, they throw you away.

Here's my message to you: There are two types of people in the world — those who can love, and those who can't. You need to know the difference.

I sure didn't know. When I realized that my entire marriage was a scam, I wanted to prevent others from losing money like I did. I launched Lovefraud.com to warn people about the smooth-talking con artists living among us. And that's when my education really began.

Readers told me their stories; I've collected more than 10,000 cases. Here's what I learned: The problem of sociopaths living among us is far bigger, and the damage they cause is far greater, than I ever dreamed. In fact, after hearing what happened to others, I realized that I got off easy.

You may think you can spot a sociopath — they're deranged serial killers, right? ... Well, some are, but most never kill anybody.<sup>4</sup> You may think sociopaths are criminals. ... Again, some are, but many engage in behavior that is immoral or unethical, but not necessarily illegal.<sup>5</sup>

Sociopaths don't just take our money. They manipulate our minds and our hearts. They damage our ability to trust our own perceptions. ... They destroy our sense of self.<sup>6</sup>

The term "sociopath" was coined in 1930 and originally meant, "anything deviated or pathological in social relations."<sup>7</sup> Today, "sociopath" is not an official diagnosis at all. I use it on Lovefraud as an umbrella term for what the American Psychiatric Association calls "Cluster B" personality disorders, including antisocial and narcissistic personality disorders, plus psychopathy.<sup>8</sup>

What do they have in common? People with these personality disorders are socially sick. They are impaired in their ability to authentically love — although they're really good at faking it.<sup>9</sup>

The entire time I was married, my husband told me he how much loved me. He promised that with my help, we would soon be living in "the lap of luxury." Those were his words. He told me I was investing in our future.

So I kept paying our expenses, draining my savings and running up my credit cards, while my husband kept pitching new businesses. None of them worked. When I suggested that he help us out by like, getting a job, he berated me for not believing in him.

I wasn't happy. I was afraid of going broke. But I asked myself, what wife leaves her husband because the business plans aren't working out?

Then the Titanic movie became an international phenomenon, and my husband had the idea of opening a Titanic exhibit in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He found partners and investors. The show was headed toward launch — but the Titanic sank again. I was crushed. My husband made excuses, saying it wasn't his fault that the investors bailed out.

Then my husband told me he cut a deal to open the show in Florida. In desperation, I used the last of my credit to move us 1,000 miles to Orlando. I expected us to work like crazy to get the show ready, ... but nothing happened. When was it opening? My husband told me he was still sorting it out. So I asked, "You mean there's no deal?" Without taking his eyes off his computer screen, he said no.

My vision blurred and my knees almost buckled. My husband had demanded that we go to Florida, spending money we didn't have, on a gamble. His rationale was if you don't gamble, you don't win. He said he did it all for me. Then he said he loved me, and our love was all that mattered.

But someone who really loves you doesn't drain your finances, lie to you and then berate you when you're terrified.

Here's what you need to understand: Sociopaths are not capable of authentic love.<sup>10</sup> But they do know that when they say the words, "I love you," they get what they want.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers have identified three components of romantic love.<sup>12</sup> The first is attachment, which is the desire to be with someone special. The second is sex — I hope I don't have to explain that. The third component is caregiving. When you truly love someone, you want what is best for them. You want them to be healthy and happy. When necessary, you are willing to take care of them.

Sociopaths do not do caregiving. Sociopaths care only about themselves. They want what they want, and feel totally entitled to use you to get what they want.<sup>13</sup>

Now, maybe at this point you're wondering — am I a sociopath? I've told a few fibs. I've manipulated people. If this worries you, you're not a sociopath. Real sociopaths never worry about how their behavior affects others.<sup>14</sup>

So how many sociopaths live among us? No one really knows, but the estimates are frightening. Depending on which study you look at, the number of people who have Cluster B personality disorders or psychopathy ranges from 5.5%<sup>15</sup> to 17.5%<sup>16</sup> of the population. These are the people I call sociopaths. For simplicity, let's use a midpoint of 12%. If 12% of adults in the United States<sup>17</sup> have a Cluster B personality disorder, that means we live among 31 million sociopaths.

Where are they? Here's the bad news: They're everywhere. Sociopaths can be found in all cities and states. They're in all demographic groups — male, female, rich, poor, all races, all religions and all education levels.<sup>18</sup>

Here's more bad news — there is no treatment proven to cure antisocial, narcissistic or psychopathic personality disorders.<sup>19</sup> But the prevailing view in the mental health field is that sociopaths burn out in their 40s and engage in less antisocial behavior.<sup>20</sup>

This made no sense to me. My ex-husband was older than that when I met him, although he lied about his age. First, he was 49. Then, claiming he couldn't bear to lie to me, he admitted he was 51. Actually, he was 55. And when I divorced him, he went on to scamming even more women. This man did not burn out.

I surveyed Lovefraud readers specifically about senior sociopaths. Some stayed in these relationships for 20, 30 or 40 years, hoping and praying for change. But when survey respondents knew the senior sociopaths both before and after age 50 ... here's the really bad news, **91% ... 91% ...** said their deceit, manipulation and antisocial behavior were just as bad, or worse, as they aged.<sup>21</sup>

It seems that once they are adults, sociopaths do not change. They never learn to love.

There are many differences among the people of the world — in nationality, race, sex, religion, education, income and opinion. But in my view, only one difference is significant — the difference between people who can love and those who can't.

So how do you protect yourself from sociopaths?

First, know that they exist. This is the hard part — I can't tell you how many people have said to me, "I never knew people like this existed." They do, and after listening to me today, I hope you understand that.

Second, know the warning signs. Here are some big ones: All sociopaths lie, fluently. They blame others for everything bad in their lives. And they cannot put anyone before themselves.<sup>22</sup> Yes, you CAN recognize sociopaths, once you know what to look for.

Finally, trust your instincts. Our intuition evolved over millennia to protect us from predators.<sup>23</sup> So if you have a gut feeling that something isn't quite right about someone, pay attention. It could be your intuition warning you of danger.

I can now spot sociopaths a mile away. I can also identify people who truly know how to care, like my second husband — we've been happily married for 17 years.

By avoiding sociopaths and surrounding ourselves with people who can authentically love, our lives will be healthier, happier and more fulfilling. We will take a giant step ... in moving humanity forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Leedom, L. J., Geslien, E., & Hartoonian Almas, L. (2012) "Did he ever love me?": A qualitative study of life with a psychopathic husband. *Family & Intimate Partner Violence Quarterly*, 33, 103-135

<sup>2</sup> Blair, R. J. R. (2009) Empathic dysfunction in psychopathic individuals. In Farrow, T. F. D. & Woodruff, P. W. R. (Eds.), *Empathy in Mental Illness*. (pp. 3-16) doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511543753.002>

<sup>3</sup> Andersen, D. M. (2013, June). *In love with an exploiter: Sexual deception correlates with increased harm to romantic partners*. Poster session presented at the 5th Biennial Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Psychopathy, Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> Hare, R. D. (1993) *Without conscience: The disturbing world of the psychopaths among us*. New York: The Guilford Press. (p. 5)

<sup>5</sup> Maibom, H. L. (2005) Moral unreason: the case of psychopathy. *Mind & Language* 18, 296-315

<sup>6</sup> Leedom, L. J., Andersen, D., Glynn, M. A., & Barone, M. L. (2019) Counseling intimate partner abuse survivors: effective and ineffective interventions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 97 pp. 364- 375

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- <sup>7</sup> Partridge, G. E. (1930). Current conceptions of psychopathic personality. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 10, 53–99. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.87.1.53>
- <sup>8</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- <sup>9</sup> Leedom, L. J. (2017) The impact of psychopathy on the family. Durbano, F. (Ed.) *Psychopathy: New updates on an old phenomenon* (pp 139-167) <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.70227>
- <sup>10</sup> Leedom L. J. (2017) Psychopathy: a behavioral systems approach. Durbano, F. (Ed.) *Psychopathy: New updates on an old phenomenon* (pp 117-138) <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.69488>
- <sup>11</sup> Leedom, L. J., & Andersen, D. M. (2011, May). *Antisocial/psychopathic personality: What do family members, romantic partners, and friends report?* Poster session presented at the 4th Biennial Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Psychopathy, Montreal, Quebec.
- <sup>12</sup> Shaver, P. R., & Mikulincer, M. (2006) A behavioral systems approach to romantic love relationships: attachment, caregiving, and sex. In Sternberg, R. J., & Weis, K. (Eds.), *The New Psychology of Love*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- <sup>13</sup> Becker, S. (2015) *The inner world of the psychopath: a definitive primer on the psychopathic personality*. North Charleston, S.C.: CreateSpace.
- <sup>14</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- <sup>15</sup> Volkert, J., Gablonski, T., & Rabung, S. (2018). Prevalence of personality disorders in the general adult population in Western countries: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 213(6), 709-715. doi:10.1192/bjp.2018.202. This meta-analysis of 10 studies covered a total of 113,998 individuals. It reported the prevalence of Cluster B personality disorders as: antisocial, 3.05%; narcissistic, 1.23%, borderline, 1.90%; and histrionic, 0.83%. It also listed the prevalence of any Cluster B disorder as 5.53% (p. 713).
- <sup>16</sup> Hasin, D.S., Grant, B.F. (2015). The National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) Waves 1 and 2: Review and summary of findings. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, Nov; 50(11):1609-40. doi: 10.1007/s00127-015-1088-0. Epub 2015 Jul 26. PMID: 26210739; PMCID: PMC4618096. The NESARC was a survey of 43,093 American participants that covered alcohol, drug and psychiatric disorders, risk factors and consequences. It reported a lifetime prevalence of Cluster B personality disorders as: antisocial, 3.6%; narcissistic, 6.2%, borderline, 5.9%; and histrionic, 1.8%. The study did not specify a total for any Cluster B disorder, but the reported prevalence rates add up to 17.5% (p. 54).
- <sup>17</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2019). Age and Sex Composition in the United States: 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/age-and-sex/2019-age-sex-composition.html>.
- <sup>18</sup> Robins, L. N., Tipp, J. & Przybeck, T. (1991) Antisocial personality. In Robins, L. N., & Regier, D. A. (Eds.), *Psychiatric Disorders in America*. New York: The Free Press.
- <sup>19</sup> Kiehl, K. A., & Hoffman, M. B. (2011) The criminal psychopath: history, neuroscience, treatment, and economics. *Jurimetrics* 51, pp. 355-397.
- <sup>20</sup> Andersen, D. M., Veltman, E., & Sellbom, M. (2022). Surviving senior psychopathy: informant reports of deceit and antisocial behavior in multiple types of relationships. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* pp 1-23.

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<sup>21</sup> Andersen, D. (2022) *Senior sociopaths: how to recognize and escape lifelong abusers*. Egg Harbor Twp., N.J.: Anderly Publishing.

<sup>22</sup> Andersen, D. (2012) *Red flags of love fraud: 10 signs you're dating a sociopath*. Egg Harbor Twp., N.J. Anderly Publishing.

<sup>23</sup> DeBecker, G. (1997) *The gift of fear*. New York: Dell Publishing.