

Pathological Love Relationships

By Linda M. Shake, PhD LPC LMFT

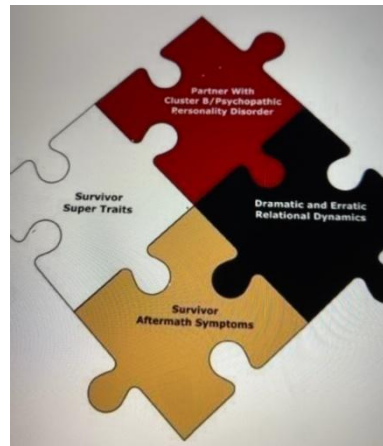
Psychopaths have always been part of society. At least 60 million, possibly as high as a 100 million people are severely impacted by someone's dangerous disorders of narcissism, antisocial personality disorder, and psychopathy (Brown & Leedom, 2008). The overarching concern is the lack of professional training and public safety education about this dangerous part of the population. "The Dark Triad of disorders is estimated to cost \$560 billion per year, mostly in medical and mental health costs to their victims who have been traumatically impacted" (Brown & Young, 2009-2018, pp. 11-12).

There is a vast amount of information that comprises the field of relationship study; too much to cover in this article. Therefore, the Dark Triad, the four identifiers of pathological love relationships (PLRs) and the four core impairments will be briefly discussed here, concluding with a section addressing reasons women become victims of pathological love relationships, and why they stay.

There is a set of disorders belonging to a part of the population which have low or no conscience. This set, known as the Dark Triad, consists of The Charming Psychopath, The Personable Narcissist, and The Edgy Bad Boy Antisocial Personality Disorder. The characteristics and symptoms of the psychopath are based partly on control and dominance, generated from having no conscience, including predatory tactics naturally motivating them to manipulate others (Brown & Young, 2009-2018). The psychopath is counting on his most alluring, and appealing, but feigned characteristics of his mask, to lure the unsuspecting, potential partner into his darkness. This is the part that draws the woman, or potential partner, into his dark world, as these characteristics are appealing to a potential partner. The psychopath is often portraying someone who is extroverted, listens well, appears to be caring, and charming (Brown & Young, 2009-2018).

The Dark Triad can be further explained by the four identifiers, which include symptoms of a Cluster B personality disorder, dramatic and erratic behavior evident in the relationship dynamics, super traits of the survivor, and aftermath symptoms/atypical trauma. Cluster B personality disorders include antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Personality is expressed in how one thinks, feels, relates, and behaves. In personality disorders however, there is poor functionality in these areas (Brown & Young, 2009-2018). The pathological love relationship is characterized by dramatic and erratic behavior, which refers to the psychopath's disordered areas of thinking, feeling, relating, and behaving. These individuals are attracted to partners who have super traits, which encompass extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The survivor's presentation of aftermath symptoms are described as atypical because they are often diagnosed as having posttraumatic stress disorder

(PTSD), which is not always an accurate diagnosis. For instance, in PTSD, there are flashbacks of the traumatic event. In atypical PTSD related to pathological love relationships, the survivor often has a combination of flashbacks of negative and positive events. Flashbacks of the positive events activate longing and emotional pain in remembering the relationship (Brown & Young, 2009-2018). The aforementioned components can be better conceptualized by Brown's depiction of puzzle pieces:



Brown and Young describe the four core impairments of the abusive partner to include self-identity, self direction, intimacy, and empathy. In severe self-identity and self-direction impairment, the psychopath's boundary definition and goal setting is poor. With regard to severe empathy and intimacy impairment, the psychopath is limited in the ability to consider the other person's struggling and vulnerabilities, and there is poor positive and long lasting connection.

Why do women stay in these relationships?

The traits of approachableness, trusting, and having an optimistic nature, all common in women who have super traits, target her for the psychopath. The woman, or potential partner, sees others as she sees herself, which is one reason she stays in a dangerous relationship even when the harsh darkness of reality emerges, as she believes in the possibility that he can change. She persistently tries to make the relationship work, even though she is in a relationship that is a reoccurring pattern of inevitable harm (Brown & Young, 2009-2018). Survivor lack of information is a strong component of why women stay in the pathological relationship (Brown & Young, 2009-2018). One of the most important components of education is for therapists to inform survivors that there are specific neurological deficits in the brain of the psychopath, which include the limbic, amygdale, hippocampus, and other brain regions (Kiehl, 2006; Raine & Yang, 2006).

Survivors who find their way out of these damaging and dangerous relationships all need awareness, education, validation, trauma treatment, super trait education, life restructuring, and the ability to find meaning in the suffering they have endured (Brown & Young, 2009-2018). All of these steps are necessary in the survivor's recovery, especially learning about super traits, as they will be strong components in recovery. Conscientiousness is a super trait that can be instrumental in a survivor's recovery, as it is a strong driver of perseverance and commitment to healing. The main message for survivors to know is that trauma, even of this magnitude, is treatable. Recovery is possible.

The information in this article represents the intense work of Sandra L. Brown, M.A., and her team. Ms Brown has devoted 30 years of her career to the study of pathological love relationships. She is the CEO of The Dangerous Relationship Institute—A Relational Harm Reduction and Public Psychopathy Education Project. She is deeply committed to informing the public about the dangerousness of these relationships. For more information, you can access Sandra Brown's website: www.saferrelationships.com. There you will find a plethora of information on dangerous relationships, resources and articles, videos and more.

Linda M. Shake, PhD, is a licensed psychotherapist in Corpus Christi, Texas. Dr. Shake has 30 years of experience in the field of psychology. She holds Clinical Fellow Designation in the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists and is working on her full certification in the treatment of survivors of pathological relationships.

Questions:

One (1) distinct way that our Journal stands apart from other *Journals* is that each article includes discussion questions for training purposes. This allows for the completing of the “missing link” plaguing most modern-day *Journals*: *Journal* articles are written for other scholars, not the students that should be the primary sources served.

Dr. Shake’s thought-provoking article pertaining to pathological love relationships warrants further review:

1. How can pathological lovers (individuals with no conscience) affect their lover’s health?
2. Without identifying any actual individual, what advice can you give to supplement Dr. Shake’s advice on how to being in a relationship with a pathological lover?
3. What are the characteristics of being in a pathological relationship?
4. Do you agree with the reasons that Dr. Shake includes related to why women may stay in relationships with pathological men?
5. What do you think of the work of Sandra Brown’s Dangerous Relationship Institute ([Bing Videos](#))?
6. Without mentioning or referring to any individual, what do you see as the greatest danger of being in a relationship with someone with psychopathic tendencies?
7. What do you see as the three (3) most important characteristics of a healthy relationship?

References

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed).

Arlington, VA: Author.

Brown, S.L., & Leedom, L.J. (2008). *Women who love psychopaths: Inside the relationships of inevitable*

harm. Health and Well-Being Publications, LLC.

Brown, S. L., & Young, J. R. (2009-2018). *Women who love psychopaths: Inside the relationships*

Inevitable harm with psychopaths, sociopaths, & narcissists (3rd ed.). Balsam Grove, NC: Mask

Publishing.

Kiehl, K. A. (2006). A cognitive neuroscience perspective on psychopathy: Evidence for paralimbic

system dysfunction. *Psychiatry Research*, 142(2-3), 107-128.

Raine, A., & Yang, Y. (2006). Neural foundations to moral reasoning and antisocial behavior. *Social*

Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 1(3), 203-213. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsl003>