

Tears and Healing; The journey to the light after an abusive relationship

by [Richard, 21CP](#)

Living with a Sociopath Partner –

You're not Crazy

(Chapter 3)

It is painful and confusing to live with a sick partner, whether you call it sociopath, psychopath, or antisocial personality disorder. For many in these situations, the first handhold we need to grasp is that *we are not crazy*. Disordered people can't deal with the reality of their behaviors. On some level they realize how hurtful they are, yet accepting this major flaw in themselves is just too painful. So disordered abusers spin our reality to make theirs less painful. One of the most common defense mechanism they use is *projection*. In projection, a characteristic of themselves that they find just too painful to accept is *projected* onto us. And the most frequently projected characteristic is mental illness. "I don't have a personality disorder. *YOU* have a personality disorder." Another common and difficult defense mechanism is blame shifting. It's *your* fault this happened because blah, blah blah blah...And explanations can be vehemently delivered.

Our sick partners don't stop there. They use other techniques that experts tell us are an essential part of brainwashing. They isolate us from people who give a more balanced perspective and question their distortions. They deprive us of sleep. And they can hammer away, on and on repeating their distortions. Anyone living with this is vulnerable to it, and it leads us to question our own beliefs about what is appropriate and what is right and wrong.

The reality is that *we are not crazy*. But we do need help. We need balanced stabilizing input from others. We need safety and the ability to rest through the night.

And we need to learn about our partner's illness and how we are swept into their disordered orbits.

Several personality disorders lead to behavior that is abusive. These include borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder, which can be called sociopathic, psychopathic, or just sociopath. Alcoholics often suffer from these disorders even if it isn't recognized. People who suffer from these disorders have extreme emotions, which lead them to actions that can range from puzzling to brutal.

Personality disorders are aptly named, because the minds of people who suffer from these disorders work differently than healthy people. Their reactions, both thought and emotion, to otherwise normal situations can be extreme and puzzling.

People with all of these personality disorders - borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder (also called sociopaths or psychopaths) - have serious maladjustments in coping with life. Thus, they live in emotional turmoil. They seek to present a very together appearance, hiding their disease from most people. It is only when we get into a close and private relationship with someone with these personality disorders that the abusive behavior comes out. And because their lives are wracked with emotional turmoil, there is a lot of pent-up emotion that can be focused on us.

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All of this leads a lot of confusion for those of us unlucky enough to be in committed relationships with someone with a personality disorder. My own experience was with someone who probably would have barely diagnosed at her worst - and definitely not at her best - with borderline personality disorder. What I have learned, as I have begun helping people with broader experiences, is that much of what I learned about abuse and borderline personality disorder also applies to narcissistic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder (psychopaths and sociopaths).

Another thing I've observed over time is the link to alcoholism. AA and Al-Anon have a culture that treats alcoholism as a disease alone and apart. Thus, people getting support through these channels tend to think that there is nothing more to learn beyond alcoholism. At the same time, this approach leaves some things unexplained. They talk about "dry drunks" and problems that persist long after alcoholics get sober. Why is this so? If addictive use of alcohol is the problem, why don't things improve when the alcohol abuse stops?

The reality is more likely that alcoholism and other addictions, like pot/marijuana, prescriptions drugs, cocaine, etc, are the result of a personality disorder. In the case of my ex-wife, a mixed addiction to alcohol and prescription psych meds was the result of self-medication to deal with the emotional pain of her disorder. Addiction is extremely toxic, and greatly worsens the effects of a personality disorder. But if the substance abuse stops, the underlying

personality disorder is still there.

To cope with these relationships and make good decisions, we need a valid perspective on these diseases, the behavior they cause, and their prospects for improvement. *Tears & Healing* offers a unique and insightful perspective on abusive disorders and how they affect us.