

Psychopath Free: Recovering From Emotionally Abusive Relationships with Narcissists, Sociopaths, & Other Toxic People

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Contents

1	Introduction	3
1.1	An Adventure	3
2	Spotting Toxic People	3
2.1	30 Red Flags	4
2.2	What Is Normal?	6
2.3	Beware the Vultures	6
2.4	The Constant	7
3	The Manufactured Soul Mate	8
3.1	Personalized Grooming	8
3.1.1	Idealization	8
3.1.2	Indirect Persuasion	10
3.1.3	No Support	10
3.1.4	The “Crazy” Ex	11
3.1.5	“My Ex Is Bipolar”	11
3.1.6	“My Ex Is Crazy & Hysterical”	11
3.1.7	“My Ex Is Bitter”	11
3.1.8	“My Ex Is Jealous of Us & Still in Love with Me”	11
3.1.9	“But My Ex Really Was Awful!”	12
3.1.10	Testing the Waters	12
3.2	Identity Erosion	12
3.2.1	Destroying Your Boundaries	12
3.2.2	Manufactured Emotions	13
3.2.3	The Serial Provoker	13
3.2.4	Word Salad	15
3.2.5	Gaslighting & Projection	16
3.2.6	Enemy Number 1	16
3.2.7	The Black Hole	16
3.2.8	Sexual Manipulation	17
3.2.9	The Transitional Target	17
3.2.10	Putting You on the Defensive	18
3.2.11	Boredom	19
3.2.12	Covert Gossiping	20
3.2.13	The Manipulator Test	20
3.2.14	Torture by Triangulation	21
3.2.15	The Detective	23
3.2.16	Silence	23
3.3	The Grand Finale	24
3.3.1	The Aftermath	24
3.3.2	The Psychopathic Breakup Checklist	24
3.3.3	Setup	24
3.3.4	Destruction	25
3.3.5	The Talk	25
3.3.6	Abandonment	25
3.3.7	Triangulation Again	25
3.3.8	Superiority Complex	25
3.3.9	The Emotional Abuser’s Trap	26

3.3.10	Why Are They So Happy with Someone Else?	27
3.3.11	Happily Never After	27
3.3.12	The Irony	28
4	The Path to Recovery	29
4.1	Why Does It Take So Long?	29
4.1.1	You Were in Love	29
4.1.2	You Were in Desperate Love	29
4.1.3	The Chemical Reaction	29
4.1.4	Inferiority & Comparison	30
4.1.5	You Have Encountered Pure Evil	30
4.1.6	Your Spirit Is Deeply Wounded	30
4.2	The Stages of Grief – Part I	30
4.2.1	Devastation	30
4.2.2	Taking Care of Yourself	31
4.2.3	Reflection	31
4.2.4	Denial	32
4.2.5	Drinking	32
4.2.6	“If Only” Moments	32
4.2.7	Making Big Decisions	33
4.2.8	Education & Self-Doubt	33
4.2.9	Cognitive Dissonance	33
4.2.10	2 Masks	34
4.2.11	No Contact	34
4.2.12	Closure Without Contact	34
4.2.13	Un-Brainwashing	36
4.3	The Stages of Grief – Part II	37
4.3.1	Understanding the Psychopath	37
4.3.2	The Robot	37
4.3.3	Intention & Sadism	38
4.3.4	Am I a Psychopath?	38
4.3.5	Delayed Emotions	40
4.3.6	Rage	40
4.3.7	Depression	41
4.3.8	When Empathetic People Self-Destruct	41
4.3.9	Exposing a Psychopath: Should You Warn the Next Victim?	41
4.3.10	Complex PTSD	42
4.3.11	Truth Triumphs	43
4.3.12	Do-Over	43
4.3.13	New Pain After the Darkness	43
4.3.14	Embarrassment	44
4.3.15	Cognitive Dissonance Returns	44
4.3.16	Trauma & the 2 Worlds	44
4.3.17	The Loss of Innocence	45
5	Freedom	46
5.1	Looking Back, Moving Forward	47
5.1.1	The Anomaly	47
5.1.2	A Letter to the Next Target	48
5.2	Introspection & Insecurities	49
5.2.1	Mirror, Mirror on the Wall	49
5.2.2	Cowardly Love	50
5.2.3	Sympathy for the Devil	50
5.2.4	What’s Your Personality?	51
5.2.5	Alone Time	52
5.3	Self-Respect	53
5.3.1	Boundaries	53
5.3.2	When Not to Say “I’m Sorry”	53
5.3.3	Channeling Empathy	54
5.4	30 Signs of Strength	54
5.5	Spirituality & Love	54
5.6	The Fool & the World	54
5.7	A Bigger Picture	54
5.8	Afterword: The Constant: Revisited	54

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“No hurt survives for long without our help, she said & then she kissed me & sent me out to play again for the rest of my life.” – Brian Andreas, *Story People*

1 Introduction

1.1 An Adventure

“Finding yourself involved with a psychopath is an adventure, that’s fore sure. It will open your eyes to human nature, our broken society, &, perhaps most important of all, your own spirit. It’s a dark journey that will throw you into spells of depression, rage, & loneliness. It will unravel your deepest insecurities, leaving you with a lingering emptiness that haunts your every breath.

But ultimately, it will heal you.

You will become stronger than you could ever imagine. You will understand who you are truly meant to be. & in the end, you will be glad it happened.

No one ever believes me about that last part. At least, not at 1st. But I promise you, it’s an adventure worth taking. One that will change your life forever.

So what is a psychopath? How about a narcissist or a sociopath? They’re manipulative people – completely devoid of empathy – who intentionally cause harm to others without any sense of remorse or responsibility. & despite some differences between each disorder, the bottom line is that their relationship cycles can be predicted like clockwork: Idealize, Devalue, Discard.

Years ago, this cycle had me thinking I’d never be happy again. Falling in love had somehow wiped out my entire sense of self. Instead of being joyful & trusting, I had become an unrecognizable mess of insecurities & anxiety.

But life is a lot of fun these days – mostly just running around outside in my bathing suit & eating pizza. & this is all thanks to a lucky Google search that lead me to psychopathy, which led me to the friends who saved my life, which led us to cofound a tiny online recovery community, which now reaches millions of survivors every month!

At PsychopathFree.com, we see new members join every single day, always with a seemingly hopeless & all-too-familiar tale. Left feeling lost & broken, they wonder if they will ever find happiness again.

1 year later, that person is nowhere to be found.

In his or her place, there is a beautiful stranger who stands tall & helps others out from the shadows. A stranger who takes pride in their own greatest qualities: empathy, compassion, & kindness. A stranger who speaks of self-respect & boundaries. A stranger who practices introspection in order to better conquer their own demons.

So what happened in that year?

Well, a lot of good stuff. So much that I had to write a book. I might be biased – actually, I definitely am – but I think PsychopathFree.com has 1 of the coolest healing process out there. We believe in education, open dialogue, validation, & self-discovery. We have a uniquely inspiring user base, full of resilient values & honest friendships.

Yes, friendships. Because this journey is personal, but it’s also remarkably universal. Whether it be a whirlwind romance, a scheming coworker, an abusive family member, or a life-consuming affair, a relationship with a psychopath is always the same. Your mind is left spinning. You feel worthless & lost. You become numb to the things that once made you happy.

I cannot fix a toxic relationship (because toxic people cannot change), but I can give you a new place to start. & I can promise that you will feel joy again. You will learn to trust your intuition. You will walk this world with the wisdom of a survivor & the gentle wonder of a dreamer.

But 1st, you’ll need to forget everything you thought you knew about people. Understanding psychopathy requires letting go of your basic emotional instincts. Remember, these are people who prey on forgiveness. They thrive on your need for closure. They manipulate compassion & exploit sympathy.

Since the dawn of time, psychopaths have waged psychological warfare on others – humiliating & shaming kind, unsuspecting victims – people who never asked for it; people who aren’t even aware of the war until it’s over.

But this is all about to change.

So say farewell to love triangles, cryptic letters, self-doubt, & manufactured anxiety. You will never again find yourself desperately awaiting a text from the person you love. You will never again censor your spirit for fear of losing the “perfect” relationship. You will never again be told to stop overanalyzing something that urgently needs analysis. You are no longer a pawn in the mind games of a psychopath. You are free.

& now it’s time for your adventure.

Love, Jackson.” – [Mac15, pp. 7–9]

2 Spotting Toxic People

“Your strengthened intuition is the greatest defense against a manipulative person. It is a skill that can never be exploited – & once learned, it will serve you a lifetime.” – [Mac15, p. 10]

2.1 30 Red Flags

“There are a lot of phenomenal studies on the traits & characteristics of psychopaths. A quick Internet search will lead you to them. The red flags in this book are intended to supplement these resources.

So what’s different about this list? Well, for one, it’s specifically about relationships. But it’s also about you. Each point requires introspection & self-awareness. Because if you want to spot toxic people, you cannot focus entirely on their behavior – that’s only half the battle. You must also come to recognize the looming red flags in your own heart. Then you will be ready for anything.

- **Gaslighting & crazy-making.** The blatantly deny their own manipulative behavior & ignore evidence when confronted with it. They become dismissive & critical if you attempt to disprove their fabrications with facts. Instead of them actually addressing their inappropriate behavior, somehow it always becomes *your* fault for being “sensitive” & “crazy.” Toxic people condition you to believe that the problem isn’t the abuse itself, but instead your reactions to their abuse.
- **Cannot put themselves in your shoes, or anyone else’s, for that matter.** You find yourself desperately trying to explain how they might feel if you were treating them this way, & they just stare at you blankly. You slowly learn not to communicate your feelings with them, because you’re usually met with silence or annoyance.
- **The ultimate hypocrite.** “Do as I say, not as I do.” They have extremely high expectations for fidelity, respect, & adoration. After the idealization phase, they will give none of this back to you. They will cheat, lie, criticize, & manipulate. But you are expected to remain perfect, otherwise you will promptly be replaced & deemed unstable.
- **Pathological lying & excuses.** There is always an excuse for everything, even things that don’t require excusing. They make up lies faster than you can question them. They constantly blame others – it is never their fault. They spend more time rationalizing their behavior than improving it. Even when caught in a lie, they express no remorse or embarrassment. Oftentimes, it almost seems as if they *wanted* you to catch them.
- **Focuses on your mistakes & ignores their own.** If they’re 2 hours late, don’t forget that you were once 5 minutes late to your 1st date. If you point out their inappropriate behavior, they will always be quick to turn the conversation back to you. You might begin to adopt perfectionist qualities, very aware that any mistake can & will be used against you.
- **You find yourself explaining the basic elements of human respect to a full-grown man or woman.** Normal people understand fundamental concepts like honesty & kindness. Psychopaths often appear to be childlike & innocent, but don’t let this mask fool you. No adult should need to be told how he or she is making other people feel.
- **Selfishness & a crippling thirst for attention.** They drain the energy from you & consume your entire life. Their demand for adoration is insatiable. You thought you were the only one who could make them happy, but now you feel that anyone with a beating pulse could fit the role. However, the truth is: no one can fill the void of a psychopath’s soul.
- **Accuses you of feeling emotions that they are intentionally provoking.** They call you jealous after blatantly flirting with an ex – often done over social networking for the entire world to see. They call you needy after intentionally ignoring you for days on end. They use your manufactured reactions to garner sympathy from other targets, trying to prove how “hysterical” you’ve become. You probably once considered yourself to be exceptionally easygoing person, but an encounter with a psychopath will (temporarily) turn that notion upside down.
- **You find yourself playing detective.** It’s never happened in any other relationship, but suddenly you’re investigating the person you once trusted unconditionally. If they’re active on Facebook, you start scrolling back years on their posts & albums. Same with their ex. You’re seeking answers to a feeling you can’t quite explain.
- **You are the only one who sees their true colors.** No matter what they do, they always seem to have a fan club cheering for them. The psychopath uses these people for money, resources, & attention – but the fan club won’t notice, because this person strategically distracts them with shallow praise. Psychopaths are able to maintain superficial friendships far longer than relationships.
- **You hear that any fight could be your last.** Normal couples argue to resolve issues, but psychopaths make it clear that negative conversations will jeopardize the relationship, especially ones regarding their behavior. Any of your attempts to improve communication will typically result in the silent treatment. You apologize & forgive quickly, otherwise you know they’ll lose interest in you.
- **Slowly & steadily erodes your boundaries.** They criticize you with a condescending, joking sort of attitude. They smirk when you try to express yourself. Teasing becomes the primary mode of communication in your relationship. They subtly belittle your intelligence & abilities. If you point this out, they call you sensitive & crazy. You might begin to feel resentful & upset, but you learn to push away those feelings in favor of maintaining the peace.
- **They withhold attention & undermine your self-esteem.** After once showering you with nonstop attention & admiration, they suddenly seem completely bored by you. They treat you with silence & become very annoyed that you’re interested in continuing the passionate relationship that *they* created. You begin to feel like a chore to them.

- **They expect you to read their mind.** If they stop communicating with you for several days, it's your fault for not knowing about the plans they never told you about. They will always be an excuse that makes them out to be the victim to go along with this. They make important decisions about the relationship & they inform everyone except you.
- **You feel on edge around this person, but you still want them to like you.** You find yourself writing off most of their questionable behavior as accidental or insensitive, because you're in constant competition with others for their attention & praise. They don't seem to care when you leave their side – they can just as easily move on to the next source of energy.
- **An unusual number of “crazy” people in their past.** Any ex-partner or friend who did not come crawling back to them will likely be labeled jealous, bipolar, an alcoholic, or some other nasty smear. Make no mistake: they will speak about you the same way to their next target.
- **Provokes jealousy & rivalries while maintaining their cover of innocence.** They once directed all of their attention to you, which makes it especially confusing when they begin to withdraw & focus on other people. They do things that constantly make you doubt your place in their heart. If they're active on social media, they'll bait previously denounced exes with old songs, photos, & inside jokes. They attend to the “competition's” activity & ignore yours.
- **Idealization, love-bombing, & flattery.** When you 1st meet, things move extremely fast. They tell you how much they have in common with you – how perfect you are for them. Like a chameleon, they mirror your hopes, dreams, & insecurities in order to form an immediate bond of trust & excitement. They constantly initiate communication & seem to be fascinated with you on every level. If you have a Facebook page, they might plaster it with songs, compliments, poems, & inside jokes.
- **Compares you to everyone else in their life.** They compare you to ex-lovers, friends, family members, & your eventual replacement. When idealizing, they make you feel special by telling you how much better you are than these people. When devaluing, they use these comparisons to make you feel jealous & inferior.
- **The qualities they once claimed to admire about you suddenly become glaring faults.** At 1st, they appeal to your deepest vanities & vulnerabilities, observing & mimicking exactly what they think you want to hear. But after you're hooked, they start to use these things against you. You spend more & more time trying to prove yourself worthy to the very same person who once said you were perfect.
- **Cracks in their mask.** There are fleeting moments when the charming, cute, innocent persona is replaced by something else entirely. You see a side to them that never came out during the idealization phase, & it is a side that's cold, inconsiderate, & manipulative. You start to notice that their personality just doesn't add up – that the person you fell in love with doesn't actually seem to exist.
- **Easily bored.** They are constantly surrounded by other people, stimulated & praised at all times. They can't tolerate being alone for an extended period of time. They become quickly uninterested by anything that doesn't directly impact them in a positive or thrilling way. At 1st, you might think they're exciting & worldly, & you feel inferior for preferring familiarity & consistency.
- **Triangulation.** They surround themselves with former lovers, potential mates, & anyone else who provides them with added attention. This includes people that the psychopath may have previously denounced & declared you superior to. This makes you feel confused & creates the perception that the psychopath is in high demand at all times.
- **Covert abuse.** From an early age, most of us were taught to identify physical mistreatment & blatant verbal insults, but with psychopaths, the abuse is not so obvious. You likely won't even understand that you were in an abusive relationship until long after it's over. Through personalized idealization & subtle devaluation, a psychopath can effectively erode the identity of *any* chosen target. From an outsider's perspective, you will appear to have “lost it,” while the psychopath calmly walks away, completely unscathed.
- **Pity plays & sympathy stories.** Their bad behavior always has sob-story roots. They claim to behave this way because of an abusive ex, an abusive parent, or an abusive cat. They say that all they've ever wanted is some peace & quiet. They say they hate drama – & yet there's more drama surrounding them than anyone you've ever known.
- **The mean & sweet cycle.** Sometimes they shower you with attention, sometimes they ignore you, sometimes they criticize you. They treat you differently in public than they do behind closed doors. They could be talking about marriage 1 day & breaking up the next. You never know where you stand with them. As my morning-coffee friend Rydia wrote: “They put forth as little effort as possible & then step it up when you try to disengage.”
- **This person becomes your entire life.** You're spending more of your time with them & their friends, & less time with your own support network. They're all you think & talk about anymore. You isolate yourself in order to make sure you're available for them. You cancel plans & eagerly wait by the phone for their next communication. For some reason, the relationship seems to involve a lot of sacrifices on your end, but very few on theirs.

- **Arrogance.** Despite the humble, sweet image they presented in the early stages, you start to notice an unmistakable air of superiority about them. They talk down to you as if you are intellectually deficient & emotionally unstable. They have no shame when it comes to flaunting new targets after the breakup, ensuring that you see how happy they are without you.
- **Backstabbing gossip that changes on a whim.** They plant little seeds of poison, whispering about everyone, idealizing them to their face, & then complaining about them behind their backs. You find yourself disliking or resenting people you've never even met. For some reason, you might even feel special for being the one he or she complains to. But once the relationship turns sour, they'll turn back to everyone they once insulted to you, lamenting about how crazy you've become.
- **Your feelings.** Your natural love & compassion has transformed into overwhelming panic & anxiety. You apologize & cry more than you ever have in your life. You barely sleep, & you wake up every morning feeling anxious & unhinged. You have no idea what happened to your old relaxed, fun, easygoing self. After a run-in with a psychopath, you will feel insane, exhausted, drained, shocked, & empty. You tear apart your entire life – spending money, ending friendships, & searching for some sort of reason behind it all.

You will find that normal, loving people do not raise any of these flags. After an encounter with a psychopath, most survivors face the struggle of hypervigilance: Who can really be trusted? Your gauge will swing back & forth for a while, like a volatile pendulum. You will wonder if you've gone absolutely mad – wanting to believe the best in an old friend or a new date, but feeling sick to your stomach when you actually spend time with them because you're waiting for the manipulative behavior to start.

Developing your intuition is a personal process, but I would leave you with this: the world is mostly full of good people, & you don't want to miss out on that because you've been hurt. Spend some time getting in touch with your feelings. Keep tweaking until you find a comfortable balance between awareness & trust. Look within & understand why you felt the way you did when you were with your abusive partner & how you felt before you met them. You will discover that many old relationships may need revisiting. & as you begin to abandon toxic patterns, healthier ones will inevitably appear in their place.

To quote a longtime member & friend, Phoenix, you will stop asking “Do they like me?” & start asking “Do I like them?” – [Mac15, pp. 10–17]

2.2 What Is Normal?

“If your “soul mate” went from fascinated to bored in the blink of an eye, this is not normal. If you were called jealous & crazy by someone who actively cheated on you, this is not normal. If you were desperately waiting by your phone for texts they once initiated on a minute-by-minute basis, this is not normal. If all of their exes were “bipolar” or “madly in love” with them, this is not normal. Psychopaths are parasitic, emotionally stunted, & incapable of change. Once this individual is gone from your life, you will find that everything begins to make sense again. The chaos dissipates & your sanity returns. Things will be normal once again.” – [Mac15, p. 17]

2.3 Beware the Vultures

“You are taking the 1st steps to recover from a toxic relationship with a psychopath. That's great! The work you'll be doing will not only free you from the grasp of your abuser, but it will also enable you to reclaim yourself – the self that was trampled on, beaten down, & transformed into a shell of who you once were. I know it may be difficult to face some of the truths we'll be exploring, but it's also empowering, as you'll see how much you've survived, how strong you really are.

As you begin this work, I strongly encourage you to seek out a recovery professional or a healing community. You'll need the support &, at times, an encouraging reminder that you're on the right path.

I'd like to extend a special warning to those of you who are new to recovery. After psychopathic abuse, you're going to be extremely raw & vulnerable. As you start to put the pieces together, you'll feel devastated, miserable, & angry. It's overwhelming.

You're probably used to repressing your emotions & dealing with things on your own. But this time, everything is out in the open. You're dependent like a newborn child, seeking out someone – anyone – to understand what you're going through.

In general, it's important to be open with your emotions. But at your most insecure moments, you may unknowingly open the floodgates for more abuse.

It's no mystery that survivors seem to attract more pathological people like magnets. As you frantically share your story, you latch on to the quickest & most sympathetic ear – anyone who claims to understand you. The problem is, these people do not always have your best interests at heart.

Those willing to listen to your psychopathic story for hours on end are, unfortunately, not likely to be people who are truly invested in your recovery. They are most likely “vultures.”

Vultures often seem exceptionally kind & warm at 1st. They want to fix you & absorb your problems. They are fascinated by your struggles. But sooner or later, you will find yourself lost in another nightmare. They begin drowning you in unsolicited advice. They need constant praise & attention. You are never allowed to disagree with them. They feel off drama & an insatiable need to be appreciated by others.

You will find that they lash out as you become happier. They perceive your progress as a threat to their control. They want to keep you in a perpetual state of dependency. They do not want you to seek help from anyone except them.

Whether these people are pathological or not, you don't need this toxic garbage after what you've been through.

I would strongly urge all survivors to avoid seeking out new friendships & relationships for at least a few months. You must get to the point where you no longer need – or want – to talk about your abuser anymore.

When you do need help, stick to professional therapy or recovery communities & services. These people know what you’ve been through, & you’re going to find that all of them are willing to help – with no strings attached.

I understand the temptation to go out & meet new people. You’re looking to start rebuilding your life. You want to surround yourself with kinder & more genuine friends.

& you will.

But real friends won’t be acting as your therapist, & they definitely won’t be rambling on about their ability to empathize & care. Their actions should speak louder than their words.

It takes a long time to start building healthier relationships. It takes breaking old habits, forming new ones, developing your intuition, & finally coming to understand what it is that you want from this world.

So be on the lookout for vultures. In the writing world, there’s a universal rule called “show – don’t tell.” This rule also applies to people. If you encounter someone who’s constantly telling you who they are, how much they want to help you, how they will make things right for you, take a step back & look at their actual behavior. Manipulative people are always “telling” because they have nothing good to show. Their inappropriate & dishonest actions never actually match up with their promising words, causing an overwhelming cognitive dissonance in the people who trust them.

You will find the decent, humble human beings aren’t trying to tell you who they are & what they can do for you. They simply show it through consistent love & kindness. You never need to question them, because their intentions are always pure. Vultures, on the other hand, are really acting out of self-interest; they want to be praised & adored. In an argument, a “teller” will frequently remind you of how well they treat you, even after blatantly hurting you. A “show-er” will simply share their point of view without trying to twist the conversation in their favor. Avoid those who tell you how nice they are, how generous they are, how successful they are, how honest they are, & how important they are. Instead, search for the quiet ones who show these qualities everyday through their actions.” – [Mac15, pp. 17–19]

2.4 The Constant

“You know about psychopaths. You’ve got the red flags. So now the big question: *Are you really involved with a psychopath?*”

Well, barring any major scientific advancements, you really can’t know for certain whether or not someone has a conscience. In fact, I don’t think there’s any approach that will allow you to spot a psychopath with 100% confidence.

Fortunately, there’s a different way to keep yourself safe. & this one involves looking within. It will work with anyone, anywhere, anytime. It’s a question with answers – lots of them.

“How are you feeling today?”

Seriously, I’m asking you. Because most people might respond with a vague “fine” & follow up with a casual comment about their weekend, a promotion at work, or their favorite television show.

But what about you? Perhaps you’re feeling empty? Broken? Hopeless? Maybe you woke up with that constant aching in your heart, eating away at your soul like a cancer. You spend the day trying to keep your thoughts free from painful topics – only to find that your mind keeps racing right back to them. Memories that once brought you so much joy now make you feel sick. You oscillate between anger & depression because you are unable to decide which one hurts less.

Those are answers.

So when you feel those things after a relationship, *does it really matter if your ex was a psychopath, a sociopath, a narcissist, or a garden-variety jerk?* The label doesn’t make your feelings any more or less valid. Your feelings are absolutes. They will endure, no matter which word you settle upon.

& here’s what you know from those feelings: someone uprooted your life, introducing a new kind of anxiety that you’ve never felt before. They’ve introduced you to a whole range of horrible emotions that make each day seem unbearable. During the relationship, you may have felt constantly on edge & unhinged, worried that any mistake could mark the end of your dream. Maybe you found yourself desperately comparing yourself to other people, trying to win back your rightful place by your partner’s side.

So I ask you again, *does it matter if they are a psychopath by definition?*

You already have everything you need to know – from your own feelings. You felt horrible around them, right? So during the relationship, why wasn’t that enough to confirm that they should have no place in your life?

Because you were groomed & idealized. You were tricked into falling in love – the strongest of all human bonds – so that your feelings could be more easily manipulated.

Toxic people condition us to ignore our intuition, & we must learn to trust it again. Instead of judging outwardly, we need to perceive inwardly. When we start focusing on our own feelings, this is where the heading begins. & if you are anything like me, we can agree on this simple truth: good people make you feel good & bad people make you feel bad.

Everything else falls into place from there.

Don’t listen to the folks who say your feelings should be totally independent of the world around you. If you’ve got an open heart, that’s impossible. As human beings, we have this incredible gift – the ability to make another person feel wonderful. With a word, a gesture, or a quiet smile. It’s what makes the world beautiful. Some people would call this love.

But you experienced an abuser, someone who manipulated this gift in order to cause pain. & now you want to know how to avoid people like this so it’ll never happen again. You’re worried that you’ve become hypervigilant – untrusting of everyone & everything around you. You feel that you need a little something extra. Something beyond your intuition.

So this is where I’d like to introduce the idea of a Constant. Your Constant will comfort & protect you throughout this book, & for the rest of your life.

Think of someone you love. Someone who consistently inspires & never disappoints. It could be anyone – your mom, a close friend, your children, your cat, a deceased relative. Really, anyone. You might feel that you have no Constant. Of course you do; you can even dream one up. Imagine a higher power in your mind – one that brings peace to your heart. Colorful, glowing, & full of life. Embodying all of the qualities you admire most: empathy, compassion, kindness. A gentle spirit who will always keep you safe. & voilà, you have a Constant.

So now that you’ve got a Constant in mind (tangible or imagined), I have some questions. Does your Constant make you feel unhinged? Anxious? Jealous? Does your heart rise up into your throat when they speak to you? When you’re away from your Constant, do you spend hours analyzing their behavior & defending yourself from hypothetical arguments?

Of course not.

So why is that? Why can one dismissive person make you doubt everything good going on in your life? What’s the difference between your Constant & the people who make you feel like garbage?

If you can’t answer these questions quite yet, you’re not alone. & that’s the beauty of it all. You do not need to understand why you don’t like being around a person. You have a Constant, & that’s all you need to know for now. Self-respect comes later.

Your Constant is a private reminder that you are not crazy, even when it feels like you’re taking on the entire world. With time, you will begin to filter out the people who make you feel bad. You realize that you do not need to put up with negativity when there is a Constant who brings out the best in you.

Once you become more comfortable with the idea, you’ll be ready to ask the most important question of all: Shouldn’t I feel this same kind of peace with everyone in my life?

Absolutely. So let’s get started.” – [Mac15, pp. 19–22]

3 The Manufactured Soul Mate

“Perhaps most insidious of all the psychopath’s evils: their relationship cycle, during which they gleefully & systematically wipe out the identity of an unsuspecting victim. Cold & calculated emotional rape.” – [Mac15, p. 23]

3.1 Personalized Grooming

“The psychopath trains you to become the perfect partner. In a matter of weeks, they take over your entire life, consuming your mind & body with unrivaled pleasure. Ultimately, you are to become their newest source of endless adoration & praise – but 1st, you must fall in love. Then your heart will be open to their every suggestion. There are 3 key components to this process: idealization, indirect persuasion, & testing the waters.” – [Mac15, p. 24]

3.1.1 Idealization

“The idealization phase in a psychopathic relationship will be unlike anything you’ve ever experienced. You will be swept off your feet, lost in a passionate fantasy with someone who excites you on every level: emotionally, spiritually, & sexually. They will be the 1st thing on your mind when you wake up in the morning, waiting for their cheerful, funny texts to start your day. You will quickly find yourself planning a future with them – forgetting about the dull realities of life. None of that matters anymore. They’re the person you want to spend the rest of your life with.

While all of this is going on in your heart, their thoughts are occupied by something else entirely: “Good. It’s working.”

Psychopaths never truly feel the things they display. They’re observing you, mirroring your every emotion, & pretending to ride this high with you.

Because the higher you rise, the lower you’ll fall.

Idealization is the 1st step in the psychopath’s grooming process. Also known as *love-bombing*, it quickly breaks down your guard, unlocks your heart, & modifies your brain chemicals to become addicted to the pleasure centers firing away. The excessive flattery & compliments play on your deepest vanities & insecurities – qualities you likely don’t even know you possess.

They will feed you constant praise & attention through your phone, Facebook Timeline, & email inbox. Within a matter of weeks, the 2 of you will have your own set of inside jokes, pet names, & cute songs. Looking back, you’ll see how insane the whole thing was. But when you’re in the middle of it, you can’t even imagine life without them.

So how did they do it?

Aside from gifts & poems, the psychopath uses a variety of brainwashing techniques to win you over. They will emphasize 6 major points during the idealize process:

1. We have So Much in Common. *We see the world the same way. We have the same sense of humor. We’re both so empathetic, constantly helping out our friends & family members. We are perfect for each other.*

The psychopath repeatedly drills these points home, oftentimes even going so far as to say: “We’re practically the same person.” During the grooming phase, psychopaths observe & mimic. They steal qualities from their victims, & almost seem to become a “better” version of their target’s personality – co-opting of all of the cheerful positives, without any of the burdensome emotions that come along with them. But this is all an act. These amplified, mirrored qualities are nothing more than a facade. Psychopaths don’t truly feel or understand any of the things they imitate. They are able to offer a superficial & flattering copy of their victim’s personality. Nothing more. None of the depth, compassion, & empathy that come along with being human. Like everything else they have to offer, their copycat personalities are hollow & empty.

The psychopath will spend most of the idealization phase listening to you & excitingly responding that he or she feels the same way as you do. You will eventually come to think that they're the only person you'll ever meet who's so similar to you. & you're right. Because it is flat-out impossible (& creepy) for 2 people to be identical in every way.

Normal people have differences. It's what makes life interesting. But psychopaths can skip this complication because they don't have an identity. They do not have a sense of self. They don't have life experiences that shape their needs, insecurities, & fantasies. Instead, they steal yours. Like a chameleon, they will mimic every part of your personality to become your perfect match.

2. We Have the Same Hopes & Dreams. The psychopath will consume your present life, but they will also take over your future. In order to raise the stakes in the relationship, they will make many long-term promises. This ensures that you are highly invested in the relationship. *After all, who wants to stick around for a romance that has no future?*

The psychopath takes this a step further, quickly discussing major life events like marriage & moving in together. These are decisions that typically take years to arrive in a healthy relationship. But you don't need all that time. You already know you'll be spending the rest of your life with them. If you've always dreamed of a family & kids, they will fit that role perfectly. If you want to start a business, they will be your right-hand man or woman. If you're in an unhappy marriage, they will have a plan ready to replace your spouse. (What you might not notice until later is that these plans always seem to involve some sort of sacrifice on your end – never theirs.)

3. We Share the Same Insecurities. The psychopath will never actually mention your vulnerabilities, but they can sniff them out in a second. Then they will mirror your insecurities to drive up your sympathy – so that you attempt to heal their problems with the same care you might hope to receive yourself.

As an empathetic person, you are naturally drawn to offer comfort to people who are hurting or vulnerable. This inclination to comfort increases when you also recognize someone else's insecurities as your own. You see someone feeling inferior, & you believe that you know how to make them feel better.

The psychopath seems to genuinely adore all of your efforts. They compare you to their exes, idealizing you above everyone else. They praise your caring nature, which makes you want to do more for them. You feel that all of your efforts are appreciated, & you want to do even more to prove how much you care. You see their insecurities & perceive them as genuine, open, vulnerable, & sympathetic – someone you want to help. Psychopaths see insecurities in a very different way – as a tool for manipulation & control.

4. You Are Beautiful. The psychopath is obsessed with the way you look. You will never meet another human being who comments so frequently on your clothes, your hair, your skin, your pictures, or whatever other superficial quality they choose to focus on that day. At 1st, these words feel like compliments. They can't believe how beautiful you are – they don't even feel worthy of being your partner. They say they walk around the park & can't find a person more attractive than you (how this is a compliment, I'm not quite sure).

Going along with the idea of insecurities, you begin to return all of this flattery. You want to make sure they feel adequate – that they understood how attractive you think they are. & that's what they're aiming for. By showering you with compliments, they know they can expect the adoration to rebound shortly. Suddenly they become very comfortable sharing photos of themselves with you. Your relationship becomes an unending exchange of praise & approval.

You begin to place your self-esteem in their words, because they are so reliably positive. You can actually feel yourself glowing. Your body goes through changes as your confidence rises with their every word. You spend more & more time improving your appearance to keep them impressed.

5. I've Never Felt This Way in My Life. This is where the comparisons begin. They hold you in high regard, far above all of their other relationships. They explain – in detail – every 1 of the reasons you are better than their exes. They can't remember the last time they've been this happy.

You will constantly hear sweeping declarations like “I can't believe how lucky I am.” Statements like these play on your innate desire to make others happy. They convince you that you're providing them with a special sort of joy, something that they cannot find in anyone else. This becomes a point of pride for you – knowing that you are the one they want, despite all of their other admirers.

The psychopath will refer to you as “perfect” & “flawless,” which becomes an overwhelming source of cognitive dissonance when the words inevitably change to “crazy” & “jealous.” As you work through these memories, remember that their compliments were always shallow & calculated. They use these tactics with everyone. For each target, the idealization phase will be different. However, 1 thing remains true throughout each relationship: they really have “never felt this way” in their life. Psychopaths do not actually feel the love & happiness that they so frequently proclaim. They oscillate between contempt, envy, & boredom. Nothing more.

6. We Are Soul Mates. Psychopaths love the idea of soul mates. It implies something different from love. It implies that there are higher powers at work. That you are meant to be together. It means that they consume your entire being – mind & body. It creates a psychic bond that lasts long after the relationship has ended.

Perhaps there is a small part in all of us that longs for a soul mate – the perfect person to complete our lives, someone with whom we can share everything, a lover & a best friend.

& there is nothing wrong with this. I cannot stress the point enough. Psychopaths will manipulate your dreams & fantasies, but that does not invalidate your dreams & fantasies & make them weaknesses.

After being discarded by a psychopath, many survivors denounce everything about their past life, raising a permanent guard to protect themselves from more abuse. Please don't do this.

If you believe in soul mates, you will find a real one. You will meet a man or woman who is full of gentle compassion & kindness. You will never question your heart because of them. Your love will blossom on its own, without all of the manufactured intensity. The psychopath was not your soul mate, & they never will be. To be your soul mate, they would – of course – need to have a soul.

After reading the above list, you may feel angry with yourself for falling for this duplicity. “How could I be so stupid?” you might ask. But please, don't beat yourself up. You weren't targeted because you were stupid. On the contrary, you were chosen because of so many good qualities you possess. A psychopath's perfect target is idealistic, forgiving, generous, & romantic. Most targets are very selective about their partners, often feeling lonely & frustrated by the dating scene. So when the psychopath comes along to mirror all of your greatest fantasies, you pour your entire heart & soul into the relationship. You'll invest everything you can – emotionally, financially, & physically. You quickly feel comfortable opening up because the psychopath grooms you to believe you've found “the one.” This forms an immediate bond of trust & familiarity.

However, when the psychopath begins the devaluing process, you'll attempt to absorb all of the blame in the relationship, in order to restore the perfect memory you had of the person who once claimed to be your soul mate. This is why psychopathy awareness is so important. Without the missing puzzle piece, it is only logical to assume that this “soul mate” existed at some point, & might return again with enough love & care. But once we understand psychology, we come to realize that this person never existed at all. It was a mirror image – a carbon copy – of everything we wanted in a partner. When psychopaths lose this element of surprise, their pool of victims diminishes significantly.” – [Mac15, pp. 24–29]

3.1.2 Indirect Persuasion

“After they've idealized you, they're ready to begin conditioning your behavior. Using indirect persuasion, psychopaths are able to make subtle suggestions that will ultimately be accepted by their victims. They maintain an illusion of innocence, since most people won't believe “they made me feel these things.”

1 method they use involves the way they offer compliments. They will insult their exes as a way to flatter their target, but what they are really doing is grooming their target. E.g., by saying “my ex always used to do this, but you never do that,” they are *telling* you to behave a certain way. This is not a compliment – it's a warning that if you repeat any of the ex's alleged behavior, you'll be discarded as well. The ex likely didn't even do any of these things. It's just a way for the psychopath to indirectly tell you how they expect you to behave. Here are some of the most common examples: “My ex & I always fought. We never fight.” “My ex always needed to talk on the phone. You're not needy or demanding.” “My ex would always nag me about getting a job. You're so much more understanding.”

Let me say it again: These are not compliments. They are expectations. The psychopath has come up with a checklist of human traits & emotions that bother them, & now they're planting the idea in your mind: don't express these things, or else.

Now, when you fight, you will try to end it as quickly & pleasantly as possible so you're not like their ex. When you haven't heard from them in 3 days, you won't call because you don't want to be like their ex. When they're sitting on their rear end, unemployed for 6 months, you won't say anything because you don't want to be like their ex.

Any deviation from this plan, & you will receive the silent treatment or a sharp comment about your changed behavior – a reminder that the idealization could end at any time.

This is why most survivors feel so much anger after the abuse has ended. You've been shoving aside your own intuition & needs in order to be “nice.” You think you've been giving them some sort of special treatment that no one else can provide. & then suddenly they go running back to the very same people they used to complain about. Meanwhile, you've been repressing the urge to tell them to get a job, or call more often, or just be a good partner. You pushed all of that away because you thought it was the only way to stay with them, to stay on their good side.

Just remember, normal, empathetic people do not make such comparisons about the people they love. & they certainly don't keep a tally for everyone involved to see publicly. When you're truly in love, you don't need to convince yourself & others that this experience is better than all of your past experiences. Likewise, if you're falling out of love, you don't need to convince yourself & others that this experience is worse than all of your past experiences.

But psychopaths do this. Every single time. Because it's a strategically ambiguous way to influence your behavior.” – [Mac15, pp. 30–31]

3.1.3 No Support

“Psychopaths provide shallow praise & flattery only in order to gain trust. When you actually need emotional support, they will typically offer an empty response – or they will completely ignore you. With time, this conditions you not to bother them with your feelings, even when you need a partner the most, especially during times of tragedy or illness. You will begin to notice that you are never allowed to express anything but positive praise for them. & even then, they will become bored soon enough & move on to the next target. Unable to empathize with pain & suffering, psychopaths cannot provide compassion during difficult times. This is why their “support” will always feel hollow & mechanical at best.” – [Mac15, p. 31]

3.1.4 The “Crazy” Ex

“Psychopaths talk about their exes a lot – more than any healthy individual with a new romantic partner should. After 1st making you feel like the only person in the world, they quickly try to evoke your pity by sharing stories about their nasty ex who’s so very jealous of you & your passionate new relationship. Because these stories are completely invented, they can & absolutely will change on a whim. 1 day their ex is bipolar, the next day they’re great friends, & then finally the ex is crazy & hysterical. & before long, you will become the “crazy ex” used to lure in a new victim.

But what do all of these labels really mean? What purpose do they serve?” – [Mac15, p. 32]

3.1.5 “My Ex Is Bipolar”

“Name-calling someone “bipolar” is like name-calling someone “diabetic.” Bipolar disorder is a crippling illness with a specific set of symptoms that are a bit more complicated than “mood swings that I happen to dislike.” Also called manic-depressive illness, it is characterized by unusual mood shifts, with reoccurring episodes of mania & depression. While bipolar disorder is real, how likely is it that their ex was bipolar? More likely, it is an insult they throw around to evoke your sympathy. It shouldn’t be surprising, then, that when your relationship ends you’ll likely carry this label as well.

If you suddenly became “bipolar” after a relationship with someone, & you’ve never been bipolar before, then you might want to think twice before accepting the diagnosis – especially if that diagnosis came from your ex.

The thing about “bipolar” is that it’s actually a perfect label for the psychopath’s ideal victim. If you’re naturally cheerful & optimistic, these traits become your “mania.” Then your valid reactions to your partner’s abuse become the “depression.” During the idealization phase, when the psychopath was charming & mirroring your entire personality, you were walking on sunshine. Life was amazing. But when they began criticizing you & cheating on you, so you became upset & cried. They gave you the silent treatment, all the while dangling new & former loves in your face. Did this upset you? Excellent. Voilà, you’re bipolar!

It horrifies me to think about the number of victims who falsely diagnose themselves based on volatile emotions that were intentionally provoked by someone else. Most survivors find that it takes 1–2 years for their moods to fully restabilize. Until that point, please be very reserved about deciding what’s wrong with you.

Note: Millions of adults truly do suffer from bipolar disorder. If you’re genuinely concerned about your mental health, please seek the opinion of a professional, not an ex-partner whose behavior drove you to a book called *Psychopath Free*.” – [Mac15, p. 32]

3.1.6 “My Ex Is Crazy & Hysterical”

“& it’s definitely not worth thinking about how they came to be that way, right?

Seriously, though, let’s think about it. This insult implies 1 of 2 things:

- **Their ex was always crazy & hysterical, & for some reason, they still decided to date that person.** Seems unhealthy, no?
- **Something changed during the relationship to make the ex that way.** What exactly could it be? Did they just snap 1 day, for absolutely no reason at all? Or did it maybe have something to do with the constant triangulation, lying, manipulating, & criticizing? If someone tells you how “crazy” their ex is, you should take a step back & *really* rethink that one.

This characterization serves another purpose; it informs you about what is considered “acceptable” behavior. “Crazy” & “hysterical” are words of invalidation, minimization, & dismissal. They imply that the reactions this person displayed were over-the-top. You will be wary of acting this way, too. This strategy encourages you to stop reacting, & thereby to stop standing up for yourself. By making you question your own sanity, the psychopath is able to take the spotlight away from their own abusive behavior.” – [Mac15, p. 33]

3.1.7 “My Ex Is Bitter”

“What the heck? Seriously, what does this even mean? It’s like punching someone in the face & then saying “you’re bitter.” Well, yeah, that person is bitter because you punched them in the face. Does saying “you’re bitter” somehow make the bitterness inappropriate?

Again, it’s about minimization & dismissal. After their abusive behavior, lying, & mind games, the psychopath expects their victim to simply shut up or grovel. That’s it. Any signs of anger or disbelief are equated with bitterness. The psychopath will then commiserate with their new partner about their ex being childish & holding grudges, neglecting to mention all of the details that suggest why that person might be bitter in the 1st place.” – [Mac15, p. 34]

3.1.8 “My Ex Is Jealous of Us & Still in Love with Me”

“1st of all, who brags about something like this? It’s so off-putting, & even if it’s true, this sort of pigheaded arrogance should be avoided in any sort of romantic endeavor.

Digging deeper, we should also examine *why* this person is jealous & still in love with them. Psychopaths typically flaunt their new victims for the whole world to see mere days after their previous relationship ended. You know what that does? Gasp, it creates jealousy.

Psychopaths manufacture toxic, desperate love. & the thing about this sort of idealized & then devalued passion is that it's long-lasting & obsessive. Psychopaths groom others to spend every waking moment thinking about them, & then they tear it all away without a moment's notice. Because psychopaths are eternally bored & incapable of human bonding, this transition is quite easy for them. But to a normal, healthy individual it's devastating. You send desperate texts in an attempt to fix everything, unaware that they're using these frantic communications as "proof" of your insanity to garner sympathy from their next victim. It leaves you with a broken heart, crippling insecurities, a need to defend yourself, feelings of inferiority, & a million unanswered questions. This is why it takes so long to get over a psychopath.

These claims of jealousy also serve to make their new target feel special – as if they are the chosen one among the psychopath's many admirers. The psychopath will gladly string obedient exes along to make themselves seem in high demand at all times.” – [Mac15, p. 34]

3.1.9 “But My Ex Really Was Awful!”

“Everyone has horror stories about their exes. That's perfectly normal. What's not normal is when an ex's name comes up so frequently in a new relationship that you begin to feel like they're actually a part of your relationship. It's also not normal to trash an ex & then hang out with them on a daily basis. Trust your intuition, & remember that psychopaths always use exes as tools for manipulation & persuasion.

The bottom line is this: anyone who speaks so regularly & so negatively about their ex is – at best – not at all ready for a romantic relationship. But at worst, this person is manipulating your every thought, pitting you against people you've never even met. & you can be assured that they'll soon be speaking the exact same way about you to every other pawn in their never-ending game of chess.” – [Mac15, p. 35]

3.1.10 Testing the Waters

“Once they have you programmed, psychopaths will begin experimenting with their newfound control to see how far they can push you. A useful victim will not talk back, & they certainly won't defend themselves if the situation calls for it. If the idealization phase worked as planned, you should be more invested in maintaining the passion than standing up for yourself.

During this period, you will see tiny glimpses of the psychopath's darker side. They may teasingly call you a “whore” in the bedroom to see how you react. If you're married to someone else, they might casually joke about your spouse's ignorance about the whole situation. They will begin making subtle digs about your intelligence, abilities, & dreams.

These are all tests, & unfortunately if you're reading this book, it means you passed them. If you react in a negative way, the psychopath will assure you that they were obviously joking. As they test the waters, you will begin to feel more & more oversensitive. You've always considered yourself to be an exceptionally easygoing person, but now you're questioning that. You stop mentioning your concerns, optimistically hoping to keep things perfect.

They use these subtle digs in combination with flattery, ensuring that the addictive brain chemicals continue to fire even when you're feeling upset. This trick slowly trains your mind to ignore your intuition, in favor of the high you feel when you're with them.

If you look back at the early stages of your relationship, you will likely remember small warning signs that you tried to ignore – signs that just didn't fit in with the whole “nice person” act. Maybe they bragged a little bit too much about how much their ex still wants them. Or perhaps they “forgot” to call when they promised they would, contacting you hours later than planned. They probably stopped paying for dates, letting you pick up the tab. So what do you do? You brushed it all aside. You forgave them quickly & moved forward because you were determined to be different – the partner who could keep them happy & absorb anything, no matter the cost.

& that's when the grooming is complete.” – [Mac15, pp. 35–36]

3.2 Identity Erosion

“The psychopath strips you of your dignity by taking back everything they once pretended to feel during the idealization period. They make a mockery of your dreams, subtly suggesting that you may not be the one for them after all – but nonetheless stringing you along for the added attention. After grooming you to be dependent & compliant, they use this power to manufacture desperation & desire. In a whirlwind of overwhelming emotions, your fantasy gradually shifts into an inconceivable nightmare.”

– [Mac15, p. 37]

3.2.1 Destroying Your Boundaries

“Emotional abusers condition their victims to feel ashamed, inadequate, & unstable. This is because they are cowards, incapable of healthy relationships with strong & self-respecting individuals. Oftentimes, they choose targets who are unusually successful & idealistic, because these people have more to lose. But abusers cannot control someone with such qualities, & so they break down the target's self-esteem through belittling, teasing, & manufactured jealousy. The target may have perfectionist tendencies, striving to meet the abuser's impossible standards. This results in a strange dynamic where the abuser is idealized, despite being lazy, dishonest, & unfaithful, while the victim is devalued, despite putting more effort into this relationship than ever before.

Like sandpaper, the psychopath will wear away at your self-esteem through a calculated “mean & sweet” cycle. Slowly, your standards will fall so low that you become grateful for utterly mediocre treatment. Like a frog in boiling water, you won't even realize what's happened until it's far too late. Your friends & family will wonder what happened to the man or woman who

used to be so strong & energetic. You will frantically excuse your partner's behavior, unable to acknowledge the painful truth behind your relationship: something has changed.

You spend hours waiting by the phone, hoping for that morning text message or a promised phone call. You cancel your plans for the day just to make sure you'll be available for them. You begin to initiate contact more often, brushing aside the nagging sensation that they don't want to talk with you – that they're simply “putting up” with you. You find yourself filling their Facebook wall with compliments & cute jokes, trying to reestablish the perfect dream from the beginning of your relationship. But their responses now feel hollow at best.

You invent romantic stories & exaggerate their positive aspects to anyone who will listen. By convincing others that they are a wonderful person, you can continue to live the lie yourself. Throughout the worst of the relationship, your friends & family will likely know them as the “perfect” partner you described. After the relationship ends, it will be confusing & awkward to explain what really happened. Your stories will seem implausible, & your friends will wonder why you didn't speak up sooner. They will not understand that you didn't even know you were in an abusive relationship.

While you're struggling with all of this unexpected anxiety, the psychopath is able to push your boundaries even further. You're in a vulnerable place now, because you're willing to put up with mostly anything – so long as they're paying attention to you.

Their opinions about your appearance become much more critical than before. Suddenly they begin to notice every little part of your body, commenting freely on your supposed inadequacies. You may even develop an eating disorder, failing to take care of yourself in an effort to keep them interested. Psychopaths are fascinated by body-image issues, & will reward your unhealthy habits with the occasional compliment to keep you striving for perfection. Since your self-worth is invested entirely in their oscillating opinions, your moods will become unstable & volatile.

They will also begin to humiliate you in front of friends – no longer limited to belittling you behind closed doors. But it will always be done under a guise of humorous intention. You will be hurt to see that others seem to take your partner's side & laugh, despite the way they're making you feel. A psychopath doesn't care when they take a joke too far, & they will dismiss any concerns you might have, accusing you of being hypersensitive. You begin to go along with it, playing the role of a crazy, unintelligent partner whose only purpose is to entertain your love. With time, you will come to believe this facade.

All the while, they will sprinkle intermittent reminders of the idealization phase. If you reach a breaking point, they will always be ready to swoop back in with promises of unlimited love & affection. Although they will never take the blame for their behavior, these superficial distractions will be enough to convince you that they're still the person you fell in love with. & nothing else matters.” – [Mac15, pp. 37–39]

3.2.2 Manufactured Emotions

“During a relationship with a psychopath, you are likely to experience a range of emotions that you've never felt before: extreme jealousy, neediness, rage, anxiety, & paranoia. After every outburst, you constantly think to yourself, “If only I hadn't behaved that way, then maybe they'd be happier with me.”

Think again.

Those were not your emotions. I repeat: those were not your emotions. They were carefully manufactured by the psychopath in order to make you question your own good nature. Victims are often prone to believe that they can understand, forgive, & absorb all of the problems in a relationship. Essentially, they checkmate themselves by constantly trying to rationalize the abuser's completely irrational behavior.” – [Mac15, p. 39]

3.2.3 The Serial Provoker

“Serial provokers are experts at seeking out flexible, easygoing people. They exploit this quality by constantly provoking their target with covert jabs, minimization, veiled humor, & patronizing. The target will attempt to avoid conflict by remaining pleasant, choosing to forgive & excuse this behavior in favor of maintaining harmony. But the serial provoker will continue to aggravate the target until they finally snap. Once this occurs, the provoker will sit back, feign surprise, & marvel at how passive-aggressive, angry, & volatile the target is. The target will immediately feel bad, apologize, & absorb the blame. They are essentially shamed for rightfully losing their patience & behaving the way the serial provoker behaves every single day. The difference is, the target feels remorse – the serial provoker does not. The target is expected to remain calm & peaceful no matter what, while the serial provoker feels entitled to do whatever they please.

E.g., you probably didn't consider yourself to be a jealous person before you met the psychopath. You might have been taken pride in being remarkably relaxed & open-minded. The psychopath recognizes this & seeks to exploit it. During the grooming phase, they draw you in by flattering you about those traits – they just can't believe how perfect you are. The 2 of you never fight. There's never any drama. You're so easygoing compared to their crazy, evil ex.

But behind the scenes, something else is going on. Psychopaths become bored very easily, & the idealization is only fun until they have you hooked. Once that happens, these strengths of yours become vulnerabilities that they use against you. They begin to inject as much drama into the relationship as they possibly can, throwing you into impossible situations & then judging you for reacting to them.

Most people would agree that jealousy is toxic in a relationship. But there's a huge difference between true jealousy & the psychopath's manufactured jealousy.

Take the following 2 (exaggerated) conversations:

Case 1.

BOYFRIEND: Hey, my old high school friend is coming into town if you'd like to meet her.

GIRLFRIEND: No! Why do you need other female friends? You have me.

In this case, the girlfriend truly seems to have some jealousy issues that need to be addressed. Assuming the boyfriend hasn't abused her in the past, this is an inappropriate display of jealousy.

Case 2.

BOYFRIEND: My ex is coming into town. You know, the crazy abusive one who's still completely obsessed with me.

GIRLFRIEND: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that!

BOYFRIEND: We're probably going to meet up later for drinks. She always hits on me when she drinks.

GIRLFRIEND: I'm confused. Could we talk about this in person/

BOYFRIEND: You have a problem with it?

GIRLFRIEND: Nope! No problem. I guess I was just a little confused since you said she abused you. But I hope things go well! It's nice when exes are able to be friends.

BOYFRIEND: Wow, you're so jealous sometimes.

GIRLFRIEND: I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be jealous. I was just confused at 1st.

BOYFRIEND: Your jealousy is ruining our relationship & creating so much unnecessary drama.

GIRLFRIEND: I'm sorry! We don't have to talk about it in person. I really didn't mean to come across that way.

BOYFRIEND: It's fine, I forgive you. We'll just have to work through your jealousy issues.

In this case, the psychopath did 3 things:

- Put his girlfriend in an impossible situation that would make any human being jealous, especially after talking about how much his ex loves him.
- Accused her of being jealous, even though she tried to respond reasonably.
- Played "good cop" by offering to forgive her for a problem that he created in the 1st place. This places him in his favorite role of teacher vs. student.

The longer this abuse occurs, the more she'll begin to wonder if she actually has a jealousy problem.

& it's not just limited to jealousy. Perhaps you began to feel needy & clingy during the relationship with the psychopath. Again, it's all manufactured. Who was the one responsible for initiating constant conversation & attention in the 1st place? It was them. Once they're bored, they will start to lash out at you for trying to continue practices that they initiated.

Again, most people would agree that neediness is toxic in a relationship. But there's a huge difference between true neediness & the psychopath's manufactured neediness.

Case 1.

BOYFRIEND: Hey, I won't be around tonight because my grandmother wants to get dinner. Sorry!

GIRLFRIEND: Oh my God, I haven't seen you in 3 hours. This is getting ridiculous. You better text me the entire time.

In this case, the boyfriend truly seems to have some neediness issues that need to be addressed. Assuming the girlfriend hasn't abused him in the past, this is an inappropriate display of neediness.

Case 2.

BOYFRIEND: Hi, I haven't heard from you in 3 days. Just want to make sure you're doing okay.

GIRLFRIEND: God, I have a life outside of you, you know.

BOYFRIEND: I know, I was just sort of confused because I'm used to hearing from you each morning.

GIRLFRIEND: You're so needy. I have important things to do & I can't just drop everything to text you.

BOYFRIEND: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound needy. It was the 1st text I've sent in 3 days.

GIRLFRIEND: I can't deal with this. I've never met someone so needy in my life.

BOYFRIEND: I'm really sorry! I won't bother you again.

GIRLFRIEND: It's fine. I forgive you. We'll just have to work through your neediness issues.

Once again, the psychopath did 3 things:

- Put her boyfriend in an impossible situation that would make any human being needy, especially after the constant attention in the idealization phase.
- Accused him of being needy, even though he tried to respond reasonably.
- Played "good cop" by offering to forgive him for a problem that she created in the 1st place. This places her in her favorite role of teacher vs. student.

The longer this abuse occurs, the more he'll begin to wonder if he's actually a needy person.

I could go on like this for paranoia, anger, hysteria – & every other nasty emotion you may have felt in your toxic relationship. When you're in the grip of these emotions, it is natural to wonder what's wrong with you. You might even think you're going crazy. Well, psychopaths want you to believe you're crazy because it makes you seem more unstable to the rest of the world. But you'll find that once they're gone from your life, everything starts to make sense again. If you went from normal to "crazy" to normal again, that's not crazy. That's someone provoking you.

You must understand that in loving, healthy relationships, no one would ever put you in these situations in the 1st place. Your boundaries were put to the test, & you did the absolute best you could, given the circumstances. In the future, you should never allow someone to tell you who you are or how you feel." – [Mac15, pp. 40–43]

3.2.4 Word Salad

"When they're feeling threatened or bored, the psychopath will often use what's called *word salad* in an attempt to keep your mind occupied. Basically, it's a conversation from hell. They aren't actually saying anything at all; they're just talking at you. Before you can even respond to 1 outrageous statement, they're already on to the next. You'll be left with your head spinning. Study the warning signs, & disengage before any damage can be done:

1. Circular Conversations. You'll think you worked something out, only to begin discussing it again in 2 minutes. & it's as if you never even said a word the 1st time around. They'll begin reciting all of the same tired garbage, ignoring any legitimate arguments you may have provided moments ago. If something is going to be resolved, it will be on their terms. With psychopaths, the same issues will come up over & over again: *Why are they so friendly with their ex again? Why are they suddenly not paying any attention to you? Why do they sound so eager to get off the phone?* & every time you bring up these issues, it's as if you never even had the argument in the past. You get sucked back in, only to feel crazy & high maintenance when they decide, "I'm sick of always arguing about this." It's a merry-go-round.

2. Bringing Up Your Past Wrongdoings & Ignoring Their Own. If you point out something nasty they're doing – like ignoring you or cheating – they'll mention something totally unrelated from the past that you've done wrong. Did you used to drink too much? Well then, their cheating isn't really all that bad compared to your drinking problem. Were you late to your 1st date 2 years ago? Well the, you can't complain about them ignoring you for 3 days straight. & God forbid you bring up any of their wrongdoings. Then you are a bitter lunatic with a list of grievances.

3. Condescending & Patronizing Tone. Throughout the entire conversation they will have this calm, cool demeanor. It's almost as if they're mocking you, gauging your reactions to see how much further they can push. When you finally react emotionally, that's when they'll tell you to calm down, raise their eyebrows, smirk, or feign disappointment. The whole point of word salad is to make you unhinged, & thereby give them the upper hand. Because remember, conversations are competitions – just like anything else with a psychopath.

4. Accusing You of Doing Things That They Themselves Are Doing. In heated arguments, psychopaths have no shame. They will begin labeling you with their own horrible qualities. It goes beyond projection, because most people project unknowingly. Psychopaths know they are smearing you with their own flaws, & they are seeking a reaction. *After all, how can you not react to such blatant hypocrisy?*

Multiple Personas. Through the course of a word-salad conversation, you're likely to experience a variety of their personalities. It's sort of like good cop, bad cop, demented cop, stalker cop, scary cop, baby cop. If you're pulling away, sick of their abuse & lies, they will evoke a glimpse of the idealization phase. A little torture to lure you back in with empty promises. If that doesn't work, suddenly they'll start insulting the things they once idealized. You'll be left wondering who you're even talking to, because their personas are imploding as they struggle to regain control. Our beloved administrator, Victoria, summed this up perfectly: "The devil itself was unleashed in a desperate fit of fury after being recognized: twisting, turning, writhing, spewing, flattering, sparkling, vomiting."

6. The Eternal Victim. Somehow, their cheating & lying will always lead back to a conversation about their abusive past or a crazy ex. You will end up feeling bad for them, even when they've done something horribly wrong. You will use it as an opportunity to bond with them over their supposed complex feelings. & once they've successfully diverted your attention, everything will go back to the way it was. No bonding or deep spiritual connection whatsoever. Psychopaths cry "abuse" – but in the end, you are the only one being abused.

7. You Begin Explaining Basic Human Emotions. You find yourself explaining things like "empathy" & "feelings" & "being nice." Normal adults do not need to be taught the golden rules from kindergarten. You are not the 1st person who has attempted to see the good in them, & you will not be the last. You think to yourself, "If they can just understand why I'm hurt, then they'll stop doing it." But they won't. They wouldn't have hurt you in the 1st place if they were a decent human being. The worst part is, they pretended to be decent when you 1st met – sucking you in with this sweet, caring persona. They know how to be kind & good, but they find it boring.

8. Excuses. Everyone messes up every now & then, but the psychopath recites excuses more often than they actually follow through with promises. Their actions never match up with their words. You are disappointed so frequently that you feel relieved when they do something halfway decent – they condition you to become grateful for mediocre treatment.

9. “What in the World Just Happened?”. These conversations leave you drained. You will be left with an actual headache. You will spend hours, even days, obsessing over the argument. You’ll feel as if you exhausted all of your emotional energy to accomplish absolutely nothing. You will have a million preplanned arguments in your head, ready to respond to all the unaddressed points that you couldn’t keep up with. You will feel the need to defend yourself. You’ll try to come up with a diplomatic solution that evenly distributes the blame, & therefore gives you both a chance to apologize & make up. But in the end, you’ll find that you’re the only one apologizing.” – [Mac15, pp. 43–46]

3.2.5 Gaslighting & Projection

“Gaslighting is when the psychopath intentionally distorts reality – often with trivial lies & wrongdoings – to bring about a reaction & then deny that it ever took place. Like most victims, you are probably exceptionally easygoing & will hold off on reacting for as long as possible. But inevitably, you’re going to feel frustrated enough to finally speak up, & that’s when the psychopath will either rewrite history or reject that the incident ever even occurred. You may start to doubt your own sanity as the psychopath slowly erodes your grasp on reality.” – [Mac15, p. 46]

3.2.6 Enemy Number 1

“Psychopaths carefully select targets & copy their personalities in order to create an immediate bond of trust & familiarity. But because they are only acting, they cannot play the role perfectly forever. So inevitably, their targets begin to notice small cracks in the mask – uncanny, inexplicable moments that simply don’t seem to match up with the person they’re pretending to be. Any target who dares point out these inconsistencies instantly becomes enemy number 1. Instead of admitting fault & deceit, the psychopath will attempt to drive the target insane. Through mind games, triangulation, gaslighting, & silence, they innocently encourage the target to self-destruct. Most targets don’t even know they’re dealing with a pathological personality at the time. They might only have gently observed that “something feels different between us.” But to a psychopath, this is the greatest insult of all – a challenge to their credibility as a normal, healthy human being. & so they must smear the target as “crazy” before quickly moving along to another victim who will better appreciate their world of lies.

Gaslighting isn’t usually blatant abuse. It could be as simple as them saying they’re going to do 1 thing, & then doing something entirely different. E.g., they may tell you they’re on their way to the gym, but then they go to a restaurant with friends instead. *What’s the point of a lie like that?* Why not just tell you they’re going out to dinner?

Earlier on in the relationship, you might have innocently asked what happened to their gym plans & they would inevitably start to make up strange, pointless excuses. But as the abuse worsens, they’ll likely deny that they ever even said they were going to the gym. You’ll find yourself disagreeing with them & repeating the entire conversation, only to discover how petty you sound & how much you’re annoying your partner.

& that’s the thing about conversations that come from gaslighting: they *do* sound petty. Who wants to argue about gym plans turning into a dinner out on the town? *Who cares?* In any normal relationship, you wouldn’t even bat an eye. But with psychopaths, these needless lies happen on a regular basis, & you find that you’re always getting sucked into ridiculous, pointless conversations that make you seem like an obsessed detective.

Speaking of detectives, if you present evidence of the truth – like a text message or an email – the psychopath will punish you with the silent treatment & turn the entire conversation around on you for being paranoid & crazy. You slowly learn that you’re becoming a nuisance & that open communication is unofficially prohibited in your relationship.” – [Mac15, pp. 46–47]

3.2.7 The Black Hole

“Psychopaths always see themselves as victims, no matter how horribly they’ve treated someone else. Nothing is ever their fault – they’ve always been wronged in 1 way or another. To them, the problem is not their lying, cheating, stealing, & abuse. The problem is that you started to notice all of those things. *Why couldn’t you just remain happy with the idealization phase?* How dare you betray them by standing up for yourself? Encounters with these people are like drowning in a black hole, because no matter how much they hurt you, it’ll still be your fault.

Our invaluable administrator, Smitten Kitten, explains this mind-boggling process clearly & coherently:

“Psychopaths project & blame you for their own behavior. They accuse you of being negative when they are the most negative people in the world. They gaslight you into believing that your normal reactions to their abuse are the problem – not the abuse itself. When you feel angry & hurt because of their silent treatment, broken promises, lying, or cheating, there is something wrong with you. When you call them out on their dishonest behavior, you’re the abnormal one who is too sensitive, too critical, & always focusing on the negative.”

“This is all part of the brainwashing process. Acting inappropriately, unacceptably, downright abusively – & then trying to turn it around to make it your fault. They intentionally cause pain you don’t deserve, all the while denying they’ve done anything to begin with. & on top of that, they try to make it your fault – so that you blame yourself for something that supposedly didn’t even happen.”

“Yes, reread that. That’s how illogical it is.”

“It’s their parting ‘gift’ to dump all of the blame on you for the looming failure of the relationship. Problem is, it never had a chance to begin with.”

“If only you had maintained the glowing optimism & naïveté you felt during the love-bombing stage – throughout all of their subsequent lies & abuse. Then everything would have been fine. If only you hadn’t questioned the contradictions & lies you recalled from letters that they later denied sending. Yes, if only you had stayed compliant & quiet, in spite of the overwhelming evidence staring you in the face – evidence they planted, just to test you. Then it would all be fine.”

“But even then, they would become bored & disappointed that you hadn’t caught on or challenged them. So they’d invent something to accuse you of, in order to justify their abuse & create drama. No matter what you do, it’s always a lose-lose situation with a psychopath. They want you to believe you’re the loser when really, it’s them.” – [Mac15, p. 48]

3.2.8 Sexual Manipulation

“Sex with the psychopath seemed perfect at 1st. They knew exactly where to touch you, what to say, & when to do the right things. You were perfectly compatible in the bedroom, right?

Well, sort of.

Like everything else, the psychopath also mirrored your deepest sexual desires. That’s why it felt so incredibly passionate & flawless when you were together – & that’s why it feels like rape during the identity erosion. Because the psychopath does not, in fact, share your most intimate fantasies. Instead, they’ve been observing & tailoring their behavior to match yours. It’s shocking when you realize this, because you come to understand that they never felt the emotional & spiritual pleasure that you felt. While you were at your most vulnerable, they were simply watching & learning.

You find yourself in a desperate situation, needing their sexual approval & flattery to feel attractive. They use this to control you. They pull away in order to make you seem desperate, needy, & slutty. In the idealization phase, they couldn’t get enough of you. But once they have you hooked, they begin to play mind games. They withhold sex, redefining it as a privilege that they hold the key to.

When you’re lying next to them in bed, you can practically feel them waiting for you to make the next move. They’re ready to mock you – to make you feel unnatural & sex-crazed. They will laugh at you, insulting you with jokes that aren’t even remotely funny. The passionate sex you remember has been replaced by a game. A competition.

They will make you feel ugly by announcing that their sex drive is lower than ever – that they haven’t even had sexual thoughts in weeks. The implication is clear: they haven’t thought about you in weeks.

& then, when the triangulation begins, you find it impossible to believe that they could have such a great sex life with anyone else. How could they? You seemed like soul mates when you made love. They liked all of the same things as you. But remember, it was manufactured. If you loved something in the bedroom, the psychopath quickly picked up on that in the grooming phase. They’ll pick up on something else entirely for their next victim.

You unknowingly formed a bond with a con artist. Your consent was based on a lie. so many survivors blame themselves because they couldn’t get past the sexual addiction, keeping them bonded to their abuser. But it’s not your fault. You were tricked into feeling an overwhelmingly strong attachment during the grooming phase. & then they manipulated that – toying with the toxic addition firing through your body.

You will reclaim your sexual freedom – I promise. We have an open & honest dialogue about sex at PsychopathFree.com. It is a hugely important part of the psychopathic relationship cycle, & more importantly, it plays an essential role in your own healing process. Recovery is a joint effort of the mind & body.” – [Mac15, pp. 48–50]

3.2.9 The Transitional Target

“This section comes directly from a conversation I had with a dear friend, so it may feel a bit personal at times. I’ve done my best to edit it to apply to a broader audience. It’s a special note for anyone who felt unusually disposable compared to the psychopath’s other targets.

Psychopaths are always on the prowl for their next target but as the psychopath transitions from 1 “stable” relationship to the next, they need something (someone) to fill the void in between: a temporary target to dispose of as soon as they find something else. If you are selected as a transitional target, you may find your treatment a bit different from what I’ve already described. Although the psychopath likely doesn’t even have the next target scouted out yet, they already know they’re not staying with you so they want to move things along quickly. Because of this, you tend to get ripped out of the idealize phase much faster than most. Additionally, the idealize phase is lazy: no money, no actions, no special treatment. Just words. You were showered with a lot of words, which sucked you in, because you wanted to believe the words so badly. But, as you’re starting to see, their actions never match up with their words.

But to you, the relationship means everything – it’s attention & appreciation you’ve never experienced before. It appeals to your deepest dreams of making someone else happy, after all of their alleged pain & sadness. It seems like they know you so well. You finally found a soul mate after so much loneliness & frustration.

Unfortunately, none of this is true. To the psychopath, you are merely a diversion. Psychopaths are especially indifferent with transitional targets, not really caring 1 way or another – leaving you with the feeling that they’re being insensitive. You tend to fill in their abuse with your own love, in hopes that you can restore the brief idealize phase. Targets often experience cognitive dissonance, trying to project their own reasoning into an unreasonable person. But the psychopath’s behavior is neither accidental nor unintentional.

& then comes the most heartbreaking moment: they discard you & go running off with another person whom they suddenly seem ready to settle down with. They move in together, post pictures, pay for things, & live the life you always dreamed of.

It's the ultimate insult when you were not given any of that special treatment. Basically, as soon as they got their quick fix of power & control over you, they felt re-energized & ready to scout out their next great adventure.

Statistically, most victims in an abusive relationship with a psychopath return to their abusers 7 times before they finally realize the treatment is unacceptable & leave for good. Not so, for the transitional target. Here's how the 2 types of the relationships play out:

Typical relationship with a psychopath:

Idealize, devalue, idealize, devalue, idealize, devalue (repeat) → Finally a breaking point.

This is what transitional targets get:

Mediocre idealize phase with huge promises that make you feel amazing → Sudden discard out of nowhere.

This leaves the transitional target with zero closure because you can't even look back at the cycle of violence that exists for most people. Not that you would want to by any means, but you're basically just left in limbo after the abandonment, from such a ridiculous high to a devastating low, with no time or perspective to realize what just happened. It's emotional torture. You are left only with an intense love & a horrible discard.

Psychopaths use their mind games on every target – it's always the same. The difference is, transitional targets never experience that “full” idealize phase, with some time & stability for things to blow up. This is because the psychopath never intended for the transitional target to become a stable part of their life to begin with. You were perfect for what they wanted at the time: attention & admiration.

But they also recognized that you were emotionally intelligent & uniquely perceptive. The fact that you're reading this book is not some sort of accident – you're a truth seeker, determined to find out what just happened to you.

Psychopaths settle for targets who don't truly see their nasty behavior. If you're reading this now, that means the psychopath could never settle for you, because over the course of months, years, or decades, you saw through the facade. They need someone who won't catch on. Ever.

So yes, on 1 hand, the eventual long-term victim is useful, because they won't call out the psychopath's lying & cheating. But on the other hand, the psychopath silently resents these people for not seeing through their facade. Strange, right? They pretend to give off this perfect, happy image with their “settlement,” but they much prefer the thrill of someone more empathetic – someone who truly feels the torture of their mind games. But the psychopath can rarely have 1 of those people permanently, so instead he or she uses them during transition periods, like a quick high before the settlement. (Every once in a while, though, they will end up spending years with a highly empathetic person. I know several of those people from the forum. They are usually locked into a psychopathic relationship because they have children with the psychopath. These dynamics often seem to result in horrific discards.)

Many survivors tell stories of love-bombing that lacked the actual courtship seen with the psychopath's next target or previous ex. You never got to spend as much time with them as the others, right? Instead, you experienced a much shorter fling, cut off abruptly in the middle of the idealize phase with some unbelievably vicious identity erosion. & then suddenly they've settled down with another partner, leaving you wondering how they're able to spend years with that person, when they could barely handle a few months with you.

& that's the point – psychopaths typically can't last long with empathetic people (except for cases with children & long-term manipulation), because you tend to absorb their poison. Yes, they get the high of sweeping you off your feet & making you a perfect servant to their mind games. But the downside is, eventually you subconsciously spit that poison right back in their face. You don't want to ruin the idealize phase, but you find yourself unable to stop pointing out their lies & changed behavior.

Transitional targets & truth-seeking targets figured them out, all the way down to their nasty core. Psychopaths would never admit it, but they'll always have a bitter respect for people who can see them for what they really are. & at the same time, they'll also strongly resent those who can't – even though that's all they can get in the long run. This is why they always lose & reinvent the rules of the game, to convince themselves that their choice is correct.

But the fact is, psychopaths settle. They always do. & that's why they needed to destroy you before settling: to convince themselves that they're not losing anything special. So why not make you self-destruct – even hurt yourself? Perfect, the nagging doubts are finally gone.

& from your perspective, this is why you're left so resentful & angry. You did so much, encouraged by their fake appreciation that kept you going. *At the very least, why couldn't they be a jerk from the start so you'd know not to waste your time & emotions?* Instead, they used words & promises to brainwash you into giving, giving, & more giving. So when they not only don't appreciate it – but actually destroy you – you're left feeling broken & empty. & then you see them running off with someone else, paying for things, settling down a bit ... It makes you think “Hey, maybe they are capable of a relationship after all. Maybe the problem was me.”

No, the problem was not you. & it never will be.” – [Mac15, pp. 50–54]

3.2.10 Putting You on the Defensive

“If you're dealing with a psychopath, it's a given that they will make unfounded accusations about you at some point – especially if you're starting to put together the red flags in their behavior. These insults have a very specific purpose: to put you on the defensive.

Why?

It's actually a lot simpler than you might think. People who defend themselves seem guilty by default. Whether or not they're guilty doesn't matter. Once they start to defend themselves, opinions & assumptions are made. *Is it unfair?* You

bet. But it's how people often react. We've seen lives destroyed because of this phenomenon – a man falsely accused of rape will continue to be thought of as a rapist, even after he's been proven innocent. The truth doesn't matter. No one trusts him anymore.

So the psychopath says all sorts of ridiculous things, & you're suddenly defending yourself from accusations you've never dreamed of. *How could you not?* Your name is being smeared – if not to others, then to the partner who supposedly loves you. So you get caught up in trying to prove them wrong, & that's where the calculated self-destruction begins.

The psychopath can sit back, relax, & enjoy the show. They can calmly point to the hysterical victim & say, “Jeez, that poor, crazy person . . .” Essentially, they provoke your anger, & then calmly use it to prove their own point.

You may try to expose their lies: “They're the liar, here's the proof!” or “They cheated on me, here's the proof!” or “They've done the same thing with 10 other partners, here's the proof!” The problem is, nobody cares about the proof. They just see you desperately trying to defend yourself, & because you're defending yourself, you seem like the guilty one.

Here's the most important thing to remember: defending yourself will only make things worse. Sometimes less is more, & this is 1 of those times. You think you have a perfect response to their ridiculous defamation? Yes, the psychopath is counting on that. In fact, they've carefully crafted their insults to make sure of it. They attack the things you value most, because those are the things in life you will defend most passionately.

& make no mistake – it's intentional.

The easiest way for them to suck you in is to accuse you of doing things that they themselves did. It's almost too easy for you to point out the hypocrisy. & that's the point – yes, it's too easy. Because it's a trap. If you have a perfect retort to their garbage, there's a reason for that. Do not fall for it. They want you on the defensive, trying to prove yourself to everyone. Once you've taken the bait, their job is done.” – [Mac15, pp. 54–55]

3.2.11 Boredom

“When you're having a bad day, sometimes you just need to be on your own to recharge & figure things out. Maybe you like to use your alone time to create, write, cook, imagine, meditate, paint, or dream. Or maybe you're just looking to take a well-deserved nap. My point is, whether you're an introvert or extrovert, occasional quiet time seems to be a universal human need.

But this is not the case with psychopaths.

Alone time may be 1 of the few things that truly agitates these people, who are otherwise seamlessly cool & calm. Without a conscience, there's not very much to think about on their own. & without people spoonfeeding them adoration & attention, the boredom sets in quickly.

Psychopaths are always bored, & they constantly seek out stimuli to distract themselves from this nagging condition. They cannot tolerate being alone for any extended period of time. Healthy human beings learn to enjoy quiet time & introspection – this is how we discover some of the most important things about ourselves. Psychopaths, on the other hand, have nothing to discover. They spend their free time mirroring others & copying desirable traits. Empathy allows us to experience imagination & creativity, 2 of the most wonderful human qualities that psychopaths can only mimic.

In various forums devoted to self-proclaimed sociopaths, there are frequent discussions about how to cope with the overwhelming boredom that consumes their daily life. Not surprisingly, most of the answers have to do with sex, alcohol, drugs, & – of course – manipulating others.

Relationships provide the psychopath with the most stable & reliable form of boredom relief, because once they have you hooked, they can reach out to you at any time for compliments, attention, & praise. & once they have other targets readily available, they're safe to start emotionally abusing you, which is far more interesting than pretending to love you. Watching you scurry around like a rat in a maze provides them with an entertaining distraction from their otherwise insufferably boring life. The idealization phase is merely a by-product of this boredom – a necessary step in grooming you so that they can abuse you for as long as possible.

At times in the relationship, you may have felt exhausted because it seemed like you never had any alone time with your partner after the honeymoon period. It was always spending time with them & their friends, from 1 busy plan to the next. Psychopaths also have a tendency to behave like innocent children, surrounding themselves with maternal & paternal types who constantly want to be there for them, offering support & providing for them at every turn.

These people are all kept around to alleviate the psychopath's boredom. The more targets the better. At 1st, the psychopath might have complained about them to you. But after you're locked into the relationship, the psychopath will oscillate between choosing you & choosing others in order to keep everyone on their toes. No matter who they choose for the day, 1 thing is certain: they will not spend time on their own. It's far better to provoke hurt feelings in you & watch your reactions than to simply sit alone in their room for an hour.

Eventually, the most hurtful boredom comes when it seems that they have suddenly lost all interest in you. Everything you do seems to bore them. As you struggle to regain their attention, you find that the qualities they once admired in you have apparently become glaring faults. Nothing you do seems to bring back the intense focus they once aimed at you – the time when you were the *only* one who could cure all of that boredom.

Even after they begin treating you terribly, a part of you may wish that you could win back your place as “Boredom Relief #1.” This is completely normal, because once you realize that the idealization phase is gone forever, the next best option is to frantically ensure that you at least remain 1 of their many sources of entertainment.

Yes, this is how warped our standards become.” – [Mac15, pp. 55–57]

3.2.12 Covert Gossiping

“The psychopath claims to hate “drama,” but you will slowly come to find that there’s more drama surrounding their life than anyone you’ve ever known. Of course, according to them, none of this is actually their fault. People just love them too much, treat them badly, & always seem to go crazy around them. How unfair for them.

But, as we’re beginning to discover, that’s not really the case.

The psychopath is constantly provoking drama, rivalries, & competitions. What separates them from everyday drama queens is their ability to appear innocent in all of it. They make subtle suggestions, then sit back & watch as others go down in flames for them. This is where the “covert” part comes into play.

They plant little seeds of poison, whispering to everyone, idealizing them to their face, & then insulting them behind their backs. “Insulting” doesn’t really even capture the subtlety of a psychopath’s gossip. Instead of overtly trashing people, psychopaths paint themselves as victims. Someone is always wronging them in 1 way or another. So instead of being a backstabbing gossip, they come across as a sympathetic victim of everyone else’s bad behavior. At some point, you might have even felt special being the one they chose to complain to (again, that’s how screwed up our standards become).

But then you end up on the receiving end of it.

Suddenly *you’re* the villain – the one causing them all this pain & torment. This process begins in earnest once the relationship starts to unravel. They begin running back to the very same people they once complained about to you, using them to lament about how crazy you’ve become. This generates a lot of sympathy, which is the perfect way to transition to their next target without anyone judging their blatant infidelity.

During the relationship, you probably found yourself disliking & resenting people you’d never even met. Could that have anything to do with the psychopath’s constant suggestions that these people were all in love with them, wanted them, abused them, or were jealous of you? Over time, this builds up so much negativity & envy – more than you’d experience in any healthy relationship. & the sad part is, this same negativity is also felt toward *you* by everyone else.” – [Mac15, pp. 57–58]

3.2.13 The Manipulator Test

“If you’re looking for a way to discern manipulators from empathetic people, pay attention to the way they speak about others in relation to you. Kind, decent people will go out of their way to make sure you know their friends & family members really like you. Manipulators, on the other hand, will always seek to triangulate. They provoke rivalries & jealousy by manufacturing competitions. They whisper in your ear that their friend, an ex, or a family member is very jealous of you – or maybe that they said something nasty about you. Make no mistake, they’re whispering the exact same things about you to those very same people. So ask yourself, does this person create harmony, or do they engineer chaos?

Sure, friends & exes might smile to your face, just like you smile to theirs. But deep down, everyone under the psychopath’s spell is harboring this growing resentment toward one another. & it’s not for any legitimate reason – it’s because you’ve been turned against each other. You’re all just movable pawns in the game the psychopath plays for attention & drama. They keep each target far enough apart that you can’t compare notes, but close enough that you’re always on edge & unsure of where you stand.

As impossible as it might seem while you’re still involved with a psychopath, all of these people are probably perfectly nice human beings. Like you, they’ve just been poisoned & brainwashed to believe the worst about everyone else. Most empathetic partners are excited to befriend their partner’s friends & make a positive impression. This was probably true at the beginning of the relationship, but as the triangulation & gossip worsened, you started to experience more & more negative emotions. & perhaps you blamed yourself, believing that you were becoming an unrecognizable mess of jealousy & resentment.

This is what happens when you enter the psychopath’s reality – all of their gossip & lies start to distort your own reality. Because here are the 2 realities you must choose from:

- The psychopath is normal. Everyone else is jealous, ill-intentioned, & self-serving.
- The psychopath is jealous, ill-intentioned, & self-serving. Everyone else is normal.

During the idealization & love-bombing, we favor option 1. It all feels absolutely incredible, & so we begin to define a new reality around our “soul mate.” They are wonderful, everyone else is wonderful. Life is good! But then the covert gossip begins, & that’s when our reality starts to shift. In order for us to continue living in the dream reality, where the psychopath is honest & good, all of their gossip must also be true. All of these other people must be jealous, ill-intentioned, & self-serving. Because if that’s not true, then that means the psychopath is a liar, gossip, & manipulator.

The stronger this reality becomes, the harder it is to break away from it. It really does start to feel like all of these people are against you – & that’s how the psychopath wants you to feel. Because then your entire sense of happiness is dependent on them. & what’s more, maintaining a false reality requires that you make a lot of excuses & explanations that keep you on the defensive & in denial. This is an extremely effective distraction (& destabilizer) from the frightening truth that your idealizer is actually your enemy.

During the breakup & recovery, we’re ripped away from option 1 – which was really just a fantasy – & faced with reality. We feel devastated, empty, & hopeless. Without that fantasy, we’ve lost *everything*. We’ve lost the most important, wonderful, perfect partner in the entire world. & on top of that, everyone else is untrustworthy & toxic. We have nobody & nothing.

But then we start to put the pieces together & experience small moments of trust with the people around us. This is where a Constant can truly change someone’s life. We see how we feel around someone who treats us well. We notice the freedom in spending time with someone who is not judging, triangulating, or spreading lies. Eventually, we start to place the negativity where it really belongs, instead of shifting it onto the rest of the world.

& finally, everything falls into place.

Reality number 2 strengthens. The 1st option doesn't even make sense anymore. It was never you & your partner against the world – it was only your partner against you. You begin to find peace & feel compassion toward people you once disliked. The cognitive dissonance lessons as you spend more time in the proper reality, away from the psychopath's web of lies. Your natural mercy & empathy return to you. Manufactured paranoia transforms into genuine trust, & at long last, the distractions are gone so that you can turn your focus to the *real* problem.” – [Mac15, pp. 59–61]

3.2.14 Torture by Triangulation

“To draw you closer, the psychopath creates an aura of desirability – of being wanted & courted by many. It will become a point of pride for you to be the preferred object of their attention, to win them away from a crowd of admirers. They manufacture the illusion of popularity by surrounding themselves with members of the opposite sex: friends, former lovers, & your eventual replacement. Then they create triangles that engender rivalries & raise their perceived value. (Adapted from *The Art of Seduction* by Robert Greene.)

The psychopath gleefully create love triangles, surrounding themselves with other targets to manufacture competition & make themselves seem in high demand at all times. Some targets will be used just to make you jealous, while others will be groomed as your replacement. After once texting you on a minute-by-minute basis & declaring you their “perfect” soul mate, they begin to pull away, showering other targets with this very same attention. This causes you to try harder, striving to win them back – unaware that they are simply toying with you. Meanwhile, the new victim falls fast, believing you to be “crazy” & “bipolar” & “abusive.” But despite this sickening smear campaign, the psychopath will still flatter you behind closed doors in order to give you a glimmer of hope – keeping you hooked until the bitter end.

A note before I continue: People fall in & out of love. People find new love, before & after relationships come to an end. People cheat on one another. This section is not about these everyday occurrences – no matter how heartbreaking & unfair they might be. Instead, I am describing a very specific set of patterns & behaviors that psychopaths utilize in order to torture & control their targets.

Psychopaths, like most predators, seek power & control. They want to dominate their partners sexually, emotionally, & physically. They do this by exploiting vulnerabilities. This is why they love-bomb you with attention & flattery in the beginning of the relationship – because no matter how strong or confident you are, being in “love” makes you vulnerable. Psychopaths don't need physical aggression to control you (although sometimes they resort to it). Instead, relationships provide them with the perfect opportunity to consume you by manufacturing the illusion of love. This is why it's so damaging when bystanders say, “Well, why didn't you just leave?” You never entered a relationship with the psychopath expecting to be abused, belittled, & criticized. You were tricked into falling in love, which is the strongest human bond in the world. Psychopaths know this.

So how do psychopaths maintain such a powerful hold over their targets? 1 of their favorite methods is through triangulation. When I mention this term, survivors usually equate it with the next target, but that is not always the case. Psychopaths use triangulation on a regular basis to seem in high demand, & to keep you obsessed with them at all times. This can occur with anyone: Your family. Their family. Your friends. Their friends. Ex-partners. Partners-to-be. Complete strangers.

The psychopath's ability to groom others is unmatched. They feel an intense euphoria when they turn people against each other, especially when it's over a competition for them. The psychopath will manufacture situations to make you jealous & question their fidelity. In a normal relationship, people go out of their way to prove that they are trustworthy – but the psychopath does exactly the opposite. They are constantly suggesting that they might be pursuing other options, or spending time with other people, so that you can never settle down into a feeling of peace. & they will always deny this, calling you crazy for bringing it up.

The issue here is that you're accustomed to such a high level of attention after they 1st lured you in that it feels very personal & confusing when they direct that attention elsewhere. They know this. They'll “forget” plans with you, & spend a few days with friends whom they always complained about to you. They'll ignore you to spend more time with their family, when they initially told you that they were all horrible people. They'll seek sympathy from an ex when a member of their family dies, & explain that they just have a “special friendship” you wouldn't understand. Often – if not always – that ex is someone they previously claimed was abusive & unstable.

Seeking attention, sympathy, & solace from people who are not you is a very common tactic of the psychopath. As an empathetic person, & as their partner, you rightfully feel that they should be seeking comfort in you. You've always healed them in the past, so what's different now? They once claimed that they were a broken person, & that you were the reason they were happy again. But now they turn to private friendships or past relationships that you could “never understand.” & they will always make sure to shove this in your face.

This brings me to the next topic: social media.

Technology makes it so much easier for the psychopath to manipulate through triangulation. It can be as simple as liking a comment from an old ex, while ignoring one from you. They will “accidentally” upload a photo album where they're embracing the ex they once claimed to hate. Everything appears to be unintentional – you often attribute it to insensitivity – but make no mistake: it is carefully calculated.

They will strategically post ambiguous statuses, songs, & videos that suggest you might be “losing” them. They will share things that are intentionally meant to lure in new & old targets – e.g., an inside joke with their new victim, or the love song that they once shared with their ex. This does 2 things: It leaves you feeling unhinged, anxious, & jealous. But it also makes the competing party feel confident, loved, & special. They are grooming others as they erode your identity – 2 birds with 1 stone.

They want you to confront them about these things, because they are so seemingly minimal that you will appear crazy & jealous for bringing them up. They will calmly provide an excuse for everything & then blame you for creating drama. Covert

abuse is impossible to prove, because it's always strategically ambiguous. You can't prove that they're luring in their ex because of a song they posted, but you know it intuitively. This is how they accomplish the crazy-making. Because let's be honest: complaining about Facebook statuses & comments does seem immature. That's exactly how they want you to feel.

Exes who maintain a "friendship" with the psychopath do not understand that they are puppets to the psychopath. Instead, they feel that they are fulfilling some sort of beautiful duty as a friend – someone who will always be there for them. They don't understand that they are only kept around to spice things up when the psychopath becomes bored. They don't see that they are the basis of so many fights – not because their friendship with the psychopath is special & desirable, but because the psychopath intentionally creates that drama. They are operating under the delusion that their friendship with the psychopath is brilliant, unique, & unprecedented. When in reality, they are just used for triangulation.

Psychopaths are also expertly skilled at surrounding themselves with givers – insecure people who find self-worth in taking care of others. This is why your giving seems so insignificant & replaceable during the relationship. They will seem to adore people who are nothing like you – sometimes even the exact opposite of you. The message is simple: You are no longer special. You are replaceable. If you don't give them the worshiping they deserve, they'll always have other sources. & even if you do give them positive energy, they'll get bored with you eventually. They don't need you. Their current round of fans will always spoil & admire them, making you believe that they truly must be a great person. But take a careful look around. You'll notice that all the fans seem to have an unspoken air of misery about them.

The final triangulation happens when they make the decision to abandon you. This is when they'll begin freely talking about how much this relationship is hurting them, & how they don't know if they can deal with your behavior anymore. They will usually mention talking to a close friend about your relationship, going into details about how they both agreed that your relationship wasn't healthy. In the meantime, they've been blatantly ignoring frantic messages from you. You'll be sitting there wondering why they aren't talking with you about these concerns, considering it's *your* relationship.

Well, the reason is that they've already made the decision to dump you – now they've just torturing you. They only seek advice from people they know will agree with them. That "friend" they're talking to is probably their next target.

There are 3 main characters in a psychopath's love triangle, & with each one, the psychopath must wear a specific mask & act a certain way:

- **You.** Instead of feeling shameful like most normal people would, when the psychopath cheats they actually go out of their way to ensure you know about their infidelities – without ever admitting to them, of course. This involves openly flirting with others (often over Facebook), bragging to you about all of the people who want to sleep with them, & calling you crazy & jealous when you react accordingly. With you, the psychopath acts covert, ambiguous, condescending, & always trying to keep you doubting the relationship.
- **The New Target.** The psychopath is not interested in torturing the new target yet. Instead, they use your impending self-destruction to lure in the next victim, the "favorite." As you begin to fall apart, it is easy to point at your desperate texts & evoke sympathy from the new target because of how crazy you've gotten. The psychopath will put the new target on a pedestal, explaining how much happier they feel now. The new target will feel elated, being the one to save the psychopath from their supposedly abusive partner (you). The mask the psychopath dons is one that makes them appear innocent, victimized (by you), & in need of saving (from you). At the same time, they are extremely complimentary & grateful to the new target, whom they credit with restoring their happiness.
- **The Fan Club.** The psychopath also needs to keep a close watch on their supply of friendships. even the least perceptive person in the world could notice when a relationship coup is happening. So instead of openly cheating & replacing 1 victim for another, the psychopath must be more careful. They will engage in serious talks with their friends about how much the current relationship is hurting them, & start to hand out shallow praise as a way to ensure loyalty. This is preliminary damage control, to make sure they remain in a favorable light even after the obvious cheating. They want to be sure their fan club is there to clap louder than ever when they put the new target on display, showing just how perfect their new life is. Every bit of support they get from their friends further confounds you. You wonder how in the world anyone could support this person. With their fan club, the psychopath is schmoozing, charming, looking for sympathy, & ultimately acting very cheerful when it comes time to parade the new target, receiving all of the support & congratulations they crave.

The Following

No matter how much they abuse their partners, toxic people will always have a loyal following of fans cheering for everything they do. These people are blinded by shallow flattery that the manipulators use to control them. Fan clubs change often, as psychopaths' friendships are neither deep nor meaningful in any way. All that matters is constant attention & adoration. Anyone who fails to provide this mindless reinforcement will promptly be replaced with someone who can.

Think about the amount of calculation & planning it must take to pull this off. Psychopaths are cunning, cold, & very aware of their own behavior. They take on 3 different personas in order to make you doubt your own sanity!

After the breakup, when most normal people would feel very embarrassed & secretive about entering a new relationship so quickly, the psychopath will openly brag about how happy they are with their new partner. & even more surprising, they fully expect you to be happy for them. Otherwise you are bitter & jealous.

During this period, they make a postdump assessment. If you grovel or beg, they are likely to find some value in your energy. They will be both disgusted & delighted by your behavior. If you lash out & begin uncovering their lies, they will do everything in their power to break you down. Even if you come back to them later with an apology, they will permanently despise you for daring to talk back to them. You've seen too much – the predator behind the mask.

Even after the relationship is over, they will use triangulation to try to drive you insane. They'll wave their new partner in your face, posting pictures & declaring their happiness online. They want to prove how happy & perfect they are together, but more than that, they want you to hate the new target so you blame him or her for the dissolution of your relationship, instead of the true abuser.

So how can you protect yourself from this devastating emotional abuse? 1st, you must learn self-respect. I will discuss this in more detail later on in the book. But the bottom line is, you need to know what is acceptable & unacceptable behavior in a relationship. You should know that a partner who cheats & antagonizes is not worth your time. You should never resort to calling yourself crazy in order to account for their extremely dicey behavior. But that's hard to do with subtle, covert, crazy-making abuse.

So here's where I introduce "The Detective Rule." The idea is simple: if you find yourself playing detective with someone, you should remove them from your life immediately. Remember your Constant? Do you play detective with them? Do you cyberstalk their Facebook page & question everything they say & do? No, of course not. So you know the inclination to do that with your partner is not about you – something is compelling you to feel wary & suspicious.

Even if this sense of distrust feels obscure & unreasonable, trust your gut. If you are constantly worrying or doubting your thoughts, it's time to stop 2nd-guessing yourself & start taking action.

Miraculously, every single time you remove that toxic person from your life, you will find that the anxiety subsides. Only *you* can truly know if someone is harming you. Only *you* know what is best for you. You can decide whether or not you like the way you feel around someone. No one can ever tell you that your feelings are wrong. Remember the question: *How are you feeling today?* The answer is all that matters.

Triangulation leaves long-lasting emotional wounds, & it makes you feel as if you are a jealous, needy, insecure monster. Start healing those wounds & understand that your insecurities were manufactured. You were not yourself – you were manipulated. The real you is kind, loving, open-minded, & compassionate. You do not need to question these things anymore." – [Mac15, pp. 61–68]

3.2.15 The Detective

"When dealing with liars & manipulators, we often find ourselves playing "detective." This is your intuition telling you that something is deeply wrong with the individual you're investigating. For some reason, their actions never seem to match up with their words. You find them constantly making excuses & blaming others, even though their stories never actually add up. You become lost in confusing conversations that somehow result in you being labeled jealous, overly sensitive, & paranoid. But when all is said & done, you will look back on every single instance where they called you crazy & realize that they were lying to your face. Every excuse was covering up yet another con, infidelity, or even a completely pointless lie (the ones they tell for fun). Psychopaths are skilled at covert abuse, leading you on a scavenger hunt that makes you doubt everything about your once easygoing nature." – [Mac15, p. 69]

3.2.16 Silence

"Silence is 1 of the most powerful tools of identity erosion. It is covert punishment, intended to manipulate a change in behavior without actually appearing to be overtly manipulative. When empathetic people are given the silent treatment, they often self-destruct & think of everything they might have done wrong. As a result, they start to whittle down their entire personalities in order to avoid repeating any of those potential wrongdoings.

The silent treatment is a brutal form of abuse – one that pits you against your own mind. You declare war on your intuition & everything that you know to be true. Once your identity has been sufficiently eroded, the psychopath can use this final technique without any chance that you'll leave them. Instead, you will torture yourself, carrying out the remainder of the abuse for them.

They will leave you alone with your thoughts, planting subtle hints & suggestions over social networking to encourage your paranoia. You will run through everything you've done in the relationship, blaming yourself for your feelings & emotions. You will wake up in the middle of the night, heart racing as you hope for a text from them. Nothing. You log onto Facebook & see them chatting away with friends & exes. They're not unavailable; they're ignoring you.

You will be expected to understand that they may not talk for days on end, despite having texted you on an hourly basis in the beginning of the relationship. You will begin to feel that you are on "probation," despite having no idea what you've done wrong. You may become passive-aggressive, drafting out long emails about their changed behavior & complete lack of contact. You might even feel strongly enough to suggest a break, but you will never follow through with it for more than a few hours. You will think you can out-ignore the psychopath, remaining calm & collected, as if nothing is wrong, so you don't appear clingy. But they will always win this game. Because they do not need your attention – they have already found someone else. Yes, when the psychopath begins ignoring you for days, it means they've found a new target. Otherwise, they would continue focusing all of their efforts on you. But now you are just an obstacle. They've found something new & exciting & your emotions are just a bothersome speed bump in their latest romantic venture. But they will never tell you this. They will just continue to read your desperate text messages, ignoring them without another word. They will lash out & accuse you of being obnoxious, crazy, & clingy. They will refuse to discuss anything over the phone or in person, unless it happens entirely on their terms. The abuse is no longer covert. Their contempt for you is unmistakable.

But despite all of this, they will not dump you. Not yet. They're saving that for the right moment." – [Mac15, pp. 69–70]

3.3 The Grand Finale

“The psychopath carefully selects the most indifferent & heartbreaking way imaginable to abandon you. They want you to self-destruct, as they begin the grooming process with their latest victim. They destroy you as a way to reassure themselves that their new target is better. But most importantly, they destroy you because they hate you. They despise your empathy & love – qualities they must pretend to feel every single day. To destroy you is to temporarily silence the nagging reminder of the emptiness that consumes their soul.” – [Mac15, p. 71]

3.3.1 The Aftermath

“Psychopaths latch on to successful people & steal what they have worked hard to attain. If you have a solid career, the psychopath will sponge from your income & avoid finding a job of their own. If you have a great group of friends, the psychopath will charm them into their fan club, ultimately turning them against you. They will end up sucking everything out of your life, & once they’ve taken everything you have to offer, they will find a new host.

The psychopath plans their discarding of you to be hurtful & confusing, causing you to feel completely worthless. & then you watch as their new life unfolds before your very eyes, leaving you to wonder what in the world just happened. Nothing from their patronizing breakup excuse makes sense. None of it adds up. Looking back, you will find that this person offered absolutely nothing of value to the relationship – only false praise & flattery, to keep you from catching on to their extremely parasitic lifestyle. Psychopaths leave behind nothing but pain, confusion, & chaos in their path of destruction.” – [Mac15, p. 71]

3.3.2 The Psychopathic Breakup Checklist

“The psychopath almost always has a new target lined up to replace their current partner. But instead of simply ending your relationship & entering the new one, they act out the items on the psychopathic breakup checklist:

- Covertly sprinkle hints that they are interested in someone else.
- Repeat Step 1 until you finally react.
- Calmly imply that you are being oversensitive & jealous.
- Give you the silent treatment for being sensitive & jealous.
- Repeat Step 4 until you start to self-destruct.
- Use your self-destruction to convince the new target that you’re crazy, that way the new target doesn’t feel like their cheating is “wrong.”
- Use your self-destruction to convince their friends that you’re crazy; that way they have full support from their fan club when they replace you.
- Begin to patronize you & explain how much your unstable behavior is hurting them.
- Choose the most insensitive way imaginable to dump you.
- Wave the new target in your face to show how happy they are without you.

Normal breakups never happen like this, but psychopaths want to ensure that they seem innocent while you appear to be the monster. Even though they are the ones who are cheating & lying, these steps turn the tables around so that they can play victim & make sure that you are left with absolutely nothing.” – [Mac15, pp. 71–72]

3.3.3 Setup

“The discarding process will feel casual & impulsive, but make no mistake – it has been planned for weeks, if not months. During this process, you will begin to feel that they actually want *you* to dump *them*. They will go out of their way to upset & harm you, & you will know in your heart that they have no interest in continuing the relationship. But of course, they will never say this. They will deny any suggestions you might have about their intentions. Instead, they will unload all of the blame on you, making you feel that your self-destructive behavior is what’s really ruining the relationship – not their blatant abuse tactics.

While you’re frantically running around trying to fix things, they will be courting their next target. They may already be sleeping together. & they’ll make sure you suspect it – dropping hints & innuendos until you can’t take it anymore & just explode. Then they’ll use your increasingly volatile behavior as a pity ploy for their next victim. *What better way to convince them of your insanity than to present them with your seemingly unprovoked & hysterical text messages?*

You will spend all of this time thinking that they’ve just lost interest, or that your jealousy issues extinguished the spark. Months into recovery, things will finally start to click. You will be able to look back at their pre-breakup performance & put all of the pieces into place. You will be shocked – unable to comprehend such a cunning scheme. You will be disgusted when you realize how long you were strung along. You will wonder why they didn’t just dump you the moment they met someone new. You will realize that they were blatantly ignoring you – not because they were busy with work – but because they were busy in bed.

& all the while, they made *you* feel like the monster.” – [Mac15, pp. 72–73]

3.3.4 Destruction

“To a psychopath’s target, the sudden breakup seems to come out of nowhere. But to the psychopath, this moment has been carefully planned for quite some time. They’ve been spreading lies & gossip about you, quietly convincing others that you’re unstable & ruining the relationship. They use this story to groom the next victim & distract friends from their obvious cheating. You will find yourself replaced in a matter of days, watching as their “perfect” life unfolds with someone else. While you were running around desperately trying to repair things, they were already starting up another relationship. & instead of breaking up with you like a normal human being, they strung you along until the bitter end. They deemed you “crazy” & “jealous,” gleefully eroding your entire identity as they pranced off with someone else. Psychopaths don’t just break up with their targets – they use breaking up as an opportunity to watch you self-destruct: physically, emotionally, & spiritually.” – [Mac15, p. 73]

3.3.5 The Talk

“When the psychopath breaks up with you, it will feel nonchalant & disingenuous. They might even do it over a text message to make you feel completely worthless. They will talk mostly about themselves & their “feelings” – explaining that they just can’t go on like this anymore. You will remain paralyzed & numb throughout the conversation. You knew it was coming, but you just can’t believe it happened. You will hear a lot of word salad about their ex & your changed behavior, but nothing about the target they’re replacing you with. They will appear both pitiful (of you) & oddly cheerful.

They will choose the most inconvenient setting possible in which to dump you. If you live cross-country, they will have no problem letting you come out to visit them, only to dump you halfway through the trip. By disrupting your travel plans & removing you from familiar surroundings, they ensure that you will be completely unhinged by the news – adding to the confusion & inferiority that you already feel.

You will leave the breakup feeling nothing but emptiness. I cannot describe this feeling as depression, because it worse than that. In this moment, you will feel that your spirit has died.” – [Mac15, p. 74]

3.3.6 Abandonment

“Sudden abandonment is not normal behavior. If someone truly feels all of the love & passion they proclaim, they will not be able to disappear months later without another word. The person who once declared you better than all of their crazy exes now grooms a new target by painting *you* as the crazy ex. Everything that comes out of a psychopath’s mouth is manufactured garbage. This becomes especially apparent when they migrate from the personality mirroring – “we’re just the same in every way” – to the inevitable abandonment, when they begin to mirror an entirely different person. Once you start to understand how this cycle works, you will realize that you have not lost your soul mate at all. While they continue this cycle forever, you begin a new adventure, free from the never-ending lies & mind games of the soulless.” – [Mac15, p. 74]

3.3.7 Triangulation Again

“The psychopath isn’t done with you yet. Their favorite time to triangulate is right after the breakup. After they change their relationship status to “Single” on Facebook, you’ll think that things can’t possibly get any worse. You have friends asking how you’re doing, but you’re not able to focus on anything except your ex-partner. Looking at their pictures makes you feel sick, but you keep doing it anyway. You scroll through old memories, impulsively deleting what you can – immediately regretting it.

& then you see it.

A few days after the breakup, they’re posting pictures of themselves with someone else. Someone you’ve never seen before. They make no effort to hide their latest conquest. In fact, it feels like they’re showing the new target off. They feel no embarrassment & no guilt. You know it’s a bad idea, but your curiosity gets the best of you: you start peeking around, discovering that this new person has been interacting with your ex for a while now. They’ve been joking around & subtly flirting on social media, but you never noticed. You were probably completely focused on the ex before you.

Before you know it, they’ve changed their relationship status & their friends are all enthusiastically congratulating the happy couple. They’ve clearly known about the new partner for some time. While you were written off as the crazy ex, the next target was already preparing to take your place. The psychopath’s fan club cheers for them, clapping louder than ever before – their hero has found the (latest) love of his or her life.” – [Mac15, p. 75]

3.3.8 Superiority Complex

“After the breakup & triangulation, the psychopath feels an immense amount of superiority. This is when they’re at their “best” – glowing with energy as they watch you fall from grace. They put their newest target on display because they want you to know about her or him. They’re waiting for your reaction, & if you don’t react, they will invent a reason to talk to you, making sure their latest profile picture is displayed front & center. Oftentimes, the psychopath will use pointless requests as an excuse to get your attention. E.g., they may say they want to return an article of clothing or a DVD – something that any normal person would just forget about.

Once they have your attention, they will adopt a calm, patronizing demeanor, talking down to you as if they’re some kind of relationship guru because they’re happy & you’re single. During the whole conversation, they will take on a very arrogant, “I’m in charge” sort of attitude. After the breakup, they’re obsessed with being the calm & superior person. The winner.

They will minimize everything that happened, warning you not to create any drama. Instead of apologizing for their abusive behavior & now-obvious cheating, they make sweeping statements explaining that breakups are just difficult. They depersonalize

the experience & speak down to you as if they pity you. They use this pseudo pleasantry to come across as the bigger person. They will wish you all the best, playing it off casually, making it seem as if this was just an everyday breakup.

If you don't allow them the postbreakup superiority routine, they will become extremely unpleasant. They do not want to talk about their infidelity or lies. They want you to idolize them in your memory. & remember how they gave you the silent treatment for entire days at the end of your relationship? Well, they still expect prompt responses from you – otherwise you're labeled bitter & jealous.

If you feel like punching a wall by this point, you're in good company." – [Mac15, pp. 75–76]

3.3.9 The Emotional Abuser's Trap

"Psychopaths, narcissists, & sociopaths are experts at flattery & charm. Although it feels amazing at 1st, this idealization is actually responsible for most of the damage when the relationship comes crashing down. They set a trap, & it's a trap that no unsuspecting victim could hope to escape from.

- **By idealizing you, the psychopath can expect this attention & adoration to rebound very quickly.** Their love-bombing ultimately results in a very quick bond, one where you fall fast & give back all of the "love" you are receiving. In your mind, this individual truly becomes the most passionate, perfect soul mate you could ever imagine. You feel & express this love on a daily basis.
- **You share your excitement about this relationship with all of your friends & family.** Oftentimes, they already have a front-row seat for this constant flattery. Sites like Facebook ensure that the mutual idealization is visible to the world. It feels good to have our egos stroked, ignited by all of this public praise.
- **The emotional abuser slowly begins to back away.** At 1st it's subtle. You can't quite put your finger on it, but something feels different. They don't text or call quite as often, they seem less interested, you start to feel like a chore, & they're always late to see you. However, due to what is described in paragraphs 1 & 2 above, you are determined to continue the idealization. You ignore the worsening behavior & actually idealize them further, hoping to restore your dream. You don't want to be like their crazy ex; you want to be easygoing & forgiving.
- **You continue to tell your friends, family, & self just how amazing your partner is.** Even though the relationship is getting progressively worse, you're sure that enough love & positive energy will fix everything. At this point, the psychopath can do whatever they desire, & you will continue to speak highly of them.
- **The psychopath's abuse becomes much worse.** The triangulation begins. You are punished through silence & criticism. You are called crazy & hypersensitive. & eventually, you are abandoned. Throughout all of this, you continue your desperate attempts to save the relationship. You find yourself crying, pleading, & denying reality. This person has become your entire life. You have no one to reach out to for help, because they all believe your relationship to be perfect.
- **After the abandonment, you begin to put the puzzle pieces together.** You discover psychopathy through a Google search & start thinking, "Oh my God, this is uncanny." The more you learn, the angrier you get. Everything falls into place, you are validated beyond belief, & your truth has changed forever.
- **The trap.** No one believes you. After all of your enthusiasm about the relationship, it doesn't make sense. How could you have been the victim of abuse? You were happy – you were elated. Your partner was amazing & treated you so well. You said it yourself! If things were really so bad, why were you always praising them? Instead of being a victim, you sound crazy, bitter, & unable to handle rejection.

This is the emotional abuser's trap. They groom you to shower them with praise & adoration, so you effectively checkmate yourself once the abuse begins. Survivors often find their own friends taking the side of their abuser. It's devastating, & this trap is the final nail in the psychopathic coffin.

To avoid this, do not try to defend or explain yourself to anyone. Yes, you need to share your story, but you need to share it with people who know what you've been through. Stick to recovery forums & journals. If you seek out therapy, be sure the therapist understands the mind games of manipulators. He or she must be familiar with Cluster B personality disorders (which includes borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, & antisocial personality disorder); otherwise you may just experience more victim blaming. You don't need someone telling you to "get over it" or "breakups are part of life." You need someone who will help you get out of this hell & set you on a path to peace.

You are not crazy. You're not bipolar, insane, hypersensitive, jealous, or needy. You're a survivor of emotional abuse – & you *can* escape this trap. Just remain calm, patient, & always kind to yourself. Someday you will be able to talk about this experience eloquently & believably. Do not worry about convincing others of your story right now. This is what the psychopath hopes for. By putting you on the defensive when you are at your most damaged, you end up looking guilty & unstable.

So say farewell to these games. You are not alone. Share your story with people who get it, & slowly you will find that this nightmare becomes nothing more than a strange, distant memory. The psychopath does not matter. It's the subsequent recovery journey that changes everything." – [Mac15, pp. 76–79]

3.3.10 Why Are They So Happy with Someone Else?

“This is probably 1 of the most common questions survivors ask during the early stages of recovery. After the breakup, the psychopath moves on very quickly to the target they already had lined up to replace you. On top of the cheating & lying, you’re forced to take a front-row seat while they begin their “perfect” life with someone else.

If you believe they’re treating the new target better than they treated you, you’re not alone. This is how nearly every survivor feels (including the new target, when he or she inevitably gets replaced down the road). The psychopath presents an image of their new relationship that seems flawless, like a fairy tale. Before you know it, they’ve adopted someone else’s dreams, likes, & dislikes. They’re both flaunting the new relationship before the entire world, not even a hint of shame or guilt for the fact that you were essentially swapped out in a matter of days.

The emotional abuser appears to run happily off into the sunset with their next target, making you wonder if perhaps they really are capable of love. But there is never a happy ending with a psychopath. They’ll gleefully parade their latest victim to the world in order to evoke jealousy & drama, which is already a sign that they haven’t magically grown a conscience.

As you watch the new relationship unfold, you’ll start to notice every little detail about the idealization – things you always wished for but never received. Perhaps they moved in with the new partner, even though they never wanted to live with you. Maybe they got married really quickly, after months of never quite being able to commit to you. They’re probably posting endless pictures on Facebook, whereas you became more of a private aspect of their life. Basically, it feels like you were a bothersome speed bump along the way to their true fantasy.

But here’s the difficult thing to understand: someone else was feeling the exact same way at the beginning of *your* relationship.

Every idealization is going to be different, which is why it always seems like the next person is getting something you didn’t. Additionally, you’re at rock bottom while the new target is on cloud 9, which makes the situation seem even more unfair.

The fact that the other person receives “special” treatment isn’t an indication that there’s anything wrong with you. & it’s not the result of your reactions during the abuse or your supposed craziness. Even if you had behaved perfectly, the psychopath would have found some reason to abandon & replace you. All this idealization they’re doing to someone else serves 2 simple purposes: (1) to groom the new target into a reliable source of attention & affection, & (2) to make you feel jealous & worthless by showering someone else with more love than they gave to you.

This is why it is so important to have no contact with your ex. If you continue to watch the new relationship unfold, you’ll only torture yourself with more impossible questions & self-doubts. Every time you look, you’ll end up wishing you hadn’t. You’ll wonder why this new relationship is lasting longer than yours did – why they’re able to tolerate someone else for so much longer than they were with you. Because of all the triangulation during the abuse, you find yourself constantly comparing yourself with others, feeling inferior & inadequate because they’ve chosen someone else.

Don’t waste your life waiting for something bad to happen in their new relationship. Because in the end, it won’t make any difference. After the initial satisfaction, you’ll still be left feeling all of these same awful emotions because your sense of self-worth is still entirely invested in someone else.

There is nothing wrong with you, & there’s nothing inherently better about the new target. You’re 2 entirely different people who were love-bombed & flattered, but it had absolutely nothing to do with your actual qualities or inner beauty. The idealization was a tool to gain control over you, & that is neither flattering nor validating – not for you, & not for anyone else. You might start to wonder who’s more attractive, more successful, more intelligent, but none of that matters. When a psychopath sets their sights on a new target, that is where all of their energy will be focused. Even if you’re the sexiest, funniest, smartest person in the world, you will be forgotten & ignored. It’s not that you’ve actually lost any of these qualities, or that someone else has more good qualities than you. It simply means that you’ve run your course in terms of supplying positive attention. You were starting to question their lies, stand up for yourself, & dig into the truth. & because of that, you were punished.

It’s okay to wonder why you weren’t good enough for what you could have done differently. It’s only human, considering what you’re responding to. But the point of this book is to help you understand that you *are* good enough – that there was nothing you could have done differently. When it comes to psychopathic relationships, the abusive partner’s behavior & choices have nothing to do with your best qualities. If anything, they train you to repress these qualities.

Now that you’re free, you finally have the opportunity to explore these qualities for yourself & begin to cultivate a healthy self-respect. But you can only do this when you’re not constantly comparing yourself to someone else. Most survivors find that they feel physically sick when they check in on their ex’s new relationship – their heart goes into their throat & they can’t even breathe right. *Why would you subject yourself to this?* Listen to your body, because it’s trying to protect you. It knows that nothing good can come from keeping tabs.

If you can, make a No Contact calendar & encourage yourself to see how long you can make it without checking up on the new relationship. At PsychopathFree.com, every member starts with a “No Contact Counter” that tracks how long you’ve maintained no contact. You will find that the longer you go, the easier it gets. & before long, you might even start to develop a certain level of sympathy for the new target as you come to understand that this new relationship actually saved you from further abuse.” – [Mac15, pp. 79–82]

3.3.11 Happily Never After

“The psychopath’s new relationship may look perfect. You’ll bear witness to the idealization of the new victim (they’ll make sure you notice), & you will wonder what he or she offers them that you couldn’t. But that “perfect pair” won’t last long. Soon after the idealization, the psychopath will get bored. They always get bored. It is a constant, nagging affliction that consumes them. To temporarily alleviate it, they will begin to erode the new victim’s identity – toying with him or her for some quick

relief. Eventually, this isn't enough. They need more. They need to see their victim beg & plead. They need their victim to self-destruct. & thus the cycle of abuse repeats itself again & again. There is no need to wonder if they've somehow found true happiness without you. Anyone who treated you with such venom & contempt is not capable of suddenly loving another human being. These qualities are mutually exclusive.

In most cases, psychopaths are obsessed with making sure that they break up with their victims. This is a sign of power & control. But there are occasions when a survivor finally breaks free on their own, leaving the psychopath & liberating themselves from the abuse.

When the psychopath is the one who's discarded, you should prepare yourself for months – if not years – of stalking & harassment. Until they find another victim, they will pour all of their rage into ruining your life through intimidation & scare tactics. They will invent online personas to cyberstalk your Internet activity. This gives them the illusion of control – reassurance that you cannot exist without them.

They may also try to win you back. Don't be fooled. This is their final manipulative attempt to turn the tables – so that the dumping can occur on their terms. It sounds ridiculous that someone would go through the trouble of courting you just to dump you, but this is how psychopaths work.

Survivors often wish that their ex would make some form of contact, just for proof that they haven't been forgotten. But if your ex has moved on, consider yourself lucky. If you need any further confirmation of this, speak to someone who dumped a psychopath. You will hear their stories & quickly understand that your ex's silence is a wonderful gift.” – [Mac15, pp. 82–83]

3.3.12 The Irony

“Strangely enough, the grand finale is also the psychopath's greatest tribute to your strength. It reveals their accidental respect for you. It seems impossible, because you're at rock bottom. You've never felt so worthless in your life. & this is exactly how the psychopath wants you to feel. So how can this be anything good?

There are 4 general cases that result in a grand finale. & in every single 1 of them, the psychopath is giving you an indirect compliment:

1. They've Found Another Partner. If the psychopath sees their new target as more valuable than you, what exactly does that say? It means that this new victim is more likely to provide them with the unconditional adoration that they crave. It also means you're not doing enough of that. When the psychopath dumps you for another target, they are writing you off as a less useful victim. They see you as less submissive, less controllable, & less vulnerable than their new target. When they dump you & rub the other partner in your face, they're not proving how happy they are; they're trying to erode your self-esteem so that they can convince themselves that you're worse than their new conquest.

The only time people need to prove their happiness to others is when they are, in fact, unhappy. When psychopaths triangulate you & post new pictures for the world to see, they're not happy. They're miserably & pathetically trying to convince themselves of a lie by manufacturing your downfall. They're complimenting you in their obsession with your failure.

2. You Caught Up with Their Lies. Did you ever hear this phrase: “God, you overanalyze everything”? Strange how you supposed overanalyzing was always a result of their cheating, lying, & triangulating. That phrase is the psychopath's way of making you feel crazy for pointing out the truth. When they punish you for pointing out their lies, they are once again complimenting you. By trying to destroy your sanity & intuition, they are telling you that these qualities of yours are currently too strong. They recognize these traits & try to convince you that they are weaknesses – ensuring that you won't rely on them anymore. If a psychopath accuses you of overanalyzing everything, it just means you're a good detective.

3. You're Too Happy. Psychopaths love to build people up in the idealization phase, but then they resent the happiness & love generated by their partners. Weird, right? It makes absolutely no sense. So the psychopath's solution is to harbor this resentment through passive-aggressive abuse. They make you feel unhinged & anxious, shattering all of the confidence that *they* built up. When they do this, they are flattering you. This means you embodied everything they hate: love, happiness, & joy. They despise these qualities because they're a reminder of everything they can never feel. Qualities they see as stupid & useless. Your smiles & laughter are a strange, nagging reminder that maybe being human is better than being soulless. To convince themselves otherwise, they plan the grand finale in order to make a mockery of these characteristics.

4. They're Bored with Your Emotions. Psychopaths love the idealization phase because everything is perfect. There are no problems, & they don't have to deal with anyone's dreaded emotions. But after they've tricked someone into falling in love with them, they suddenly find themselves in a strange predicament. Their victim loves them & wants to foster a greater emotional connection. The psychopath gets bored & uncomfortable with this very quickly. In these cases, the grand finale will often be about the victim being crazy, bipolar, or hysterical. Again, these are all a flattering way of saying: “Hey, you have a heart.” But the psychopath hates things they do not understand, so they seek to destroy you. While you were spending so much time trying to repress your emotions in order to be the perfect partner, you were actually doing just fine as a regular person. Emotions are what make you human, & the psychopath got very tired of those human qualities.

Everything the psychopath values is the opposite of what you would value. So when they punish you, they're actually giving a quite a tribute to the things you probably care about most. It's twisted & manipulative, because they convince you to doubt your greatest qualities – but looking back, you can begin to understand how this abuse was a subtle acknowledgment of your own strengths.

Granted, you probably don't want to hear any of that right now. After the grand finale, there is no hope. No humor. No future. You have been deeply wounded by the pain this person inflicted upon you, & it will take years to fully comprehend the extent of the abuse. So turn the page, & we will walk this road together." – [Mac15, pp. 83–85]

4 The Path to Recovery

"Healing from psychopathic abuse is a long journey. It is neither linear nor logical. You can expect to swing back & forth between stages, perhaps even inventing a few of your own along the way. It is unlike the traditional stages of grief, because you have not truly lost anything – instead, you have gained everything. You just don't know it yet." – [Mac15, p. 86]

4.1 Why Does It Take So Long?

"Breakups with abusers are much different from breakups with healthy human beings. Relationships with psychopaths take an unusually long time to recover from. Survivors often find themselves frustrated because they haven't healed as fast as they'd like. They also end up dealing with friends & professionals who give them well-intentioned advice about how it's "time to move on."

Whether you were in a long-term marriage or a quick summer fling, the recovery process will be the same when it comes to a psychopathic encounter. It takes 12–24 months to get your heart back in a good place, & even then, you might have tough days.

Please don't set a deadline for yourself. With time, you will begin to find moments of happiness, contentment, & hope. These moments will become stronger & more frequent through No Contact, as the abuser slowly drifts into a strange obscurity. In retrospect, this person likely won't even seem "real." You will be unable to believe that you were ever caught up in such a frenzied panic, hooked by someone who mirrored your personality & then triangulated you against others. Your heart & mind have better things to focus on – namely, your own self-respect & happiness.

No matter how long it takes, do not worry that you have been permanently injured by this person. The empathetic spirit never dies. It is always with you, & it will return in a new & beautiful form when it is ready. There will be ups & there will be downs, but you are on a path to freedom that will last a lifetime.

The important thing here is to stop blaming yourself. Stop wishing it would go faster. Stop thinking that they psychopath somehow "wins" if you're still hurting. They are out of the picture now. This journey is about you. If you come to peace with the extended time line, you'll find this experience a lot more pleasant. You can settle in, make some friends, & get cozy with this whole recovery thing.

So why is it taking so long? – [Mac15, pp. 87–88]

4.1.1 You Were in Love

"Yes, it was manufactured love. Yes, your personality was mirrored & your dreams manipulated. But you were in love. Love is the strongest human emotion & bond in the world, & you felt it with all your heart. It is always painful to lose someone you loved – someone you planned to be with for the rest of your life.

The human spirit must heal from these love losses. Regardless of your abuser's intentions, your love was still very real. It will take a great deal of time & hope to pull yourself out of the standard postbreakup depression." – [Mac15, p. 88]

4.1.2 You Were in Desperate Love

"Here's where we branch off from regular breakups. Psychopaths manufacture desperation & desire. You probably worked harder for this relationship than any other, right? You put more time, energy, & thought into it than ever before. & in turn, you were rewarded with the nastiest, most painful experience of your life.

In the idealization phase, they showered you with attention, gifts, letters, & compliments. They actually pretended to be exactly like you in every way. Everything you did was perfect to them. This made you elated, unaware that they were preparing you for the identity erosion.

You began to pick up on all sorts of hints that you might be replaced at any time. This encouraged your racing thoughts, ensuring that this person was on your mind every second of the day. This unhinged, unpredictable lifestyle is what the psychopath hopes to create with their lies, gaslighting, & triangulation.

By keeping them on your mind at all times, you fell into a state of desperate love. This is unhealthy, & not a sign that the person you feel so strongly about is actually worthy of your love. Your mind convinces you that if you feel so powerfully, then they must be the only person who will ever make you feel that way. & when you lost that person, your world completely falls apart. You enter a state of panic & devastation." – [Mac15, pp. 88–89]

4.1.3 The Chemical Reaction

"Psychopaths have intense emotional & sexual bonds with their victims. These are due to their sexual magnetism, & the way they train their victims' minds to become reliant upon their approval.

After they 1st adored you in every way, you let down your guard & began to place your self-worth in them. Your happiness started to depend on their opinion of you. Happiness is a chemical reaction going off in your brain – dopamine & receptors firing off to make you feel good.

Like a drug, the psychopath offers you this feeling in full force at the beginning. But once you become reliant on it, they begin to pull back. Slowly, you need more & more to feel that same high. You do everything you can to hang on to it, while they're doing everything in their power to keep you starving for their love & approval.” – [Mac15, p. 89]

4.1.4 Inferiority & Comparison

“There are thousands of support groups for survivors of infidelity. Infidelity leaves long-lasting insecurities & feelings of never being good enough. It leaves you constantly comparing yourself to others. That pain alone takes many people years to recover from.

Now compare this to the psychopath's triangulation. Not only do they cheat on you – they happily wave it in your face. They brag about it, trying to prove how happy they are with your replacement. They carry none of the usual shame & guilt that come with cheating. They are thrilled to be posting pictures & telling their friends how happy they are.

I cannot even begin to explain how emotionally damaging this is to someone who had once been the target of a psychopath's idealization. The triangulation alone will take so much time to heal from.” – [Mac15, p. 89]

4.1.5 You Have Encountered Pure Evil

“Everything you once understood about people did not apply to this person. During the relationship, you tried to be compassionate, easygoing, & forgiving. You never could have shown that the person you loved was actively using these things against you. It just doesn't make any sense. & so you spent your time projecting a normal human conscience onto them, trying to explain away their inexplicable behavior.

But once you discover psychopathy, sociopathy, or narcissism, everything starts to change. You begin to feel disgusted – horrified that you let this darkness into your life. Everything clicks & falls into place. All of the “accidental” or “insensitive” behavior finally makes sense.

You try to explain this to friends & family members, but no one really seems to get it. This is why validation matters. When you come together with others who have experienced the same thing as you, you discover you are not crazy. You are not alone in this inhuman experience.

It takes a great deal of time to come to terms with this personality disorder. You end up having to let go of your past understanding of human nature, building it back up from scratch. You realize that people are not always inherently good. You begin to feel paranoid, hypervigilant, & anxious. The healing process is about learning to balance this new state of awareness with your once-trusting spirit.” – [Mac15, pp. 89–90]

4.1.6 Your Spirit Is Deeply Wounded

“After the inevitable abandonment, most survivors end up feeling a kind of emptiness that cannot even be described as depression. It's like your spirit has completely gone away. You feel numb to everything & everyone around you. The things that once made you happy now leave you cold. You worry that your encounter with this monster has destroyed your ability to emphasize, feel, & care.

I believe this is what takes the longest time to recover from. It feels hopeless at 1st, but your spirit is always with you. Wounded, for sure, but never gone. As you begin to discover self-respect & boundaries, it slowly starts to find its voice again. It feels safe opening up, peeking out sporadically to say hello. You will find yourself grateful to be crying again, happy that your emotions seem to be returning. This is great, & it will start to become more & more consistent.

Ultimately, you will leave this experience with an unexpected wisdom about the people around you. Your spirit will return stronger than ever before, refusing to be treated that way again. You may encounter toxic people throughout your life, but you don't let them stay for very long. You don't have time for mind games & manipulation. You seek out kind, honest, & compassionate individuals. You know you deserve nothing less.

This newfound strength is the greatest gift of the psychopathic experience. & it is worth every second of the recovery process, because it will serve you for the rest of your life.” – [Mac15, pp. 90–91]

4.2 The Stages of Grief – Part I

“The early stages of recovery are like a whirlwind – chaotic, volatile, & uncontrollable. During these stages, you likely don't even know that you encountered a psychopath. You blame yourself & feel that you will never be happy again. You act out in ways you never even imagined. You don't yet understand how the abuse destroyed your confidence & identity – because you don't even know to call it abuse. All you know is that you're hurting more than you ever have in your life. But no matter how fast this whirlwind spirals, you must not lose hope. You are not alone in this darkness, & everything is going to be okay.” – [Mac15, p. 92]

4.2.1 Devastation

Symptoms: emptiness, shock, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, inability to focus, depression, physical deterioration.

This is the stage immediately following the breakup, in which you feel all-consuming devastation. Your heart & mind become numb, & you are unable to perform trivial tasks. You've been ripped away from the chemical addiction going on in your brain, so you should expect to experience a lingering haze as you go through the withdrawal process. Your body will deteriorate & you

will seem fragile & haunted when you look at yourself in the mirror. Before & after pictures of psychopathic abuse survivors are shocking.

Your sex drive will oscillate between desire for your ex & the misery of thinking about what you no longer have. Psychologically, you are extremely raw & vulnerable from the identity erosion, but at this point you aren't even aware that your identity was eroded. You don't yet understand the extent of the emotional abuse you have suffered. So instead of healing from their tactics, you are still a victim of them. You genuinely believe you deserve this – that you are nothing without them. That you are jealous, crazy, needy, clingy, & everything is your fault.

You feel worthless.

Emotionally, you will lose any connection you once had with the world around you. Your empathetic & perceptual abilities will temporarily collapse. Looking back, you will be unable to remember most of the details during this phase. Almost like an out-of-body experience, your mind will have blocked out many of the unbearably painful & embarrassing memories. A part of you shuts down in order to protect your spirit. The stages of grief are about bringing it to life again.” – [Mac15, p. 93]

4.2.2 Taking Care of Yourself

“During the entire healing process – but especially right now – you must remember to treat your body well. It's the least you can do, considering your mind is going to be out of commission for quite some time. Along the way, I'll make some more suggestions, but here are a few basic ideas to get you started:

- Practice meditation whenever you can. My beautiful friend & ice-skating partner, An Old-Fashioned Girl, has shared many techniques on our website that you can try throughout the day. She offered 1 example where you simply take 10 deep breaths in a row – & you can do this anytime, anywhere!
- Take a multivitamin with B complex each day. This will ensure you're receiving all of the nutrients you need. B₆ & B₁₂ can also help to combat depression.
- Fish oil is an excellent supplement to keep your skin & hair strong, but it also has some great antidepressant qualities.
- Exercise! Go for a walk each day. Spend half an hour at the gym. Don't worry if your workout is less intense than it used to be. To this day, my friends still refuse to go to the gym with me because I mostly just roll around on the exercise balls & giggle.
- Eat 3 meals each day, even when you're not hungry. You probably won't feel like eating for a few weeks, but you cannot starve your body. Keep yourself well fed & healthy.
- Wake up at a reasonable hour each morning. You don't want to get stuck in the habit of rolling out of bed in the afternoon, too depressed to face the day. Set an alarm if you need to.
- Get 7–9 hours of sleep. Adequate rest is essential to your mental health, & you won't be able to get through this if you're exhausted everyday.
- Go outside & get some sun. Wear sunscreen, of course, but enjoy the natural light of the outdoors, & absorb some vitamin D from the sun. You'll feel better.
- Take care of your basic hygiene each day. Don't skip out on brushing your teeth or taking a shower. The more you get into a routine, the easier it will become to form good habits.
- Get away from the mirror. Seriously, you look fine. The psychopath conditioned you to feel especially self-conscious about the way you look, but no one is judging you like they did.” – [Mac15, pp. 93–94]

4.2.3 Reflection

“During the devastation period, you will find it very difficult to reflect on anything at all. But I must ask you to look inward, just for a moment.

This is the most important paragraph in the whole book. Please pay attention: Many survivors struggle with suicidal thoughts, unable to imagine life beyond this experience. To cope with this, some begin to drink alone or abuse prescription pills. If you're self-medicating or considering suicide, please put this book down & seek professional counseling immediately. No healing book or website can provide you with the help you need right now.

Even if you're not feeling suicidal, having professional guidance through this experience can be hugely beneficial. There are so many amazing psychologists, therapists, & counselors out there who transform lives every single day. Most of these people enter the field because they have an innate desire to help others. They'll usually list their specialties on their website. Try seeking out someone who specializes in the field of relationship abuse – off the bat, they'll understand that this is not a process to be rushed.

Everyone's going to have a different rapport with a therapist, but at the very least, this person should be compassionate, kind, & open-minded. You should never feel judged or uncomfortable speaking your mind. If you found any books or online articles that really resonated with your experience, you should feel welcome to bring them in for discussion.

After a few months with my therapist, I went from feeling suicidal & unable to get out of bed in the morning to being functional & eating again. I still had a long, long way to go, but she was the one who got me back on my feet when I had lost

all hope. Sometimes we just need a little extra boost to get us out from that all-consuming darkness. There is absolutely no shame in reaching out a hand & asking for that help. You might be surprised to find that there are a lot of strangers willing to pull you back up.” – [Mac15, pp. 94–95]

4.2.4 Denial

Symptoms: volatility, pseudo happiness, manic moods, substance abuse, impulsivity, attention seeking, cyberstalking.

You can expect this stage to start up in full force when the psychopath begins waving their happy life in your face. You see them running off with another partner, gleefully telling the world how perfect their life is now. This triangulation is commonly done through social media. At this point, you aren’t even angry about the new target because you likely have no idea how long the infidelity was going on. You just feel the need to prove that you are find & dandy like the psychopath – because then maybe they’ll want you back.

Realize that at this point, your healing is still largely centered around the psychopath desiring you again.

In order to convince yourself that everything is okay, you change jobs, spend money, & redefine your entire life. You lash out at everyone & everything except the psychopath. You go out drinking, partying, & dating recklessly – all in a monumental effort to convey the message that you are fine. You will become very impulsive, blowing away your savings & harboring delusional thoughts of returning to your idealizer. You may try to replicate the exact dynamic you had with the psychopath with another partner, only to get very frustrated that you sex life isn’t as good or that they don’t love-bomb you with attention.

You spend a lot of time online, peeking at their Facebook profile & learning about their new life. A part of you isn’t ready or willing to believe that the relationship is actually over. You think if they just see 1 picture or comment of yours, then maybe they’ll realize what a mistake they’ve made. But much to your dismay, they don’t seem to be paying any attention to you at all. You might even invent fantasies in which they secretly want you back. So you continue to act out, unaware that your sense of self has become entirely consumed by someone else. This is the phase in which you’ll be most likely to do things you’ll regret after recovery has ended.” – [Mac15, pp. 95–96]

4.2.5 Drinking

“Please stop drinking. In the early months of recovery, this might seem like the easiest way to deal with your pain. Downing a bottle of wine each night somehow becomes “normal” – & you defend it with excuses or a casual joke. But it’s not funny. You are doing a lot of damage to your mind & body. If you’re serious about healing, you need to be completely in touch with your sober, unaltered self. You will find no peace by indulging in alcohol-induced rants, drunk storytelling, & mindless partying. These distractions only serve to delay your healing process. You will still have all of the same work to do once you wake up the next morning – & it’ll be made substantially more difficult by a hangover & embarrassing memories from the night before.

There’s nothing wrong with having a drink every now & then, but this experience is an exception. Spend a few months completely dry. Make a calendar if you need to, checking off each day as you go. You will be absolutely amazed at how quickly your healing process accelerates. Your mind is the most valuable tool in the recovery process – so treasure it & treat yourself kindly.” – [Mac15, p. 96]

4.2.6 “If Only” Moments

“A big part of the denial phase is still believing they must be interested because of how amazing things were when you were in love. It doesn’t seem possible that they could already be in love with someone else (& it wouldn’t be possible, in a normal relationship). You believe that what you had with them was unique & special, something that they frequently reminded you of during the relationship.

So instead of recognizing that things are over, you spend a lot of time wondering what you could have done differently to save your perfect relationship. You look back on every single moment that led to the “downfall” & wish that it hadn’t gone that way. You think of creative ways to fix the things that you supposedly broke.

Here are some examples:

- “If only I hadn’t confronted them about their ex, then we’d still be together.”
- “If only I hadn’t traveled that weekend, then they wouldn’t have cheated on me.”
- “If only I’d bought them a nice gift, then they would have realized how much I cared.”
- “If only I hadn’t asked them to stop criticizing me, then they wouldn’t think I was so sensitive.”
- “If only I’d pretended nothing was wrong when they gave me the silent treatment, then they wouldn’t think I was so needy.”
- “If only I wore a different outfit that day, then they would have found me more attractive.”

What in the world! *How would any of those things ever justify silence, cheating, abuse, or even dumping someone? & why should changing any of those minor events have any impact on whether or not a relationship succeeds?* Love should be like a deep-rooted tree, not a sailboat. It should be stable & consistent, not conditional, based on changing situations – especially when half of your “mistakes” were perfectly reasonable reactions to unacceptable behavior.

If your entire relationship was hanging on a few “if only” moment going differently, then it was a terrible relationship. This means you were walking on eggshells, on the brink of a breakup any time something didn’t go exactly according to plan. This is not companionship & support. It’s like walking a tightrope with someone judging you the whole time, arms crossed, instead of extending a hand to help you safely to the other side. & if you fall down, then so be it. “If only” you hadn’t.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. This is supposed to be the stages of grief, not Jackson arguing with his 21-year-old self.

Just understand that these thoughts are completely normal, & they will start to subside as you dig deeper into psychopathy in the later stages of grief. If possible, please don’t act on the “if only” moments. You might have an optimistic high where you suddenly dismiss this whole abuse thing, & think that 1 nice gesture or apology could fix everything. It won’t. If this person really ever cared about you, you wouldn’t be running every single 1 of your mistakes through your mind, wondering with each one if that was the reason you were replaced. This is what silence & abuse do to a loving, compassionate human being. This is what happens when 1 person refuses to take any responsibility for their actions, while the other is willing to absorb all of the blame if it means keeping the peace.” – [Mac15, pp. 96–98]

4.2.7 Making Big Decisions

“1 of the most humbling aspects about working in abuse recovery is that I can’t tell anyone how to heal. Remember when you were a kid, your parents would give you a bunch of life lessons about how not to repeat their mistakes? Of course you ignored them, because no one can tell you how to be happy; you had to go off & make those very same mistakes yourself.

The stages of grief are exactly the same, but I still want to share some advice on the off chance that it happens to resonate with you.

During the denial phase, you should avoid making big, life-changing decisions. You will invest your happiness in so many different things, unable to realize that happiness must come from within. You will enthusiastically rip apart your life, confident that every idea you come up with is the next best solution.

But there is no solution.

There is nothing wrong with your job. There is nothing wrong with your salary. There is nothing wrong with your home, your phone, your profile picture, or your single status. None of these things is the problem. (You’ve been long trained to ignore the real problem.)

So in this stage, I strongly urge you to avoid making big decisions – especially ones involving money & friends. For now, you should *not* trust your gut instincts. Rarely will you ever hear me say that, but right now everything is out of balance. Your intuition is skewed, completely unhinged by the psychopath’s abuse.

You will have plenty of time to sort out the friendship situation after you’ve gone through recovery. If you are suspicious of toxic friends, simply distance yourself from them for the time being. It does not need to be personal or unpleasant. Just tell them you’re going through a difficult time, & you’ll reconnect with them when you’ve found some peace. Then you will be free to dedicate some time to recovery forums where you know people will understand what you’re going through. Your old friends will not get it, but this does not necessarily make them bad people. They will simply suggest that you “move on,” giving you the best breakup advice they know. Ask yourself: If you hadn’t gone through this experience, would you know how to empathize with a survivor?

If, in 1 year, you still want that new job, or want to send a nasty letter to a longtime friend, then go ahead & do it. But for now, your future self might be very grateful for your present self’s patience.” – [Mac15, pp. 98–99]

4.2.8 Education & Self-Doubt

“Symptoms: uncertainty, anxiety, curiosity, disbelief, excessive storytelling self-blame, contradicting yourself.

This is where things start to change really fast. Somehow, you come across the topic of psychopathy or narcissism or sociopathy. Whether it be through a lucky Internet search, some prior life knowledge you picked up, or a skilled therapist, you now have the biggest piece of the puzzle. This is why the label matters. From here, everything starts to fall into place.

You know deep down that something within you is horribly broken. Even though you impatiently want to feel good again, you also want to figure out what in the world just happened. When you begin to read through the list of red flags of psychopathy, you will experience extreme self-doubt. You will recognize most – if not all – of the warning signs, but you will wonder if you’re just labeling your ex a psychopath because you can’t handle the truth of how you ruined the relationship. This is, of course, the *psychopath’s* truth.

So you oscillate back & forth as you think about your idealizer & your abuser. *How could someone who thought you were perfect be the very same person who intentionally hurt you? How could they go from obsession to contempt in the blink of an eye?* It isn’t possible. There’s no way you dated a psychopath. They loved you. *Right?*” – [Mac15, pp. 99–100]

4.2.9 Cognitive Dissonance

“What I’ve just described is a psychological phenomenon known as *cognitive dissonance*. It’s a state of mind where your intuition is telling you 2 competing things. It’s totally natural after a psychopathic relationship, because you’re used to repeatedly being told things – instead of seeing them with your own 2 eyes, or feeling them in your heart. You constantly heard the psychopath make sweeping declarations of love & devotion, but you never actually felt them. You fondly remember the dreams you shared with them, & the future you planned together – but obviously those things didn’t happen.

So what do you believe? Their actions or their words? During the relationship, you probably spent a lot of time with their words. Cherishing them, idolizing them, analyzing them, & ultimately distrusting them. But despite your intuition telling you something was wrong, a part of you still desperately wanted to believe in the manufactured soul mate.

& now you're dispelling these illusions. You don't fully understand how their mind works, but you know something wasn't quite right. So there's going to be a battle going on in your own mind – a battle to quell the dream of love & passion so that you have a chance to see things rationally.

You will switch from 1 extreme to the other. 1st, they're a total monster who cheated & lied throughout the relationship. Then they're really not the worst person in the world; they were just insensitive, & definitely didn't hurt you intentionally. If you forgive them, then maybe everyone could be happy. But wait, some of those things they said to you were really cruel. They made you feel like garbage, patronizing you as if you were a child. Then again, everyone deserves a 2nd chance – you've always been taught not to hold grudges, & it'd be a lot more pleasant to remain friends with them. Plus, how could you forget those beautiful memories where you held hands as they said "I love you ..."

& that's the danger of cognitive dissonance. It brings you back to the additive love memories. It causes you to long for a broken dream, a manufactured lie. As you begin to work through these feelings, the diametrically opposed thoughts will become less & less extreme. But in the meantime, you are still very susceptible to their ongoing abuse. As long as you're experiencing cognitive dissonance, make no mistake: they will be able to trick you again. All it takes is 1 sweet word to send you right back to the idealization phase. *So how can you protect yourself?* – [Mac15, pp. 100–101]

4.2.10 2 Masks

"Delayed arrogance is common in sociopaths. When you 1st meet, they'll seem usually innocent, humble, childlike, & thoughtful. But as time goes by, they inevitably transform into a monster: manipulative, arrogant, & neglectful. Whenever they are grooming new targets, they're on their best behavior, hooking others with babylike charm. The reason for this is that most people aren't attracted to blatant arrogance, & so sociopaths develop this vulnerable, "cute" persona in order to sink their claws in. But once the target is hooked, their true colors come to light. At their core, sociopaths are smug, patronizing, & narcissistic. Because of these 2 opposing masks, targets will go through great lengths to reconcile this monster with the childish sweetheart they remember. Targets also deal with a considerable amount of victim blaming, where they are accused of being attracted to jerks, or told "it takes 2 to tango." It does not take 2 to tango when 1 person uses a completely manufactured identity to convince another person that they are alike in every way." – [Mac15, pp. 101–102]

4.2.11 No Contact

"After a relationship with a psychopath, the No Contact rule is the only way to stay safe from their manipulation & abuse. There are no exceptions to this rule. No matter how badly you were hurt, contact will only make it worse. If you have children or other lasting connections to the psychopath, engage in the minimal amount of contact possible.

Cutting contact with toxic people will transform your life. At 1st, it feels miserable – like you're going cold turkey from an addiction. But as time goes on, you come to discover that each passing day brings unexpected new blessings. You begin to develop self-respect, boundaries, & true friendships. Instead of running around absorbing & forgiving everything, you spend time with people who do not behave in a way that requires constant explaining. This freedom allows your spirit to thrive. Someday you will look back & wonder how you even tolerated interacting with such unhealthy people. Your new self begins to feel protective of your old self, & that's a pretty neat place to be!

No Contact is exactly what it sounds like. It means you don't contact the psychopath in any way, shape, or form. *So what constitutes contact?* More than you might think.

Phone calls. Text messages. Seeing them in person. Emails. Facebook friendship. Facebook messages. Cyberstalking.

Nothing good can come from contact with a psychopath, no matter how seemingly insignificant the contact might be. It will greatly hinder your healing process & you will always regret it later. Every bit of communication with the psychopath only serves to hurt you. They're always interested in triangulating you, but this can easily be mistaken for genuine care & interest. Given the chance, they will suck you back in with charm, only to resume the nightmare you remembered from the identity erosion. They will restore the idealization phase, triggering your return to cognitive dissonance. They will lie pathologically, driving you out of your mind. They will engage in word salad, uprooting your entire healing process. As soon as they get their claws into you again, you will be dragged back into their manipulative world. You must break free of this addiction – & the only way is through No Contact.

When your thoughts start to race & you're itching to make some contact with them, be aware of this. Find distractions for yourself. A new hobby, meditation, writing, work, a pet – anything to get your mind off the psychopath. The brain learns habits, so teach it healthier ones. When you notice your mind going back to the psychopath, take a deep breath & force yourself to think about other things.

The same goes for cyberstalking. Even though you're not directly communicating with them, you're still indulging an addiction. The only way to break that addiction is to cut off every channel with them, cold turkey. You can do it now by blocking them on Facebook, Twitter, & your cell phone.

You may think you'll feel better if you stick around to see their next target get dumped like you, but you won't. Nothing will change the pain you feel, except time & personal growth. Believe it or not, you will reach a period when you could not care less about what they are doing or whom they are courting." – [Mac15, pp. 102–103]

4.2.12 Closure Without Contact

"The following piece was written by my close friend & fellow administrator, HealingJourney. Her insights are amazing & I strongly encourage you to check out her book, *The Survivor's Quest: Recovery After Encountering Evil*.

All survivors of psychopathic evil know how extremely difficult it is to cut ties with a psychopath. & then once No Contact is established, survivors find themselves trying to pick up the pieces of their shattered hearts & lives. Many survivors write that what they want more than anything is to find closure. Some hope that they can somehow obtain that closure from the psychopaths. Others are convinced that closure is absolutely impossible. *All* survivors wonder, at some point during their recovery journeys, if they will ever find a way out of the darkness.

The good news is that *yes*, closure is possible. & no, it will *not* come from the psychopaths! It must come from *within*. The following are points on a possible path toward closure. This road map does not have a time line, & many of the points overlap:

Try to Let Go of The Illusion. The 1st step in healing from psychopathic abuse is to stop all contact with the psychopath. & the only way to do that is to let go of the image you had of the person you loved. Unfortunately & sadly, that person never existed. He or she was only an illusion, a mask the psychopath created in order to mirror & manipulate you. As crushingly hard as it is & as much as it hurts, the only way to find freedom is to stop believing in that illusion.

I clearly remember the beginning of the encounter I had with the psychopath; i thought he was the perfect partner for me! He seemed to understand me so well, & we had all the right things in common. It almost felt too good to be true! Then, when I discovered that he had so deeply betrayed me, in ways I never imagined were possible, I realized it *always* was too good to be true. All of it was a lie ... except for *me* & my feelings for him. I was real, & my feelings were real. & in the midst of the intense pain, I held on to the light – the light of truth – that was just barely left in my soul. Letting go of the “dream man” he pretended to be brought me closer to my own heart.

So do your best to let go of the illusion. When you let go, you’ll start to find the real you.

Search for Answers – But *Stay Safe!* When I realized that I had been involved with a pathological liar, I had a very strong urge to go on what I call “my truth-finding mission.” Everyone around me – *absolutely everyone* – discouraged me from investigating the psychopath. But I felt deeply compelled to uncover as many lies as I could, so I disregard their advice. It turned out that I made the right decision, because I conducted my mission *without making contact with the psychopath or anyone connected to him*. I also did not reveal my new knowledge to the psychopath or his fan club, although I desperately wanted to. Finally, when I exhausted every anonymous avenue available to me, I stopped. I was far from healed, & I uncovered only a portion of the truth, but I felt that I had reclaimed a part of myself. The entire process was an important step in rebuilding my self-respect.

It is completely okay to search for as many answers as you can, to uncover as much of the truth as possible, *as long as you follow the No Contact rule*.

Research Psychopathy. An encounter with a psychopath is not like a normal relationship, which means the aftermath is going to be very different from a typical breakup. Survivors are left with so many WHY questions, & those questions need to be answered in order for healing to occur. Survivors also tend to blame themselves for what happened, often because others do not understand what they have been through & usually make insensitive statements like “Why did you stay?” or “Why didn’t you see the signs?” or “It takes 2 to tango.”

But psychopaths are abnormal! At the time of the encounter, you did not know that such people existed. You were *innocent*. Be ready for others to discourage you from “focusing on them” – they might imply that it delays your recovery – but researching psychopathy actually helps you make much progress in your own healing. By learning to recognize the common tactics & games of psychopathic predators, you will realize that the abuse was never your fault. By learning how the psychopathic mind works, you will realize you were set up from the very beginning. & when it all begins to click for you, that is when you start to reclaim your power!

Allow Yourself to Feel & Think. All normal human beings attempt to avoid pain. Yet, paradoxically, it is by facing the pain & moving through it that we find beauty, because on the other side of our deepest suffering, we have the opportunity to experience the greatest joy. As you heal, you will find yourself moving back & forth through the stages of grief that are unique to the aftermath of an encounter with a psychopath. Allow yourself to feel all emotions as they come over you, which will most likely happen in waves. Also, allow the thoughts of the psychopath in when they overwhelm your mind, even though you may feel as if you are going crazy because you can think of nothing else. Continuously pushing the obsessive thoughts away can actually be more harmful than helpful. You most likely are experiencing symptoms of PTSD, & it is important to find resources that can help you work through the trauma of what has happened. This might include therapy &/or other healing techniques. Amazingly, if you step into the pain instead of running from it, you begin to see who you are at a deeper level. You develop self-respect & self-love & new confidence. You learn to trust your intuition. & when you are able to trust *yourself*, then you will start to find others who are worthy of your trust.

Accept What You Can & Cannot Control. When I learned the truth about the psychopath, I was extremely disturbed to realize that such evil exists in the world. The relationship was over, & I was deeply upset to see the psychopath move on to his new target, seemingly happy, not caring about the devastation he left behind him (me... broken me). My 1st reaction to this was complete heartbreak, shame, & outrage. I wanted to expose the psychopath for the monster he is. I wanted to convince the other person to leave him. I wanted him to apologize to me & actually mean it. I wanted justice, & I wanted revenge!

However, I knew that I could not stop him from lying to & manipulating & hurting others. I knew I could not convince his new target of the truth. & I knew I could not make him feel remorse for what he did to me. What I *could* do was focus on my own healing & my own life. When I made the choice to do that, 1 day at a time, I gradually felt happier & more peaceful. I

still wage a daily war to relinquish the desire to control what I cannot control, but, thankfully, it is not nearly as difficult as it used to be. You will never receive traditional “closure” from the psychopath. But the light you can discover within your own soul is *so much better!*

Trust in Your Own Unique Truth. Perhaps the most significant epiphany during my recovery came when I finally was able to believe in myself & trust in my own truth. Psychopaths are eerily similar in so many ways, & yet many of the details of my encounter seemed so different from other survivors’ stories. As I struggled to make sense out of what had happened to me, I heard so many opinions from so many people about how to heal, about who I was, about who I should be, about what to believe. I questioned myself, as I had always done, & as long as my intense self-doubt remained, my pain lingered. Ironically, it was only after reading survivor story after survivor story, so similar to mine & yet so different, that the fog began to lift. Only after reading so many other stories, & only after seeing my own worth, was I able to see the truth in my experience. I still have doubts, about so many things, but now I put them in perspective & listen 1st to the voice within my heart.

You have a similar voice in your own heart. Listen to it.

& please hold on to this truth: you *can* find closure without contact, & you *can* find peace on the other side of the nightmare. Read & learn about psychopathy, move through the pain, take back your power, & most of all, strive daily to believe in & love yourself, *your most authentic self*. You are your own best guide.” – [Mac15, pp. 103–107]

4.2.13 Un-Brainwashing

Contributed by SearchingForSunshine. I’ve written this especially for all the people who are struggling to reach the point of No Contact, & to maintain it. I know those early days of No Contact are pure hell, & while what works for me may not work for everyone, I hope there is something here that can be of help to someone.

Where you probably find yourself in the early days of No Contact: You’ve discovered what the word “psychopath” really means, for the 1st time, ever. In your desperation for answers about the toxic relationship you’re caught up in, you do some Googling. You type in the catchphrase that leads you to Psychopath Free. You cannot believe it, because the people you’re reading about sound just like the person you’re involved with. The words resonate completely in your gut. You mind even understands perfectly what was just happened to you. You have “aha” moments in rapid succession. You can’t believe you’ve finally found the answers. You’re ready to end it, right now.

To your horror, not long after reaching this decision (whether you’ve acted on it yet or not), you suddenly begin doubting yourself. “What if they aren’t? ... maybe, just maybe, it’s me ... maybe I’m imagining what they’re a psychopath, they did say that I’m needy ...” You Google that article you found, again. You read it again. You get a few more of those “aha” moments you got the 1st time you read it. Another few things fall into place. “Yes, it’s them, it’s not me!” you think. They’re a psychopath/sociopath, you know it for sure now. More realizations are clicking into place for you. You can see why they said the contradictory things that they said. You are remembering exact phrases they uttered, exact scenarios, & seeing them all in a new light. Yet, once again, you fall back down the hole of self-doubt. Once again, you find yourself wondering, “Is it me? Am I absolutely sure it’s not me?”

Why the cognitive dissonance tears us to shreds: What I’ve described above is what cognitive dissonance feels like – this is what it feels like to you, & how it felt to me, in my desperation to come to grips with what happened to me. You only feel this way because you were brainwashed into believing you were the dysfunctional party in the relationship. You were provoked by your partner’s lies/betrayal/broken promises into reacting, as anyone would be. They used that against you, to ensure that you believe it’s all your fault, to ensure they retain power over you. This makes you want to “give it 1 last try,” because feeling that it’s all your fault gives you control over the situation in that you believe that if you behave differently, they will become loving toward you again.

All of your thoughts about it being your fault are totally untrue. Only you can’t see this clearly because you’ve had lies about who you are & your part in this relationship pounded into your brain, over & over again. This creates cognitive dissonance, causing you to have doubts about ending it. Compounding this is the fact that in the initial phase of the relationship, they did an excellent job of idealizing & love-bombing you. The vicious circle then comes in to play, in that you cannot see clearly who they are & the cognitive dissonance won’t leave you until you’ve done some No Contact time. But it’s hard to feel at peace with your decision to go No Contact while the cognitive dissonance is wreaking havoc in your mind.

What worked for me to end the cognitive dissonance: Well, I went through utter hell inside this mental tug-of-war for the 1st 6 weeks of No Contact. Yet every single time I read the material available on psychopaths, narcissists, & sociopaths, all of my cognitive dissonance vanished. This was because my gut, my instinct, was recognizing the truth that it wasn’t me, that he was indeed a psychopath. The information I read resonated with such utter truth within my soul that even my confused mind couldn’t override & overshadow it. I realized that I needed to have more of those moments of clarity; I began to see how I had been brainwashed; I began to realize that I had experienced those moments of my gut instinct speaking to me before, just a few weeks into the relationship. So I realized the only way I was going to get through this was to tell my mind to shut up when that torturous tug-of-war cognitive dissonance began again.

I resolved to read the material describing psychopathic behaviors each time I had the need to tell my mind to be quiet. I understood that the way to healing & to getting my mind to grasp the truth was to have fewer questions running through my mind, & more truths resonating from deep within my soul – more of those “aha” moments ... In those early days, I also stayed away from all the triggers – places, music, & people – that reminded me of the relationship, &/or invalidated my experiences as a victim/survivor of a relationship with a psychopath.

This is exactly how I maintained No Contact, & shut up once & for all the doubting voice screaming at me through the cognitive dissonance, which before had never seemed to run out of ideas with which to challenge me.

What I'm saying is, there comes a time in your recovery process when all the answers to all the questions you are asking are just going to lead to more questions. There comes a time when the endless analysis needs to stop, a time when you have to learn to quiet your brain & learn to listen to your gut & accept what it is telling you. If you keep filling your brain with doubts because of the psychopath's lies, & reaffirming them, you won't leave any space inside your mind for the truth.

Your mind needs to be washed with, & awash in, the truth. The percentage of truth you put into your mind is in direct proportion to the percentage of psychopathic brainwashing that you put out of it. To put it simply, as the truth grows larger, the psychopath's brainwashing will grow smaller. The more your brain is washed in the truth, the more the lies that the psychopath pounded into your brain recede & eventually fade away. Then, finally, 1 morning you will wake up & realize that the truth has found its way into your mind; it's slowly filtered up from your gut, to replace all the lies the psychopath told you. There is inner peace, at last.

Hopefully, this section has provided you with some useful tools to jump-start your journey. Disseminating the truth is the best way to help yourself out of the dark. Knowledge is power to survivors, & poison to psychopaths. The more information you have, the better. & once it all begins to sink in – well, then you're really in for something.

Please see the Resources section at the back of this book for articles, books, & videos that can educate you & help you fight cognitive dissonance.” – [Mac15, pp. 107–111]

4.3 The Stages of Grief – Part II

“You found the missing puzzle piece – the word that changes everything. You discovered psychopathy. & from here on out, everything starts to fall into place. Suddenly you have words to describe what happened to you. Every inexplicable memory can now be explained, which leads to a lot of strange, new emotions. It'll feel unpleasant at 1st, but that's because you're recovering from some unpleasant. You'll question yourself a lot, & that's a good thing. Questioning yourself (& the world around you) is the start to a long path of introspection that will forever alter the course of your life.” – [Mac15, p. 112]

4.3.1 Understanding the Psychopath

Symptoms: physical sickness, need for validation, shock, disgust, “aha” moments, paranoia, sinking feeling in your chest.

This is 1 of the strangest & most important stages in the healing process. Education can only take you so far. To really understand the psychopath, you need to actually feel what they feel. Most victims live by the values of compassion & love, so it's nearly impossible to imagine empathizing with a psychopath. In fact, this is why they're able to get away with so much – because normal human beings automatically project their consciences onto everyone else.

As you delve deeper into your research, you will inadvertently lose a bit of yourself. You will become so consumed by psychopathy that you'll actually begin to understand how the psychopath's mind works. You'll recognize not just the red flags & verbal abuse, but the sadistic pleasure they felt when they destroyed you, the silence – even laughter – that you received when you were begging & crying. Instead of excusing everything as insensitive or dense, you look back on the relationship & view all of their behavior from a very different perspective.

& suddenly everything clicks.

It all makes sense, when it never did before. From the mirroring to the love-bombing to the identity erosion to the triangulation to the eventual abandonment. You feel disgusted. You realize you were never loved – just another target in a never-ending cycle. You start to see that you've never behaved like this in any other relationship, & it wasn't because they were special. It was because they were actively working against you from the moment they chose you.

You look back at all of the things that once made you feel paranoid, now able to see that every instance of abuse & neglect was calculated & intentional. & finally, you come to the horrifying realization that the love of your life – the person you trusted with all your heart – set you up for failure since the very beginning.” – [Mac15, pp. 112–113]

4.3.2 The Robot

“Because they have no identity of their own, the psychopath is able to become exactly what their target seeks in a romantic partner. You will notice a short “observation” period, during which they enthusiastically declare how similar you both are. During this time, they are simply listening to you describe your hopes & dreams, & then producing an exaggerated mirror image of everything you've shared with them. They use this manufactured “connection” to build immediate trust, quickly leading you to believe that you've found your perfect soul mate. They appear to be fascinated with you on every level, texting you on a minute-by-minute basis & posting all over your Facebook profile for your friends to see. This person begins to consume your entire life, & suddenly you can't imagine how you were ever happy without them. But then the triangulation begins. & this is where the predator's lack of identity is most clearly evinced. They start to lure in denounced former loves & potential future mates with ambiguous hints & inside jokes, subtly ensuring that you see it all. You begin to feel like you're playing detective, when actually the clues are being spoon-fed to you. These hints make you feel jealous & crazy as you watch your soul mate openly idealize other targets. But the strangest thing of all is that the psychopath's persona changes drastically in order to match these new targets. You find them flattering things they once insulted, laughing at jokes that aren't funny, & transforming their entire personality to become somebody you don't even recognize. If you point out the fact that something has changed, you will be deemed “crazy” or “hypersensitive.” & perhaps most unsettling of all, they often steal a little bit of your personality to use during the grooming process with their next victim. Like a sophisticated robot, they evolve & improve with every target, borrowing the traits that work & disposing of the depleted remains.” – [Mac15, pp. 113–114]

4.3.3 Intention & Sadism

“1 of the greatest myths surrounding psychopaths is this Hollywood pseudo psychology that psychopaths are actually victims themselves. Whether it be an abusive past, an absent father, or something in between – the idea is that psychopaths cannot help their behavior.

I don’t agree with this at all.

Unlike people with other mental disorders, psychopaths are keenly aware of the impact that their behavior has on others. That’s half the fun for them – watching people suffer. They pick up on insecurities & vulnerabilities in a heartbeat, & then make the conscious choice to exploit those qualities. They know the difference between right & wrong, & simply choose to steamroll straight through it.

The psychopath relationship cycle is not some accidental by-product of insensitivity & emotional “thickness.” It is a calculated, personalized process that psychopaths use to methodically torture their victims. Imagine the time & planning that go into mirroring someone else’s hopes & dreams. The psychopath spends months – sometimes years – playing the role of a completely different person. All for 1 end: your destruction. They did not feel even a small amount of love for you, even when they claimed you were the only one who ever made them feel this way. No, the entire time they were just closely observing you, patiently waiting for the fun to start. *Did you notice that as soon as you fell in love & became comfortable in the relationship, that’s when the emotional abuse started?* From there, you spent the rest of the relationship frantically trying to revitalize the soul mate they once pretended to be.

The problem is, many survivors equate the psychopath’s insatiable drive for attention with some sort of childlike insecurity. But they’re not insecure. They love themselves. They love the way they look, the way they can trick everyone around them, & the way their victims beg for them. When you are in a relationship with a psychopath, you are not filling some sort of void within their broken soul. They have no soul. They want to be worshiped & nothing else. They’re not a lost little boy or girl hiding behind a tough persona, their disorder is not a defense mechanism for deep-seated fragilities. You’re never going to find a “soft spot” within them. Just endless darkness.

At some point, you must stop thinking along the lines of “I’ll go No Contact because it’ll take away their narcissistic supply.” This implies that you still (or ever did) fill some sort of personal need within them. You don’t, & you never will. They do not seek out attention from others in order to inflate their ego. It’s already fully inflated, & I can assure you it’ll never deflate.

They want your attention so that they can consume you & then destroy you. They saw you as disposable trash. & given the chance, they might recycle you, but it’s never because they need you.

& what’s more, your healing process should not revolve around giving or withholding attention from someone else. You should be going No Contact because you genuinely believe that you deserve better. This is someone who manipulated, lied, abused, & deeply hurt you. As you develop self-respect, you should come to understand that this is all more than enough reason to remove someone from your life – permanently.” – [Mac15, pp. 114–115]

4.3.4 Am I a Psychopath?

“Too often, survivors come to the very disconcerting conclusion that *they* might be a psychopath. After months of studying the topic & thinking about the experience, I think it’s only natural that you might begin to question yourself & your own good nature. It’s a nasty topic, even addictive at times. When your mind constantly bounces back to psychopathy, it’s normal that you apply your knowledge to nearly everyone in your life, including yourself.

I’ve come up with several reasons why you are probably not a psychopath, because the last thing you need during the healing process is some nagging doubt that you’re evil. You don’t need this worry – & that’s the key word here: worry. Psychopaths would never worry about this. & moreover, they just don’t care. You’re scared because you see psychopathy as the root of all evil. But they don’t see their disorder as the terrible sickness that it is. They see it as a strength. They believe their lack of conscience makes them superior. Do you think like that? I’m going to guess not. So here are the main reasons you’re probably asking the question:

1. The Psychopath Made You Feel This Way. Throughout the relationship, the psychopath projects their flaws onto you. They call you needy, jealous, clingy, controlling, evil, & crazy, & you may start to believe you actually do act this way. But let me ask you this: *Have you ever felt that way in any normal relationship or friendship? Do you feel that way around your Constant?* No. *So what is the common denominator here?* The above behaviors are all characteristics of psychopathy, & you only exhibit them when you’re around this person. & it’s no coincidence that these traits slowly disappear as you spend more time away from them.

Victims tend to absorb all of the problems in a relationship, believing that they can forgive & understand everything in order to save the perfect idealization phase. When you do this, you end up absorbing many of the psychopath’s most horrible flaws, causing you to believe that you actually have those traits. After the identity erosion & grand finale, it is only natural to feel disgusted with yourself & your behavior. But you haven’t been yourself. You become a receptacle for the psychopath’s poison. But with time & No Contact, you begin to see that you don’t display any of those characteristics when you’re not around them. In fact, you seem to become more gentle, empathetic, & compassionate – closer to your most genuine self. That is the real you.

2. Your Personality Type. There’s this old saying that goes “Don’t believe everything you think.” This is extremely important to remember in the aftermath of the grand finale. Most survivors tend to share a variety of common personality traits, 2 of them being open-mindedness & susceptibility to suggestions. These 2 qualities are actually great strengths, but they can cause problems if you don’t introspect a bit & learn to control them. The issue is, when you ask yourself, “Am I a

psychopath?” your open mind will automatically entertain the idea. That’s not because there’s any rational reason to believe you’re a psychopath, it’s just because you have an open mind. That’s it. When your mind suggests something to you, you listen. & sometimes you just need to teach yourself to laugh it off as the ridiculous notion that it is.

Unfortunately, many survivors also tend to be very open to suggestions that they themselves are awful – & closed off to suggestions that someone else might be awful. As you recover & begin to return to a saner place, you should stop seeing yourself in such a negative light & start recovering your perspective. This means you adopt more of an “I’m okay, you’re okay” mentality instead of the toxic “I’m not okay, you’re okay” that dominated most of your relationship. So just remember that you have an open mind & are likely to be much more susceptible to hypnosis & suggestions than other personality types. Be aware of this, & learn how to use it.

Along these lines, depression can also be coloring your view. During depression, negative thoughts find a way to stay in your mind by convincing your brain that they are more important than the positive thoughts. Just like a virus, depression develops survival mechanisms so that you remain depressed. It convinces you that your positive thoughts are just delusions & ignorance. But those negative thoughts running crazy in your mind are not real. Your brain is playing tricks on you. You are not a psychopath.

3. You Have Boundaries. Abusers happily cheat, lie, verbally assault, manipulate, confuse, & ignore others, but survivors often find that when they try to react firmly & stand up to this abuse, they immediately end up feeling bad. Let go of this inner turmoil. Having boundaries is what makes you healthy. Intentionally & remorselessly harming someone else is what makes an abuser.

You are probably not accustomed to having boundaries. In fact, many survivors never had boundaries to begin with. A strange gift from the psychopathic experience is that you begin to find these boundaries. Some call it healthy narcissism, but I think “self-respect” is a better term. The problem is, boundaries & self-respect are completely foreign to you at this point. So when you begin to manifest these things, you feel like a selfish, abrasive jerk. When in reality, you’ve just stopped playing the role of a selfless doormat.

You may begin to find that old friendships & toxic dynamics fall apart as you become stronger. It almost feels as if you’re being punished for healing. But that’s not the case. You’re actually finally strong enough to allow only what’s healthy into your life. You’re not psychopathic or narcissistic for having boundaries & expecting a decent level of respect in return. You’re just a regular human being with feelings. But you may be surrounded by people who don’t want you to be regular – they prefer the person who caters to their every need. So they make you feel bad for taking on healthier habits. This kind of conditioning can make you feel psychopathic & unempathetic, but again, that is not the case. It’s what happens when selfish people stop getting their way. They fight for the status quo, because the existing dynamic suits them. But it doesn’t suit you, & that’s what boundaries help you realize. Just because you have to tell someone off or demand a bit of respect does not make you psychopathic. It makes you stronger. Every time you stand up for yourself, a part of your spirit comes back to life.

4. You Experienced The Relationship Cycle For Yourself. Psychopathic relationships have a tried & true pattern: idealize, devalue, discard – every single time. But they’re not the only one who cycles through that series. You experience phases, too. The difference is in the order. You idealize them, more than you have idealized anyone in your life. Then, you are discarded, left broken & alone to pick up pieces. & finally, you begin to devalue them as you learn about psychopathy. You deconstruct the person from the grooming phase, just like they deconstructed you during the identity erosion.

This is not a natural cycle for any person to go through after a breakup. Sure, plenty of exes end up disliking each other, but they don’t go through such a roller coaster of highs & lows, deconstructing personality traits they once idealized. Unfortunately, the only way to heal is to go through this toxic cycle yourself. Only then will you finally manage to see that it was all false. An illusion. A perverted mirror. In order to do so, you must be going through the unnatural process of undoing everything you once loved. Not just some of it. All of it. Because none of it was ever real. Only then you can find self-respect & reclaim your dreams.

Additionally, you will go through many other devaluing processes. Many survivors cyberstalk for a while, mainly because they have absolutely no idea what just happened. Social networking provides an opportunity to gain some more insight into the truth, but eventually you must realize that it is not helpful in your healing process. The bottom line is, cyberstalking counts as contact, & it doesn’t do you any good. You probably got addicted to cyberstalking during the idealization phase, when you isolated yourself & waited desperately by the computer for their every update. They knew this & loved the power it gave them. But realize that they were doing the same thing as you, although they were probably much better at hiding it. E.g., they might have claimed that they barely ever checked your Facebook feed anymore, & then accidentally referenced something you posted a few days ago. Or they might have said they weren’t expecting your call, when they were actually wondering what took you so long. So don’t beat yourself up for getting caught up in the mind games. Just understand that this addiction is unhealthy, & that self-control can finally put an end to it.

During & after the psychopathic relationship, you’ve probably done things you’re not proud of – you’ve lied, sought attention, & sent off angry emails. That doesn’t make you a psychopath. At some point, you need to forgive yourself & make a conscious effort to start making better choices. You are not that nasty, stalking, mirroring, vengeful ex. It takes a lot of time & effort to purge your system of the toxic relationship cycle, but you can get there, & you can seek out normal, loving relationships.

5. Your Empathy Is Completely Destabilized. You will feel empty & numb for long periods of time. That is the nature of psychopathic recovery. But numbness does not equal psychopathy. It means your emotions were trampled on & manipulated, & it’s going to take a long time for them to come back again. Yes, a psychopath is emotionally numb, but they are that way for life. They would never spend months mourning the loss of their own innocence or ruminating about their broken heart.

Your emotions & empathy are just in hibernation. & 1 day, the sleeping bear will wake up stronger than ever. When all is said & done, you will find yourself more perceptive & compassionate than ever before. So don't worry about feeling numb right now. It goes away, & it's replaced by something much better.

Remember my recommendation that you wait several months before forming new friendships & relationships? The reason is that you'll feel frustrated & depressed because you can't seem to experience the same love or high that you had with the psychopath. You'll feel like a bad person for getting annoyed that your new partner doesn't seem to be as attentive & sensual. You can't keep getting caught up in these postpsychopathic relationships, because they only harm you & the people around you. You will be overwhelmed with guilt, on top of your already damaged empathy.

So instead of beating yourself up for being unable to accomplish the impossible, spend some time introspecting & becoming your own best friend. But even introspection has its limits – at some point you must stop thinking & start living. This might take years, but you will know in your heart when you're ready. Too much introspection can drive a person mad. But just the right amount can bring about all sorts of wisdom & creativity.

6. You Have A Heightened Understanding of Evil. A lot of survivors once walked through this world believing that all people had some amount of good in them. The psychopath served as a nasty wake-up call from that blissful ignorance. As you learn more about psychopathy, you also learn more about human nature. You understand how & why the psychopath tricked you – how they played on your greatest insecurities. How they love-bombed you. How they set off a chemical addiction.

& then, suddenly, you might feel a little bit dark inside. It's like you've come too close to evil. & now you know how you could flatter someone into doing anything for you. Or how you could make someone feel suicidal. It's some really nasty knowledge that you'd probably prefer not to have. But think about it, would you ever act on it? Of course not. Your conscience would stop you in a heartbeat. That's what separates you from the psychopaths. Not the knowledge, but your conscience & resulting actions. So no, you are not evil for having this new understanding of people & the world.

J. K. Rowling wrote: "We've all got both light & dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That's who we really are." Keep that in mind during your healing process. Every person has their own demons – what defines us is how we choose to handle them.

Recall the blissful days when you knew nothing about psychopathy. Life was good. *Did you ever feel evil for enjoying a compliment? Manipulative for being kind? Ill-intentioned for doing a good deed?* My guess is no. It's only when you encountered something so sinister that you began to question yourself. Well, enough already. You are not a psychopath, & you never were. Like everything else, the soul heals & you will find your equilibrium again as your empathy & emotions come back to life.

You've been conditioned to see compliments & attention as some sort of weapon, but they're not. Appreciating a compliment or enjoying some attention every now & then does not make you a psychopath. You need to feel comfortable accepting these things from normal, healthy people. Don't let your understanding of how you were manipulated stop you from enjoying 1 of the nicest things in life: positive energy.

You are not a psychopath. You're the polar opposite. & that's the only reason you're asking this question in the 1st place." – [Mac15, pp. 116–122]

4.3.5 Delayed Emotions

"Symptoms: rage, depression, extreme jealousy, racing thoughts, hatred, overwhelming temptation to contact the abuser.

Once you understand the psychopath, you're going to experience a lot of unpleasant emotions. So get comfortable, because you're going to be here for a while.

In this stage, you will begin to feel all of the things you weren't allowed to feel during the relationship. Remember the emotions you brushed aside in order to maintain peace with them? Those didn't actually go anywhere – they just stirred around in your heart for a while, manifesting as self-doubt & anxiety. But now what you finally understand how the psychopath's games work, you're absolutely sickened. You feel tricked. Manipulated. Violated." – [Mac15, p. 122]

4.3.6 Rage

"Your self-doubt is replaced by anger. You know the truth. You see how you were used, groomed, & brain-washed. You're beyond angry. You want to murder them. You want to contact everyone in their life & tell them what they did. You want to write them a letter & tell them to burn in hell. You obsessively talk about it with your friends & family – you need to get your story out there. You've been shut up & minimized for so long, & now your voice is finally free.

Whenever you accused them of cheating or lying, they would turn it around & blame it on you, so you felt bad instead of mad. This cognitive dissonance caused a huge suppression of anger, but it is finally coming out now. You may also feel the delayed emotion of jealousy as you realize how long the cheating was going on – how they used your manufactured behavior to court someone else with sympathy & pity. The smear campaign makes you feel the need to prove & defend yourself.

This delayed rage is completely expected after a psychopathic relationship. It can take months, even years, to feel. Please, if possible, do not act on it. No good can come from it. The greatest thing you can do is to remain calm & composed. The psychopath wants you to feel rage so they can show everyone how crazy you are – & how much you still love them. They will use you for triangulation long after the relationship has ended, even when you go No Contact.

& what's more, anger can only take you so far. It's an essential part of the healing process, but it won't bring you any long-term peace. Its main purpose on the healing journey is to develop your self-respect – an understanding that you deserved so much better." – [Mac15, p. 123]

4.3.7 Depression

“You will swing back & forth between depression & rage for a very long time. You’ll have good days & bad days, unable to maintain any sort of consistency in your moods. 1 night, you will think you’re ready to move on; the next morning, you’ll wake up crying & screaming into a pillow.

You don’t want to be sad. & you don’t deserve to be mad. All you did was fall in love. *Why are you being punished for falling in love?*

You find it impossible to go anywhere without thinking about your abuser. Every couple you come across reminds you of your lost relationship. Your old love songs seem to come up on the radio every second of the day. You can’t even have a glass of wine without bursting into tears & embarrassing yourself.

& so you begin to isolate yourself from the world around you, surround yourself with people who understand you on discussion forums. You have obsessive, racing thoughts. The tiniest things set you off. Your boundaries are returning – or perhaps being formed for the very 1st time – & you can’t believe you let yourself sink so low. Only now are you beginning to realize how much you truly lost. How much you uprooted in your own life to make room for this evil person. Not just friends, money, & life experiences – but also your happiness. Your kind understanding of the world has been shattered. Instead of giving people the benefit of the doubt, you suddenly have trouble trusting.

You begin to notice a constant feeling of dread & tightness in your chest – the demon that wraps its claws around your heart, always there to remind you of everything you want to forget.” – [Mac15, p. 124]

4.3.8 When Empathetic People Self-Destruct

“I believe that most empathetic people have a “self-destruct” mode. This often happens when all of our efforts to maintain the relationship finally come crashing down, & we realize that no matter how hard we tried, it was never enough. Once we slip into that self-destructive mode, we go through a few phases:

1. Overdrive. In this phase you are desperately trying to empathize with everything & everyone around you. You’re reaching out to new people, attempting to give them exactly what you think they might need, & hoping for love & appreciation in return. You’re spending inordinate amounts of time & energy on people in need. During this period, you might find yourself agreeing with things you don’t truly agree with, & making a lot of connections with people that you will later regret. You are on a mission to prove that empathy can improve any situation or person.

2. Anger. At this point, you may still be denying the fact that you’ve surrounded yourself with people who are insatiable. Realizing that none of your efforts are working, you become furious & declare war against your past self, against everything you once stood for. No more Mr. Nice Guy/Gal. No more doormate. You overcompensate by becoming somewhat abrasive, & often lose friends in the process.

3. Loneliness. In every dreamer’s journey, there is going to be a long period of quiet & solitude. This is uncomfortable at 1st, especially after you have become accustomed to seeking the approval of others in order to feel a sense of self-worth. But eventually, this alone time actually becomes quite pleasant. Without so much feedback, you finally have a chance to focus on some pressing internal struggles. With no one’s judgments but our own, we have this great opportunity to discover who we truly are. It is during this alone time that we begin to rebuild our identity from scratch, after being wiped out by whatever darkness we encountered.

4. Balance. You start to discover that there is a healthy equilibrium somewhere in Sects. 1–3 above. You do not need to empathize with everyone around you. Empathy is something to be saved for people you trust & care about – people who are capable of reciprocating it. You also do not need to put on a tough persona in order to avoid being a doormat. You can demonstrate your self-respect simply by living it. & finally, you do not need to shut yourself off from the world to avoid being hurt. There are so many good people out there, & once you have properly self-destructed, you will be ready to take part in this magical world again. With a healthy balance, your qualities become gifts that will stay with you for as long as you live.

Some of us have spent years, even decades, without hitting the self-destruct button. Once we do, at 1st it feels very volatile & upsetting. But ultimately, empathetic people need to go through this journey. This is how we begin to form boundaries, & it’s how we learn to love the world again – this time with a little wisdom to go along with our wonder.” – [Mac15, pp. 124–126]

4.3.9 Exposing a Psychopath: Should You Warn the Next Victim?

“We’ve all been there. Through a lucky Google search, you came across your 1st few articles about psychopathy & everything started to fall into place. It’s uncanny, overwhelming, infuriating, horrifying, & a lot of other awful emotions.

For many of us, our 1st reactions are:

- Expose the psychopath.
- Warn the next victim.

It's so tempting to take some triggering words from an article you just discovered & send it to your ex & their next victim in an impulsive email, proving that you know exactly what they are.

Here is the assumption: The psychopath will be scared that you know what they are, finally wiping that superior or smirk off their face. The next target will read your letter & recognize all of the red flags & dump the psychopath immediately. You'll become best of friends & have coffee together everyday.

Here is the typical reality: The psychopath will use your words to prove to the world how obsessed, bitter, & crazy you are. You have to keep in mind that very few people know or care about psychopathy. So instead, they'll see someone who's still in love & can't handle rejection. Your frantic messages will be used to triangulate the new target, making them feel even more special & desired, using your "craziness" as a bonding mechanism.

Your message to the new target will fall on deaf ears. *When you were being love-bombed & idealized, would you have been swayed by a message calling your soul mate a psychopath?*

If you're already done these things, don't worry about it. Life goes on, & in some cases it actually does work out fine. I'm sure in retrospect, when the new target is on the other side, left destroyed by the psychopath, he or she will appreciate that you tried to warn them. Either way, there is no shame in feeling that overwhelming need for revenge, especially after what happened to you.

But you deserve to be happy, & happiness starts with No Contact. Your heart needs a lot of time & love to start healing, but that can't happen when your energy is focused on deconstructing an extremely toxic dynamic.

Share your story, vent all you need, write out unsent letters – these are all essential parts of the process. As thousands of forum members will tell you, it gets so much better, & there will come a time when you just could not care less about the new relationship. As days become weeks, & weeks become months, you'll completely forget about how long it's been & start living life for *you*. That is what this journey is about. Cultivating self-respect, gentleness, & happiness." – [Mac15, pp. 126–127]

4.3.10 Complex PTSD

“Symptoms: numbness, feeling of dishonest, flashbacks, triggering memories, aversion to love & sex, 2 “yous,” isolation.

Once you've felt all the emotions you needed to feel, your spirit will be left broken, exhausted. Because when all is said & done, you know you can't remain angry & depressed forever. There comes a point when it's no longer healthy venting – just addictive rumination. You know you'll never get back together with this abusive person, & you understand that you cannot change the past.

So what comes next? How do you go back to your daily life, learning to cope with the abuse you suffered? How do you enjoy each day without the excessive flattery & approval that you'd grown so accustomed to? Something about the world just seems different now. Lifeless. Dull. Hopeless.

You find that the most obscure triggers set you off, unable to enjoy a date or some time with an old friend. You're on high alert the entire time, constantly looking out for manipulation & red flags. The slightest jokes will offend you. That feeling of dread in your heart never seems to go away – warning you that anyone & everyone could be out to hurt you.

& then, after you spend time with others, you overanalyze the experience & come up with a list of reasons that this person shouldn't be in your life anymore. Then you feel awful for thinking those things, guilty & ashamed that you could be so disloyal. Your opinions of others will oscillate between positive & negative, just like they did for the psychopath. You are now applying the horror you experienced to every aspect of your life, even though the psychopath has been gone for quite some time.

Contrary to popular belief, you do not need to be a war veteran or a kidnap victim to suffer from PTSD. Your current situation fits every 1 of the criteria for this disorder:

- **Exposure to a traumatic event.** Yes, relationship abuse from someone you love is traumatic & life-altering.
- **Persistent reexperiencing.** Yes, through the “mean & sweet” cycle, you were repeatedly subjected to their abuse.
- **Persistent avoidance & emotional numbing.** Yes, this is the coping mechanism you adopted to excuse their behavior.
- **Persistent symptoms of increased arousal not present before.** Yes, you begin to feel these during the delayed emotions stage, ultimately manifesting as anxiety & fear.
- **Duration of symptoms for more than 1 month.** Yes, most survivors will require anywhere from 12–24 months of recovery before they begin to trust & love again.
- **Significant impairment.** You tell me – how do you feel right about now? I'd say “impaired” is an understatement.

As you come to understand that your brain chemicals were altered by this experience, you should feel comfortable seeking out professional help from those who know how to combat this debilitating obstacle in the healing process. There is no shame in mental illness – all you need to worry about is finding the right help for you. I personally had a great experience working with a therapist who specialized in relationship abuse. My time with her was life-changing, & she's responsible for so much of the peace I feel now. Keep in mind, just like anything else, there are also bad “professionals” out there. If you do choose to speak with someone, remember you have every right to like or dislike them. There are going to be so many professionals to choose from, so do not settle for someone unless you feel 100% satisfied. Trust your intuition when it comes to find the perfect match.” – [Mac15, pp. 126–129]

4.3.11 Truth Triumphs

“Those who have encountered a psychopath, sociopath, or narcissist often feel as if they have been touched by pure evil – haunted by a constant anxiety, self-doubt, & lingering darkness that can’t quite be explained. It feels as if your life force has been drained away, & you become numb to the things that once made you happy. People without conscience have this effect on empathetic beings – the reaction between soulful & soulless is life-altering. Ultimately, it comes 1 of the most important experiences you could imagine. You begin to see the world as it truly is, & yourself as you truly are. Your energy slowly returns, & because your spirit generates this power from within, it cannot be broken.” – [Mac15, p. 129]

4.3.12 Do-Over

“1 of the most common feelings associated with PTSD is powerlessness. Both during & after the abuse, you come to feel powerless to change your situation in any way. You realize that you were charmed, duped, used, & discarded – & there was absolutely nothing you could have done to avoid it. Just when you thought you’d hit rock bottom, the psychopath came along & took away what little remaining dignity you had. They made sure your behavior was as hysterical & embarrassing as possible. & no matter how terribly they treated you, it always felt like they were “winning” (I’ll go into this in much more detail later on in the book).

Once you realize this was all a game to the other person, this powerlessness begins to feel even more overwhelming. You look back at every instance when you were begging & pleading, now aware that they were silently enjoying your reactions. You recall each time they called you crazy & jealous, now aware that you were right all along – they *were* actively cheating on you. You think to yourself, “If only they would contact me 1 more time, that way *I* could be the one to ignore them.”

This is called a *do-over*, & I think it’s your spirit’s way of healing from a completely powerless situation. Your imagination is an incredibly powerful tool that wants nothing more than to make sure your heart stops hurting. So allow yourself to dream up these do-overs when the bad memories won’t leave you alone. Sure, the annoying part of your brain might try to remind you that none of it is “real,” but imagination is every bit as real as we decide it is.

Instead of begging & pleading, maybe you laughed at their nasty criticisms. Instead of apologizing profusely, maybe you found yourself demanding an apology. Instead of crying when they gave you the silent treatment, maybe you gave that silence right back to them. Instead of being dumped in the most insensitive way imaginable, maybe you were the one to walk out the door & never speak to them again.

Basically, you undo all of the parts in which they brought you to your knees. You do not allow them the satisfaction of calmly watching while you frantically scramble around for them. Instead, with your newfound knowledge of psychopathy, you become the calm one & beat them at all of their own games.

Not only is this natural after an abusive relationship, I think it’s actually much healthier than reliving the same trauma over & over again. You used your imagination to absorb their abuse & romanticize nonexistent good qualities in them during the devaluation. *So why in the world shouldn’t you be allowed to use that same imagination to work through all of this pain?*

With time, you’ll come to see that the frantic, broken, anxious, unhinged version of you was nothing to be ashamed of. You were simply a kindhearted person reacting to a very unkind situation. Those outbursts & behaviors were the result of your most admirable qualities being exploited & eroded. It took me quite some time to come to this conclusion, but when I look back on my old mess of a self, I actually feel a strange sort of admiration for that person. He was doing everything he could with an impossible situation, & I will always respect him for that.

Of course, a part of me would like to go back in time & save him from it all – but I don’t think that do-over would be particularly helpful to either of us.” – [Mac15, pp. 129–131]

4.3.13 New Pain After the Darkness

“After the psychopathic experience, life seems to stand still for a while. You pour all of your energy into research, validation, & healing. The world around you stops while you work to regain a sense of self. But inevitably, life goes on. & such being the case, painful things continue to happen. Whether it be death of a friend or family member, another breakup, loss of beloved pet, an illness, or anything else, you will experience pain. But after the psychopath, it’s different. You find yourself always going back to this: “I could have coped with this so much better if that psychopath thing had never happened.”

You burden yourself with more misery, finding that each challenge seems to lead you back to the toxic relationship, even if it’s totally unrelated.

This is especially true for breakups, where you had a glimmer of hope & joy with someone else – an experience that finally made you forget about the psychopath. & once that’s gone, the feelings come rushing back, like a 2nd wave of the identity erosion, even though the psychopath is long gone.

I don’t believe these feelings actually have anything to do with the psychopath. Your spirit has transformed, becoming more sensitive & vulnerable to sadness. You might initially interpret this as a bad thing, because it makes you feel weak when you need strength the most.

But this negative energy you’re feeling has a bigger & more important purpose. Instead of digging through old memories, allow yourself to let go. Cry as much as you want to. Send out waves of loving energy, to heal where it is needed, or to touch what is already gone. You will find yourself exhausted, but also at peace, connected to something deeper than yourself.

Dealing with grief will never be the same again, but that doesn’t have to be a bad thing. It only feels bad at 1st because you have no idea where to direct all of these new & overwhelming emotions. So you go back to what feels familiar – when you felt the absolute worst. But you soon learn ways to deal with painful emotions & direct them in a more healthy way.

Here's another thing to keep in mind when you're feeling down: *How many other things have become easier to cope with because of this whole experience?* Most survivors find better friendships, healthier relationships, self-respect, boundaries, & a broader connection with humanity.

Negativity can work like a rolling snowball sometimes, & it's important to remember how far you've come. Give yourself some credit for pulling yourself out from the ashes.

You survived the darkness. You do not need to fear it anymore." – [Mac15, pp. 131–132]

4.3.14 Embarrassment

"After making it through the early, ugly stages of grief, many victims feel ashamed of themselves & the relationship aftermath. They cannot believe they sank so low, actually begging another human being for acceptance & approval. It feels like an insult to your soul, & rightfully so.

To make matters worse, you probably spent a lot of time defending yourself to anyone who would listen – waging imaginary arguments & trying to explain your changed position about the relationship, telling others that they weren't actually the perfect partner you once claimed them to be, but instead an abusive psychopath.

Unknowingly, survivors often continue to seek approval from external sources long after the relationship has ended. It's a habit that you picked up after placing all of your self-worth in the psychopath's oscillating opinions. When you continue these patterns with others, you might end up with some embarrassing memories – especially if you had always prided yourself on being independent & positive.

It's sort of like a big dark cloud over your otherwise good track record. Your life became a bag of marbles, spilling all over the floor. Your thoughts & emotions scattered everywhere, making it impossible to find clarity & truth. Then slowly, over the course of many months, you began putting the marbles back into the bag. The longer you did this, the more you started to understand what really happened & how your behavior might have come across to others.

But don't worry about this anymore. Forgive yourself & move on – everyone else has. Nobody thinks about you as much as you do. That might sound rude, but I think it's more humbling than anything else. It's a reminder that everyone fights their own battles every single day, & most people won't even remember the embarrassing thing you said a week ago unless you continually bring it up.

Your goal is to focus on the present. There are so many good things coming your way. You will discover more about yourself & this world than you could ever imagine. Because the thing about missing marbles is that you have to search in strange places to find them." – [Mac15, pp. 132–133]

4.3.15 Cognitive Dissonance Returns

"The old saying goes that time heals all wounds, & that's true to an extent. The problem with recovery progress is that it encourages you to forget about how bad things really were during the relationship. It's a healing mechanism for your heart – selective amnesia to protect you from the painful memories. You might find yourself thinking about forgiveness & meeting up with your ex for lunch, just to find some peace from the whole thing.

Don't make this mistake: you will just be dragged right back into the same old mind games. You are only projecting your recovered state of happiness & optimism onto your memory of the relationship. This is actually healthy, because it helps to quell the racing thoughts. But you absolutely should not act on these improving moods. Take note of the progress & attribute it to your own efforts. Understand that you are feeling better *because* of your time spent away from the psychopath – not because you're ready to seek closure. Bringing them into your life again will only throw you back to the earlier stages.

I will go into much greater detail about forgiving your abuser in the final chapter of this book. For now, your only job is to continue No Contact & treat yourself kindly." – [Mac15, pp. 133–134]

4.3.16 Trauma & the 2 Worlds

"1 of the most bizarre parts of recovery is feeling as if there are 2 "yous": The cheerful, trusting soul from before the abuse. & the abrasive, paranoid mess that you fear you've now become. But I think there's something else going on here.

Instead of 2 yous, let's say there are 2 worlds. The material world that you see & hear every day. & then another one that you can feel only in your heart – a special connection with the universe & all beings. As kids, I think we're born with a natural link to both. But as we become socialized & grow up, we develop a stronger preference for the 1st. Slowly, our connection with the quiet world weakens.

To make up for this, we begin to develop a powerful guard – something to keep us safe & confident in the world we've chosen. This guard takes care of our deepest insecurities, vanities, & failures. We learn to judge outwardly, instead of perceiving inwardly. Things are comfortable. From day 1, we are developing this guard, teaching us how to be "strong." Strong, of course, being completely defined by the material world.

& then, throughout the course of life, adversity wears away at our guard like sandpaper – hardship, loss, & heartbreak. Slowly, we rebuild this connection with the other world, gaining wisdom & a gentle compassion for the people around us. We look back at our younger selves in embarrassment, wondering how we could have been so obnoxious. At least, that's how I imagine it goes.

But trauma is different.

Instead of sandpaper, the guard is shattered in a single moment. Whatever the damage, your guard is not nearly enough to save you from something so painful. So it collapses, & it can never be rebuilt.

During this brutal disconnect, you lash out & cause harm to others. You overfocus on their behavior, unable to recognize your own – after all, this is what you’ve become accustomed to. You’re dependent & needy, desperately latching on to anyone who will hear your story. You become numb to the things that once made you happy, fondly recalling an “old self” who seemed so much more cheerful.

You are indeed a mess. But in which world?

As you heal from your wounds, you begin to find peace in places you haven’t explored since childhood. Imagination. Spirituality. Love. & I mean real love – not the narcissistic, hypervalidating garbage that we craved from a psychopath. You start to fill your void with empathy & compassion, qualities that have been with you since the very beginning.

Mindless socializing doesn’t do it for you anymore. You seek out deep, philosophical conversations with like-minded individuals. You often find that you don’t fit into various social settings that you used to enjoy. You become frustrated when people don’t understand why topics like psychopathy & empathy are so important. You forget that most people still live comfortably with their worldly guard – as you once did – & therefore remain unaffected by these issues.

You struggle to navigate between these 2 worlds, blaming your difficulty on the 2 yous. You find that no matter how hard you try, you can never go back to that old self – the person who seemed so much happier & more innocent. But you also start to notice that your interactions with others are becoming much healthier. You’ve developed boundaries, self-respect, & self-worth. You do not need your worldly guard to be yourself, & that is a strange realization indeed.

& with time, you find that you don’t need a guard to be happy at all. For once, self-respect actually comes from – well – the self. You see how much this universe has to offer to those who listen.

As you become more comfortable with yourself, you see that your trauma did not destroy you. It ripped apart your guard & opened a connection with some other world – with all of humanity. You haven’t lost your childlike wonder. It has been with you all along, & now you are wise enough to live peacefully in both worlds. With joy & wisdom.

You can feel the pain of others, & therefore create much deeper & more meaningful relationships. You understand that what you have is special, & cannot be shared with just anyone. You find peace from listening to the quiet corners of the world. You do not mind time alone, for that is simply time in another world.

The most important thing to remember for all trauma survivors: there is nothing wrong with you. You are beautiful. You were thrown into an impossible situation, & you survived. Your innocence was taken away without your permission. You were violated. But in this violation, you regained something that takes most people a lifetime to find.

Your path may be painful, but it is also special. The universe has different plans for you. Remember, there are others who are permanently barred from any access to the spiritual world. Psychopaths have no place there, & it is why they hate empathetic beings. You are a nagging reminder of something they will never find. They will die here in the material world, with no deeper connection to this great universe.

Sometimes, I believe the spirit world leaks into this one. You can feel it. An overwhelming sadness, when it is not your sadness. Joy for a friend, when it is not your joy. A strange “coincidence” when 2 people are thinking of each other. Even through this book, I believe we are all connected.

So now imagine these 2 worlds merging. A place where feelings & compassion are apparent, manifesting themselves for all to see. Where our spirits soar together like birds, singing songs of joy. We can see each other’s pain – thorny vines wrapped around a troubled soul. The flickering lights in a victim’s spirit. But we also see each other’s joy – bright colors & glowing lights emanating from our hearts.

This would be an incredible world for us, but not for the psychopaths. Because if the worlds merged, it would be a world of empathy where psychopaths cannot exist.

So let us work together to bring these 2 worlds closer. To dismiss darkness, & to teach all empathetic human beings that they are beautiful. Never be ashamed of your abuse or your past. You are here now for a reason – & this is only the beginning.”
– [Mac15, pp. 134–137]

4.3.17 The Loss of Innocence

“Symptoms: profound sadness, mourning, loneliness, acceptance, seeing the world in a different way, hope, accidental wisdom.

There is a difference between sadness & depression. Depression is hopeless, frightening, & mind-numbing. But sadness is beautiful – the gentle moment when your spirit prepares itself for a fresh start.

When you begin to feel real sadness, it’s a sign that you’re reaching the light at the end of the tunnel. Instead of devastating emptiness & upsetting triggers, your heart is ready to make 1 last transition. You’re done mourning the loss of your soul mate – & instead, you are finally ready to mourn for yourself. You go from a perpetual state of thinking about someone else to suddenly thinking about what *you* lost during all of this.

& most survivors find that they’ve lost a lot: friendships, money, career opportunities, self-esteem, health, & dignity. Fortunately, these losses can all be reversed. You find that as you return to your roots, all of these things fall back into place. Some will even improve – especially friendships & relationships.

But there’s 1 thing you will never be able to get back: your innocence. Keep in mind that innocence has nothing to do with ignorance or naïveté. It’s simply the well-intentioned belief that all human beings have some good in them – the trust & love that you wholeheartedly gave to someone else. That’s innocence.

Moving forward, you will never see the world like that again.

That’s not to say you’re now hypervigilant & jaded. It just means that you’re going to view the world & the people around you in a more realistic light. Instead of automatically projecting your own goodness onto others, you let their actions speak for themselves. You see, this is not at all a bad thing. It’s just sad at 1st, because you can never know you’re losing your innocence until it’s actually gone.

Many survivors find that they didn't really know how to express sadness or anger throughout most of their lives. They were instead expected to be a cheerful servant to everyone around them. & so they developed this stubborn light in their hearts that always sought to see the best in everything, no matter how much the evidence pointed to the contrary.

But you will come to see that the psychopath is something that your heart can never light up. & you will try. That's what cognitive dissonance is all about. For months, you oscillated between the idealization & devaluing phases, trying to understand which one was real. You reasoned that of course they loved you, because they said they did. But then you looked at their actions, which did not at all reflect their words. You know intuitively that love is not insulting, criticizing, cheating, & lying. Love does not make you feel suicidal. Love does not mock you for having hurt feelings.

& so, the more you thought about it, the angrier & more depressed you got. The light inside of you began to fade away as this person consumed your every thought. The light could not transform their behavior, so instead it started to absorb it, growing dimmer every day.

As time went on, you felt profound rage & an emptiness that you'd never felt in your life. Throughout most of the process, you probably didn't even know how to express it. So on the outside, you remained this happy person that everyone expected & needed. You wouldn't want to inconvenience anyone with your feelings. But deep down, something was changing. The light was almost out, & suddenly you found yourself feeling very resentful & irritated with many people – people you thought were your friends.

After each interaction, you'd return home & find yourself reflecting for hours on what had just taken place. Who was that? It wasn't you. You didn't truly believe the things you were saying, & you certainly held no respect for the gossip & insults they so adored. Suddenly your light isn't justifying it all away as humor anymore. You're just left with the cold reality that you've surrounded yourself with some very unkind people.

You're left as a drained battery that's still expected to fuel a rocket. Your energy is broken. You want to automatically love everyone like you used to, but you can't. Unkindness & superficially frustrate you when they never did before.

For a long time, you probably remembered the psychopath so fondly not because they were a good person, but because of your own light. You were rewarded every single day for denying the bad & glorifying the mediocre. You now associate that relationship with your light, but that does not mean they actually made you happy. It means your innocence made you happy, because it was protecting your very gentle heart.

The ability to distinguish your innocence from genuine happiness is essential to your healing process. Simply because you once felt euphoric with the psychopath & with friends who frequently insulted you does not mean that life was actually great at the time. Likewise, just because you feel sadness now does not mean that your life is somehow bad. On the contrary, things are looking brighter than ever before. You're just struggling to enjoy the world without your light.

But you don't have to. Your light never left you – it's just waiting. Yes, it's a bit shy right now. But as you begin to develop your self-respect & boundaries, the light will flicker back on. & as you explore your love & spirituality, the light will return stronger than ever.

So many survivors long to go back to a time when life was “normal” & “happy,” but how much of that was ever real? How much of that time you spend desperately trying to replace the negative with positive? How much of it was projection, while other people were busy projecting their own poison onto you? When your light fades, especially after a trauma like this, it becomes far more difficult to keep projecting goodness onto others.

So I believe that you do not truly miss your past, but instead you miss the light you associate with it.

1 thing I've noticed about every member of psychopathfree.com is that none of them want to feel this darkness. Not a single one. They do not want to be victims. They want to recover their happiness & joy. They feel a burning anger about being angry in the 1st place. They've practiced forgiveness throughout their entire lives, only to be confronted with the most unforgivable experience of a psychopath. Why? What was the point? Why did their identity need to be destroyed like this, leaving them so incredibly broken & drained?

With time, you will find your own answers to these questions. Your innocence was a beautiful gift, but the paradox was that you never knew you had it. This was why you tended to pour so much of your love & affection into other human beings. Because you hadn't yet felt that love for yourself. Through the healing process, you make that final leap. As uncomfortable as it may be, you find self-respect & begin creating healthy boundaries. Instead of trying to fit in with others, you find yourself wondering why people don't behave more like you. Empathetic, compassionate, loving, outgoing, creative, easygoing, responsible, caring, ... The gentle souls who walk this earth & touch it only with kindness.

When your light is gone, you can no longer use it to fix all of the broken things around you. So in its place, you begin to surround yourself with people who actually share & appreciate your most wonderful qualities. & you can't discover all of that magic until your innocence is gone, giving you an opportunity to see the world as it truly is – as you truly are.

This journey is about you, & it always has been. Once you discover this, you are finally ready to fly free.” – [Mac15, pp. 137–140]

5 Freedom

“You can free your spirit with the very same imagination you once used to imprison it. With this knowledge, you take full responsibility for the person you're about to become.” – [Mac15, p. 141]

5.1 Looking Back, Moving Forward

“Once you have truly & completely disconnected your spirit from the psychopath, you will be able to look back on the experience from a less emotional perspective. You will begin to understand that you are not missing out on anything – in fact, you got lucky.

I know it doesn’t seem like that at 1st. It always feels like they’re winning, because that’s the image they present to the world. Psychopaths always seem to be winning because they manage to abuse & replace victims with a big smile on their face, all the while appearing innocent & cheerful to the entire world. While you’re at rock bottom, they seem to be happier than ever with their new life. But it’s all an illusion – manufactured success to impress others & evoke negative feelings in their past victims. This is not the behavior of a winner. This is the behavior of a loser desperately trying to convince themselves & others that they are superior. A psychopath is incapable of feeling all of the most wonderful human emotions: love, trust, & compassion. Sure, they pulled off their latest con with great success, but just because a person gets what they want does not make them a winner.

So they pranced off into the sunset with some other partner, but you’ve forgotten about something very important. How can any single human being go from being so abusive to a sudden, new, & perfect relationship with someone else? They can’t. It’s emotionally & logically impossible.

You might wish they would break up with the new victim, just for the validation. But it won’t make any difference. The psychopath will repeat their cycle until the day they die or settle down with a comfortable target. You do not need to stick around & watch. They’ll maintain the shallow illusion of success & happiness no matter what happens. You will never gain any satisfaction from their downfall. Instead, you will come to understand that their entire life is a failure – a sham.” – [Mac15, pp. 142–143]

5.1.1 The Anomaly

“a-nom-a-ly [n]: something that deviates from what is standard, normal, or expected.

During & after an encounter with a psychopath, you probably found yourself behaving in ways you never imagined: lashing out, pleading, begging, taking revenge, writing nasty letters, apologizing profusely, blaming yourself, blaming others – a far cry from your usual fun-loving, easygoing self. You probably feel ashamed about this behavior, but it’s time to let that go. Any emotionally healthy human being is going to react strongly to emotional abuse. The fact you’re ashamed about it means you have a conscience.

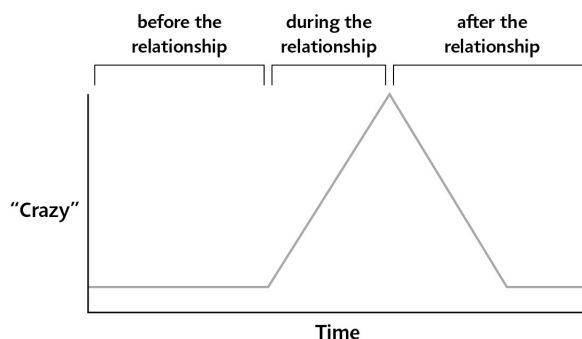
During the idealization, you were tricked into a frenzied excitement. During the abuse, you were doing everything you could to hang on to that manufactured dream. During the silence, you were frantically trying to figure out what you did wrong (did you know that silence sets off the same receptors in the brain as physical pain?). & after that, you saw your abuser happily run off with another person as if you never existed.

How is anyone’s heart supposed to withstand all of that?

The answer is: it can’t. That’s why your entire personality seemed to transform into someone you barely recognized. Your emotional responses imploded upon one another, all in a very human attempt to respond to a completely inhuman experience. & now you’re left with a lot of embarrassing memories & concerns about your own good nature.

But was any of this behavior normal for you?

I’m a visual person, so I made this chart to illustrate what I’m trying to say:



Before this person entered your life, you never behaved like this. After this person was gone from your life, you never behaved like this. So what does that tell you?

Assuming an average human baseline level of partly crazy, along with some expected craziness during the recovery period, the spike in the chart still seems abnormally huge (scientifically speaking, of course). If you take into account that this spike never existed in any of your other relationships, suddenly we have some very compelling evidence that suggests this “craziness” might actually be an anomaly.

This anomaly was situational – specific only to this very strange & very hurtful experience. During the recovery stages, it takes quite some time for things to settle back down into a healthy (like healthier) equilibrium, but the point is: the process only begins once you’ve gone No Contact with this person, & not a moment sooner. So what does this really say about their influence on you? Was it positive or negative? Looking back at your Constant, did you ever experience these strange spikes with them?

Now keep in mind, your brain is probably going to play some tricks on you. You'll think to yourself, "Well, the reason I reacted so strongly is because this was the most intense love of my life," or "The reason I'm so depressed is that I just lost the best thing that ever happened to me."

This is why recovery is so important. It's a time for us to discover that these feelings are neither natural nor healthy. Falling in love is an intense thing, but it's not supposed to evoke feelings of desperation, anxiety, & fear. Likewise, breakups are almost always going to be painful, but they're not supposed to leave you an unrecognizable shell of your former self.

Psychopaths would love for you to believe that this was a perfectly healthy relationship – that you just fell too hard & too fast. In fact, they scoff at the idea that anyone should need to "recover" from them, because they do not feel things like heartbreak & devastation. So the next time your friends, family, or ex-partner make you feel guilty for the time it's taking you to heal, remember that your recovery path is also an anomaly. You're allowed to take as much time & energy as you need to feel better, because you're recovering from an experience that hugely deviated from the norm.

So wherever you are now – whether it be in the midst of an abusive relationship, emptiness after the breakup, or shame for your own uncharacteristic behavior – forgive yourself. If you've spent your whole life being patient & kind with others, don't start questioning your entire sense of self now, just because of what this relationship did to you. Look back at those moments, accept that it was unusual, & be gentle with yourself.

You've taken responsibility for your anomaly. A psychopath will never take responsibility for the way they behave *every single day.*" – [Mac15, pp. 142–145]

5.1.2 A Letter to the Next Target

"In nearly every toxic relationship, there is another player: the replacement. At 1st, this person is the main source of contention & hatred in your recovery journey. They are presumed to be the home wrecker. They ran off happily with your soul mate, flaunting themselves all over Facebook, while you became the crazy, jealous ex. This person stole your dream.

But with time, you come to see that this person actually saved your life.

This is a letter for every "next target." I'm not suggesting you send it to anyone. That wouldn't accomplish a thing & would only serve to hurt you, pull you back in. But we all want to get to the point where we can write this letter, & I suspect we would all wish, in retrospect, that it was a letter we were sent.

Dear ...:

I cannot reach you directly, for it would only send me back into a world of insanity that I have no desire to revisit. But I can hope that you might come across this letter & learn that there are always 2 sides to every story. You have already been told one. Here is the other.

I hated you. I watched you run off with the love of my life, happily & shamelessly showing the world what you had done. It took me weeks to realize that the infidelity had been going on long before our relationship ended. It took me months to realize that my pain & tears were used as a device to manufacture your sympathy. & now it will take me years to recover from the insecurity that comes from being triangulated with another person.

But I do not hate you anymore. I fear for you.

Although we have different personalities, bodies, & spirits – when it comes to this relationship, we are no different.

You see, I once rode the high that you're currently riding. I was the special one. The most beautiful, perfect, flawless partner in the world. I saved them from the pain inflicted by their last, crazy ex. I sympathized with them about how horribly they were treated. I was elated to be the one who finally made them happy after all of their alleged suffering. They were fascinated by me. They spent every waking moment texting me & showering me with attention.

Does this sound familiar?

One must wonder, in this short span of time, how I suddenly became crazy. Bipolar. Jealous. Needy. Clingy. Abusive. How did that happen? Is it really possible for a person to go from flawless to horrible in the blink of an eye? & furthermore, is it really possible that their previous ex was all of these things as well? & what about the ex before that?

The common denominator has become startlingly clear.

For so long, I punished myself. I truly believed that I deserved my pain. Something must be wrong with me, I thought, in order for them to run off into the sunset with another person.

But then I realized, I was once that person. I was you.

& because of that, I understand that I can never save you from this nightmare. Victims of psychopaths cannot escape once they have been groomed. For the rest of your relationship, you will deny reality & invent reasons that you might be the exception. You will lie to yourself, desperately trying to re-create your perfect dream. But ever so slowly, your identity will begin to fall apart. They will push your boundaries until you don't even know who you are anymore.

Another person will enter the scene. It is inevitable in relationships with narcissistic predators. You will be strung along for as long as possible, as I once was. Your increasingly volatile reactions will be used against you, to evoke sympathy from the new target.

& eventually, you will be me.

This is why I fear for you. I would not wish the pain & suffering I've experienced on anyone. I know that your intentions were not malicious. I know that you were being spoon-fed the exact same lies I believed a long time ago.

The story you've been told is false. It was a pity ploy, designed to enhance your fairy tale & consume your heart. You will not believe that today, but someday this letter will make sense. Brutal, heartbreaking sense.

I can only hope that the aftermath of your abuse might be guided by this letter. I can only hope that this might provide you with the tools that I was never given. A puzzle piece, to jump-start your journey.

I do not hate you. This is what they would want.

I will not carry on their legacy by taking part in these triangles anymore, injecting jealousy & hatred to fill the void of their soul.

I've made it through to the other side, & I know you can, too. Please have the same empathy for the person who replaces you. We can only ever stop this cycle of abuse with compassion for one another, by recognizing that all human beings deserve to be treated with respect, kindness, & honesty.

Wishing you love, hope, & above all: freedom.” – [Mac15, pp. 145–147]

5.2 Introspection & Insecurities

“You were manipulated, insulted, degraded, belittled, & neglected. Full responsibility for this goes to the psychopath. It does not matter if you were vulnerable or insecure – no decent human being should ever take advantage of another. None of it was your fault.

By now, you may have educated yourself about psychopathic behavior, learned the signs, & validated your experience. You should be disgusted by the psychopath's behavior & have no desire to see them ever again. I hope you have found a comfortable landing place after experiencing the stages of grief – on the road to self-forgiveness, healing, & love. But you may still be stuck in a place of insecurity, not trusting your judgment, thinking that you were blind enough to fall for a psychopath & worried that you cannot trust yourself to make good decisions going forward. Hopefully you've reached out to a healing professional or a recovery group, & have found the support you need to recover from the trauma you have suffered, & you will find sure footing as you walk into a psychopath-free life.

However, as essential as support is, there comes a time when you need to start trusting yourself again. This book & the Psychopath Free forum are not crutches – they are stepping-stones. Sooner or later, all survivors must learn to make decisions on their own, without seeking the opinions of everyone around them. Better life choices can only come from within, & you will know when you're making them because your intuition & self-respect will skyrocket. You certainly won't need to seek any external approval.

Introspection is a great way to discover why you're looking for this approval in the 1st place. It could be rooted in your childhood, past friendships, the psychopathic relationship – or any combination of the above. In order to better understand how all of this came to be, you can look back on the relationship & examine the toxic dynamic that formed. The psychopath's mirroring techniques are actually an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take a look at your own demons.” – [Mac15, pp. 148–149]

5.2.1 Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

“It's time to start asking questions. Why did this happen? What are your vulnerabilities? Of course these vulnerabilities aren't your fault, but it is important to understand how you were able to be exploited. This will help you to further deconstruct the bond with your ex, & protect yourself from any future emotional abuse.

This experience is all about cultivating a healthy self-esteem that comes from within, not from any sort of external validation. We all have insecurities & vanities – many of which we're probably not aware of. True self-discovery comes from practicing introspection & becoming aware of those little flaws.

This part is really up to you, but here are some of the most common reasons survivors give for falling for the psychopath in the 1st place: looks, money, career, & unfulfilling marriage, need for attention, need to be appreciated, fear of being alone. Digging deeper, they find the insecurities that were at the root of their reasons: *Their good looks validated my own attractiveness. I am worried about financial stability & my ability to provide for myself. I was looking for their career success to prove that I'm successful, too. Their attention made me feel beautiful, interesting, worthy, etc.*

Now look at your relationship with the psychopath. Whatever you needed most, they validated & provided. Pay special attention to the specifics of their excessive flattery. These are what you were seeking validation for.

So what are your insecurities? Get out a piece of paper & make a list. This will save your life down the road. Once you're aware of these traits, you will also become aware of the people who try to manipulate them. & even better, you can begin to make changes – to better yourself & improve your life. E.g., why should you need someone else to tell you you're attractive in order to feel it in your heart?

Those who have conquered their demons will be completely useless to a psychopath. You won't be susceptible to the psychopath's grooming if you do not require validation, but instead simply enjoy a compliment every now & then. Psychopaths feed on unhealthy needs, not everyday kindness. With time, you will find yourself less & less attracted to those who excessively flatter & praise you.

Keep in mind, there is another kind of vulnerability: the good kind. Your dreams – sexual fantasies, life goals, romantic endeavors, perhaps raising a family – are beautiful, good vulnerabilities that make you human. Do not let the psychopathic

experience change these things. Next to your list of insecurities, make a list of your dreams. You must never mistake your passions for flaws. & likewise, your empathetic nature is not a weakness – although the psychopath certainly makes you question that.” – [Mac15, pp. 149–150]

5.2.2 Cowardly Love

“Psychopaths don’t just shower you with praise & flattery – they groom you to reciprocate. In the very beginning, they send constant text messages & want to know what you’re doing at every moment. If you don’t respond fast enough, they’ll send quick follow-ups with more compliments. At 1st, it seem like they truly need you – like you’re the answer to all of their supposed insecurities & crazy exes. You come to rely on this communication as a source of happiness & self-worth. & that’s when they start to pull back. Once you’re hooked, they’ll suddenly start to seem slightly bored & annoyed by your attempts to continue the dynamic that they created. This leads you to feel needy, smothering, & unhinged. Your excitement about finding perfect love rapidly transforms into a constant fear of losing it. This is how cowards manufacture “love” in others. Since they are unlovable in their true forms, they learn at an early age how to engineer desperation & desire.” – [Mac15, p. 150]

5.2.3 Sympathy for the Devil

“Adorable. Charming. Lovable. You’ll often hear these adjectives used to describe a psychopath. It’s all part of their plan. You were probably never attracted to arrogance, jerkiness, & overconfidence. Instead, you’re drawn to the innocent, sympathetic partner – the one who tells you you’re making them happier than anyone else. But then something shifts. Instead of being the person that makes them happy, you desperately need them to make you happy. There is a strange pattern among most survivors: going from “giving them attention” to “needing their attention” in the blink of an eye. How did this transition happen? How did you lose your self-esteem to someone who seemed to have none to begin with?

When you 1st met the psychopath, you probably felt sorry for them. They had so many sympathetic qualities: their ex had abused them, they were insecure about the way they looked, they’d been so unhappy until they met you, etc.

This is where your empathy kicks in. You’ve done it all your life: you see someone feeling inferior, & you know how to make them feel better. You want to heal them. & so you put all of yourself into raising someone else up.

The psychopath genuinely seems to adore all of your efforts. They compare you to their exes, idealizing you above everyone else. It’s as if all of your energies finally have a purpose, & you’re so appreciated.

Many survivors report not even being attracted to the psychopath at 1st. But with time, you begin to see them as the best-looking person in the world. You can’t even think of anyone else sexually. How did this happen? By pouring all of your empathetic capital into healing their supposed insecurities, you come to a point where you actually start to believe your own kindness & compassion. You told them how smart, funny, successful, & attractive they were, & you started to believe it yourself.

You also become obsessed with proving your loyalty, because you believe the problem is their insecurity. So you open up to them & tell them how much you need them. If you make yourself vulnerable enough, surely they will learn to overcome their inferiority complex.

But that’s not the problem & it never was.

You know now that you spent all this time chasing a manufactured illusion: you were under the impression that they thought they were lucky to be with you. You probably didn’t like that power dynamic, so you built up your partner in order to make them feel better. & this is how they hooked you: with sympathy. If you perceive them as childlike, your natural instincts kick in, & you do everything you can to prove how much you care. This is likely the way you’ve dealt with people throughout your life: when others have no self-confidence, you try to build it for them.

Like a psychopath, you can probably sense insecurities. The difference lies in how you act upon those insecurities. Psychopaths see them as a way to manipulate & control. Empathetic people, on the other hand, seek to cure insecurities with love & compassion. This is why so many survivors find themselves surrounded with negative people after the breakup: because for a long time, they probably gained their sense of self-worth by making miserable people happy.

So when the psychopath came along, you were willing to do whatever it took to build up their happiness. You constantly complimented their looks, you didn’t mind paying for dates, you laughed at their jokes even when they weren’t funny. & in return, you were rewarded with their overwhelming appreciation that gave your life meaning. Your self-worth was sky-high because they were feeding it.

But somewhere in this whirlwind, you suddenly found the tables turned. It happened fast. Instead of sympathetically reassuring the poor guy or girl, you found yourself desperate for *their* approval. They began to make it clear that they did not actually need all of that attention. In fact, they found it very annoying. When you complimented them, you received an arrogant laugh or a disingenuous “you too baby.” It’s as if you became the relationship newbie, & they were the one who would take things from there.

Additionally, they made sure you knew that they were getting attention from other sources. Your unique ability to make them happy wasn’t so unique after all. This triangulation was pure torture.

They used the silent treatment to punish you & deride your once-needed sympathies. You began to feel stupid, unattractive, needy, & useless. Your solution was to continue sacrificing yourself to make room for their “feelings.” You suppressed complaints about their lying or triangulating because they made it very clear that this kind of talk was unacceptable.

Do you see what happened? They made sure the ball was in their court. & the scary thing is, despite your own beliefs, it was never in your court to begin with. All they did was make you believe it was. By giving you this false sense of self-confidence & importance, you opened up fast. This is why you trusted the psychopath very quickly & let them into your life without a second guess.

This is also why the grand finale was more terrible than anything you’ve ever felt before. It was the outright dismissal of your self-worth. You invested all of it in them, thereby giving them the power to take it away. You never recognized the game they were playing, because you were too busy pleasing their invented childlike persona. After all, how in the world could a child be plotting manipulation & domination? & then they declare “checkmate” when you thought you were playing checkers.

The hard part is that you weren’t just addicted to the flattery & attention they gave you. You were actually more addicted to their appreciation of all you gave them, because this appreciation gave you self-worth. Without their appreciation, you feel empty, & that’s why the recovery from a psychopathic breakup takes so long. You are not just getting over a romantic encounter; you’re rebuilding yourself self-worth from scratch.

That’s also why you become so sensitive to the reactions of future partners. Until you go through the recovery process, you will be bouncing around trying to find a replacement for the approval that you lost – something to give your life meaning again.

But there is good news here, & it outweighs everything else. Once you begin recovery, your life changes forever. You start to find overwhelming self-worth in your own values, behavior, & heart. Remember those negative people I mentioned above? Slowly but surely, they begin to disappear from the picture. At 1st, you question yourself & remember how “happy” you were with them. But as you redefine your self-worth, you come to realize that *you* created this happiness. & similar to your relationship with the psychopath, you thought these people needed your happiness. Well, this isn’t your responsibility anymore. You have better things coming your way.” – [Mac15, pp. 150–154]

5.2.4 What’s Your Personality?

“Do you ever wonder why you hate conflict & criticism, while others seem to have no problem with it? Do you wonder why you enjoy quiet time on your own, while others can’t stand it? Do you sometimes feel alone & misunderstood, in that no one else really experiences the world the same way you do?”

On the forums, 1 of our most popular threads is about the Myers-Briggs personality test. If you haven’t ever taken it, you definitely should! Visit Personalities.PsychopathFree.com to check out the quick quiz, read about each personality type, & see other survivors’ results. Essentially, it’s a type indicator that looks at how you make decisions & perceive the world. Then it places you into 1 of 16 different personality types.

Of course, every human being is unique & won’t fit perfectly into a box with billions of other people, but many survivors have found the test to be hugely helpful in understanding their own personalities. Each personality type is composed of 4 letters, with each letter belonging to a category having 2 possibilities:

- I (Introvert)/E (Extrovert)
- S(Sensing)/N (iNtuitive)
- T (Thinking)/F (Feeling)
- P (Perceiving)/ (Judging)

My type is INFP – the Idealists – & when I discovered this test, I realized a lot of important things about myself.

1st of all, introverts are allowed to be introverts. I spent most of my life trying to surround myself with as many friends as possible to prove that I was having fun, but secretly I usually wanted to be alone out by the river, watching the sunset & thinking about stuff. Well, now it’s not a secret! I am free to enjoy time by myself without feeling that there’s something wrong with me.

The next part (iNtuitive over Sensing) just means I’m more big-picture-oriented. In case you can’t tell from my “research” throughout this book, I don’t really care about details very much. I am much more interested in the world as a whole – how humans interact with one another on a broader scale, & how we can describe these feelings in a way that others can understand.

The F part (Feeling over Thinking) wasn’t exactly a big surprise. I walk around the city randomly crying to sad classical music, which is probably really weird to the other pedestrians.

The last one (Perceiving over Judging) means I tend not to like deadlines, structure, or having my weekends filled up with plans. It also means I would be well suited to be with someone who remembers to do things like pay bills or turn off the stove that time I got distracted by cat pictures & almost burned down my apartment.

So put all of that together, & what do you get? A complete basket case! Wait, no, I mean – an Idealist! Yes, that sounds much better.

As I learned more about my type, I also discovered some important challenges. 1st of all, INFPs have pretty intense mood swings every once in a while, where suddenly all of our bad memories come creeping back & make it feel like we’re never going to be happy again. I rarely share these moods with others & instead seek out alone time to work through the feelings on my own. After a sunny walk or a solid night of sleep, I find that these moods go away & life is good again. Learning to cope with these dark spells has been a key part of my own recovery & growth. I’m still working on it!

Here’s another one: INFPs are usually extremely easygoing, unless 1 of our principal values has been violated. Then we defend those things in an uncharacteristically rigid way. So instead of sometimes turning into a gigantic butthead, I have found that I am most content spending my time with people who do not violate my values to begin with. Then I never become harsh or rigid in a way that I know I’ll later regret.

I’m poking fun at myself, but that’s kind of the point. When we learn about ourselves, we can become more balanced & take our flaws a bit more lightly, instead of blindly allowing them to dictate our lives. This makes it far easier to enjoy our strengths.

Let’s do 1 more: INFPs place a great deal of importance in our romantic relationships, feeling an unusual amount of love & loyalty for our partners. Sometimes this means romanticizing qualities in others that don’t actually exist, mainly because we

want to be able to love everything about them. When I realized that it's okay to love myself regardless of my own flaws, I also became much more comfortable loving others regardless of their flaws.

If personality analysis sounds fun to you, I really recommend taking the test! Maybe it won't mean much, but I think you'll discover some pretty cool stuff about yourself." – [Mac15, pp. 154–156]

5.2.5 Alone Time

"Full disclosure: I am actually relieved when people cancel plans on me, so I may be a bit of an outlier on this topic. But even so, I think quiet time alone can really be beneficial. We live in such a fast-paced, constantly changing world where there are temporary distractions & stimuli at every turn. Instead of spending a night reflecting on the day, we turn to TV or the Internet to dull the boredom & relax. This makes sense after a tiring day, but we also miss out on a lot of opportunities for self-improvement.

There's so much you can do on your own: meditation, journaling, painting, gardening, cooking, walking, working out, listening to music – the list could go on forever. When we get more comfortable spending time on our own, we learn a lot about ourselves. At 1st, it can all be a little bit daunting – especially if we have negative things on our mind. It's not very fun to spend time with those thoughts.

But that's the magic of alone time! You are completely & 100% in control of your own happiness. You can imagine anything you want, transforming a bad mood into a good one. Or maybe you want to feel the bad mood fully, in which case you can cry all you want, & nobody can judge you. When you're alone, there's no pressure to be someone you're not. For a while I actually used to need time alone in order to remember who I was. When we're constantly surrounded by people – especially toxic influences – it becomes really easy to forget themselves. We get caught up in drama, gossip, & negativity.

This is especially true after the psychopathic encounter. The psychopath becomes our entire life, & we find ourselves consumed by daily arguments, lies, gaslighting, & manipulation. Instead of being our true selves, we transform into an extension of them, constantly trying to understand & defend ourselves from their mind-boggling behavior.

So what happens when all of that is finally gone from our lives? It seems like everything should be blissful, but most of us know that's not the case. It's difficult to just slow down & relax after we've become accustomed to such a high level of drama. What's going to fill that void?

This is why alone time is so important.

Our mind has been on overdrive for so long, it needs some dedicated discipline to take a step back & remember what it's like to live a life *without* all that drama. Without constantly trying to gain someone else's approval. Without fearing that you've made 1 small misstep that could ruin everything. Without playing detective because someone else's behavior is sketchy. Without the love-bombing & flattery that once made you feel so good.

When we're alone, we don't have any of those external factors swaying our behavior. There is nobody to validate (or invalidate) our thoughts except ourselves. We're our most authentic & raw selves, which can be scary or enlightening, depending on your perspective.

For me, it was a little bit of both. Scary at 1st, because I really don't like myself at all when I finally started to take a step back & look at my life. I'd done a lot of awful things after our breakup, & I had deluded myself into thinking that it was all for some noble cause to warn or help others. In reality, it was nothing more than obsessive revenge. After a while, I realized that it wasn't my ex's behavior that upset me any longer – he rarely crossed my mind anymore. It was my own subsequent behavior that I still struggled to understand & accept. How did I become that monster? How could I learn to forgive myself for such deplorable behavior? I violated my own code of ethics & values, which I believe to be the very foundation of a person's character. I encountered my own darkness, & it was ugly. There was no taking those things back. There was no blaming someone else for my own actions.

Right after the breakup it was like I had entered some sort of manic train-wreck state that couldn't be stopped. But, like most undesirable emotions, it's just a matter of teaching the brain new habits. At 1st, it was frustrating. I'd have a nice quiet week where I finally stopped dating & trying to replace the "love" I lost. The next weekend, I'd suddenly get the urge to go out & I'd end up right back in that same manic state. Everything would come crashing down the 1 stupid decision.

But it's always 2 steps forward, 1 step back.

Eventually, I found that I actually preferred that quiet time by myself. The thought of going out was exhausting. The thought of spending time with negative people was exhausting. I stopped giving in to other people – even well-intentioned ones – & just didn't do things that I didn't want to do. Something in my brain really was rewiring. I started going outside a lot & thinking about stuff & myself. I'd always dreamed of writing books, so I actually wrote books! I was in touch with a completely different set of emotions, & that old scary train wreck wasn't anywhere to be found.

Over the summer, I started this new hobby of swimming in the river & watching the sunset with some sweet white wine over ice. Instead of triggering "OMG I NEED A BOYFRIEND" mode, it just makes me happy. To this day, I sit there for hours after work & imagine story ideas, completely in awe of the beautiful world & people around me.

When you are the most important person who can disappoint or inspire you, everything becomes very exciting. It also becomes quieter. Because it's a lot easier to be a quiet, genuine version of you than it is to frantically maintain a loud version of you that isn't really you at all. If you find yourself desperately trying to prove to the rest of the world that a certain version of yourself is the real you, then it's probably not the truest version of you.

I used to be afraid of spending time alone, afraid of facing ugly truths about myself & my life. But now I'm mostly at peace with myself. Sure, I'm still scatterbrained, insecure, & moody – but those things don't control my life anymore. They're just little puzzles that I work on when I'm diving into the water." – [Mac15, pp. 156–159]

5.3 Self-Respect

“Psychopaths create chaos whenever they go, all the while maintaining a cover of complete innocence. They steamroll straight through each target’s life, leaving behind nothing but destruction & confusion. Responsible, successful people suddenly find everything falling apart – from once-stable, cheerful friendships to careers to self-esteem. In a matter of months, even weeks, a psychopath will effectively destroy all of the harmony & trust you’ve spent your entire life building. They walk into your life, charm you into trusting them, engineer paranoia & panic, & then watch intently as you fall from grace. In the end, they disappear without another word, leaving you alone to pick up the pieces. You end up questioning your sanity – your very understanding of reality. But with time, you come to fill this darkness with qualities you perhaps never valued in yourself: empathy, compassion, kindness, & creativity. In their efforts to destroy & deceive, psychopaths always underestimate a dreamer’s strength. We may not be ruthless, but we are resilient.

At some point, you will find that instead of trying to gain everyone else’s approval, you are wondering why people can’t be more like you. Why can’t they be easygoing, kind, caring, selfless, accommodating, & self-aware? This is called *self-respect*. This is your self-worth coming from within. Of course it still feels good to make someone else happy, but now you have a much better measure of who deserves your light. & this will bring you joy for the rest of your life.

You will also begin to discover that the psychopath targeted you specifically because of these assets. This does not make them weaknesses; all you needed was the self-awareness & self-respect to take pride in them. To quote my honorary aunt Peru: “[Psychopaths] are fascinated with human emotion & are forever honing their craft of mimicking ‘normal.’ Empathetic people have the full spectrum of emotions, so it’s like a master class for them. Also, [psychopaths] can suck out of these people the life force they lack. Giving & trusting, empathetic people make perfect targets.” & of course, there is nothing wrong with being giving & trusting. Self-respect is simply about coming to expect the same thing from others.

This is when you begin to discover all of your strengths. Many of these were qualities you always possessed but never valued. You realize that your compassion, empathy, & love are not weaknesses; they are the most incredible gifts in the world, when applied to the right people. You start to understand who you’re truly meant to be. It took the psychopath’s cruelty to make you see exactly who you never want to be. You laugh at their earlier mirroring, when they told you that the 2 of you are so much alike, because you realize you are nothing like them. You begin to explore your creative side, & you stop caring what others think of you. Old friendships may also start to change as you change & become more confident. Your boundaries are returning, or perhaps being formed for the very 1st time.” – [Mac15, pp. 160–161]

5.3.1 Boundaries

“Building boundaries is 1 of the most difficult parts about developing self-respect. It feels unnatural, almost psychopathic at 1st. How can you be strict with people who need your help? & moreover, how do you deal with those who accuse you of being unreasonable or hypersensitive because you’re no longer their doormat?

You must come to differentiate unreasonableness & hypersensitivity from healthy boundaries. The people who accuse you of being unreasonable are very likely to be abrasive, rude, or unpleasant themselves. The only difference is, now you’re not their doormat. They will do whatever they can to maintain the existing dynamic, because more boundaries mean less complacency. You should never feel the need to defend yourself against a friend. You should never have to explain why you can’t make plans 1 evening. & you should never be walking on eggshells, trying to rephrase a text to avoid an unpleasant interaction.

These people-pleasing habits are toxic to you, & often stem from a need to make others happy. But sometimes, there isn’t any deeper origin to these patterns beyond simply being a gentle person. If you naturally tend to be agreeable & friendly, toxic people will sense this & latch on to you. They quickly discover how to manipulate you with guilt-tripping, passive aggression, & martyrdom. This snowballs, as more & more of these people find you. You become stuck in their cycles of insecurity, which is often the reason you’re already desensitized to the psychopath’s abuse.” – [Mac15, pp. 161–162]

5.3.2 When Not to Say “I’m Sorry”

“Gentle people tend to feel very guilty after they stand up for themselves or reprimand someone for inappropriate behavior. This immediate apology for maintaining boundaries is exploited by toxic people. They come to expect your self-inflicted anguish, & know that they don’t actually need to change their behavior, because you’ll feel bad soon enough anyway. Additionally, your desire to reconcile allows them to call you “bipolar,” for alternating so quickly between firmness & compassion.

You should always feel comfortable sitting down with a friend & mentioning a concern. Normal people are receptive to suggestions for improving themselves, especially if they’re phrased kindly. Empathetic people should be especially invested in making sure they haven’t hurt your feelings. But toxic people will instead blow up, turning the conversation back on you. Or they’ll blame their past & offer up fake apologies, only to continue the exact same behavior the following week. If you find yourself repeatedly excusing someone else’s bad behavior, stop & consider why they couldn’t simply behave in a way that didn’t require excusing to begin with.” – [Mac15, p. 162]

5.3.3 Channeling Empathy

5.4 30 Signs of Strength

5.5 Spirituality & Love

5.6 The Fool & the World

5.7 A Bigger Picture

5.8 Afterword: The Constant: Revisited

References

- [Mac15] Jackson MacKenzie. *Psychopath Free: Recovering from Emotionally Abusive Relationships With Narcissists, Sociopaths, & Other Toxic People*. Expanded Edition. Berkley, 2015, p. 304.