

Without Empathy

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The Sociopaths Who Live Among Us

I believe I am like most people - I have a natural tendency to trust the people I meet. I think that is human nature. We take for granted that the people we meet feel empathy and compassion, remorse and guilt when they hurt someone. We all feel happiness and joy or profound sadness. We feel fear and anxiety. We all have morals and a value system that we live by. I found out that I couldn't be more wrong.

I learned that there are millions of men and women who have no conscience and therefore can not feel things like empathy and compassion. They never feel guilt or remorse or shame. Sociopaths don't feel true happiness or real love. They're often referred to as 'empty souls'. Do you think you could spot one? It's highly unlikely because they look just like everyone else.

I learned that sociopaths come in all shapes and sizes and from all walks of life. They are lawyers, doctors, ministers, policemen, firemen, CEO's, company executives and teachers. According to Dr. Martha Stout in her book "The Sociopath Next Door", some sociopaths use their professional role as a mask to hide their real personality. They can be very hard to spot because they don't look any different than anyone else. Sociopaths are often very charming, likeable, easy-going and fun to be around. They don't worry like normal people do. They can be intelligent, impressive and inspire confidence. Sociopaths have an overwhelming need to be admired and often portray themselves as kind, compassionate and caring people. Only their victims know the truth.

According to Dr. Robert Hare in his book "Without Conscience", the ability to feel empathy is tied to the ability to feel real love since empathy is a prerequisite for love. Thankfully, only a small number of sociopaths will ever commit a crime; the vast majority of them will show their lack of empathy by bleeding people of their possessions and savings, doing and taking what they want, neglecting the physical and emotional welfare of their families or engaging in an unending series of casual

sexual relationships.(Hare p45).

Sociopaths do not have the ability to experience emotion and do not form real attachments to people and places. Without the ability to form real emotional attachments, sociopaths do not have any sense of obligation-no moral obligation or financial obligation. They view people as objects that can be exploited and manipulated. "A sociopath is someone who 'fails to conform to social norms'; or who is 'never monogamous' or who 'fails to honor financial obligations' for the straightforward reason that an obligation of any kind is something one feels toward beings, or toward a group of beings, who matter emotionally. And to a sociopath, we simply do not matter". (Dr. Stout p126)

I learned that sociopaths learn to imitate the behavior of others so they can appear to be normal. The appearance of normalcy is important to sociopaths and can result from their level of intelligence, their family background, their professional or social standing and their social skills.

Lying is second nature to sociopaths. In 'Without Conscience', Dr. Hare says that "lying, deceiving and manipulation are natural talents for psychopaths. When caught in a lie or challenged by the truth, they are seldom perplexed or embarrassed - they simply change their stories or attempt to rework the facts so that they appear to be consistent with the lie. The results are a series of contradictory statements and a thoroughly confused listener". Sociopaths will lie and cheat to deceive for money, power, control and sex. They seldom stick around to have their lies exposed; instead, they move on to a new neighborhood or city. The lying and deception, the manipulation and conning are pervasive.

I learned that sociopaths are impulsive and don't spend much time considering the consequences of their actions. According to Dr. Hare "the psychopath carries out his evaluation of a situation - what he will get out of it and at what costs - without the usual anxieties, doubts and concerns about being humiliated, causing pain, sabotaging future plans..." These are the things that people of conscience struggle with when considering possible actions. Sociopaths know the rules but choose which ones to follow. "They have little resistance to temptation and their transgressions elicit no guilt" (Dr. Hare p76). Often times, sociopaths are protected from the consequences of their behavior by family members, friends and colleagues.

Sociopaths are often glib when questioned about their behavior. They are famous for not answering the question asked them or they answer in a way to confuse the questioner. Their answers can often seem

unresponsive to the question (Hare p139)

I learned from reading Dr. Stout's book 'The Sociopath Next Door', that those without conscience engage in certain techniques to 'keep us in line'. The techniques that Dr Stout talks about in her book are charm, risk-taking, gaslighting and seduction. Sociopaths can instantly recognize someone who is trusting and have the uncanny ability to determine a person's weak spots very quickly. Those weak spots will be exploited over and over and over again.

Millions of men, women and children are impacted daily by the sociopaths in their lives. Sociopaths can cause great pain, anxiety, terror and humiliation. They can make a good impression when needed and often portray their victims as the culprits.

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