



## 11 Signs You're Dating a Sociopath (And Not Just a Garden Variety Asshole)

By Suzannah Weiss May 09, 2016

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Remember that guy you called a sociopath when he ghosted you after three Tinder dates? He was an asshole, no doubt, but "sociopath" may not be the right word choice.

With 1% of the U.S. population fitting the diagnosis for [antisocial personality disorder](#) (colloquially known as [sociopathy](#)), it's likely you've met one of these people at some point in your life. But as it turns out, sociopaths are quite different from plain old jerks — and more dangerous.

(Note: There's some [dispute](#) in the psychiatric community as to whether there's a difference between psychopaths and sociopaths, but it's generally believed that [psychopaths are violent](#), while sociopaths are not. This piece uses the terms interchangeably.)

According to psychologists, there are some telltale signs to help you differentiate between your average, garden-variety D-bag and someone who might be a lot more dangerous.



Source: [Giphy](#)

### 1) They're charmers.

While your standard D-bag is typically not well-liked, sociopaths actually exhibit fantastic interpersonal skills that win people over. People are mysteriously drawn to them, even when they're not good-looking, said Dr. Nicki Nance, who has worked with many sociopaths during her four-decade career as a licensed mental health counselor, in a phone interview.

That's because sociopaths are experts on people. Research has shown that sociopaths excel at reading [people's facial expressions](#) and manipulating [their own](#) to appeal to others.

It's easy to fall for sociopaths since they're so charismatic — and they have no problem exploiting that. Nance uses serial killer Ted Bundy as an example. "If I would say 'would you ever get in a car with somebody you didn't know?' most people would say 'of course not,' but he had a way to lure people right in," she said.

### 2) They're thrill-seeking — and indifferent to the risks.

Sociopaths are not only irresistible dates but also thrilling ones, since they often engage in high-risk behaviors. But there's a dark side to that, too, licensed clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Strohman said in a phone interview. Many psychopaths have issues with [substance abuse](#), since

alcohol and drugs provide an easy way for them to start "going against society" from a young age, said Nance.

### 3) Their lines seem a little too smooth.



**"I try to pay attention to what makes her feel special, and then I try to produce that thing."**

Source: Mic/Kate Tegmyer/Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

Sociopaths study people with an emotional detachment that lets them determine exactly what others want to hear and how they want to hear it, said Nance. They'll often target people who seem vulnerable or insecure and feed them lines like "you must be a model" or "you must work someplace really cool." As one patient explained to Nance, "I try to pay attention to what makes her feel special, and then I try to produce that thing."

As the relationship progresses, sociopaths have perfect excuses for everything that goes wrong. Nance has had several patients who were dating sociopaths, and almost all have told her, "At first, I thought this was too good to be true."

### 4) They use people.

From a sociopath's perspective, other people are just codes to be cracked. To illustrate the coldness with which sociopaths approach their romantic prospects, Strohmman said her antisocial personality disorder patients have had dating rules like "if she shows up wearing red, then we'll have sex that night."

"They're not taking into consideration whether that woman wants to have sex with them," she said. "Psychopaths take what they want when they want it and justify it based on random rules that they themselves have set up."

Sociopaths tend to be inattentive to their love interests' boundaries, Nance confirmed. They'll often use their persuasive skills to talk others into sex, and even their pickup lines can get a bit too personal.

*"Psychopaths take what they want when they want it."*

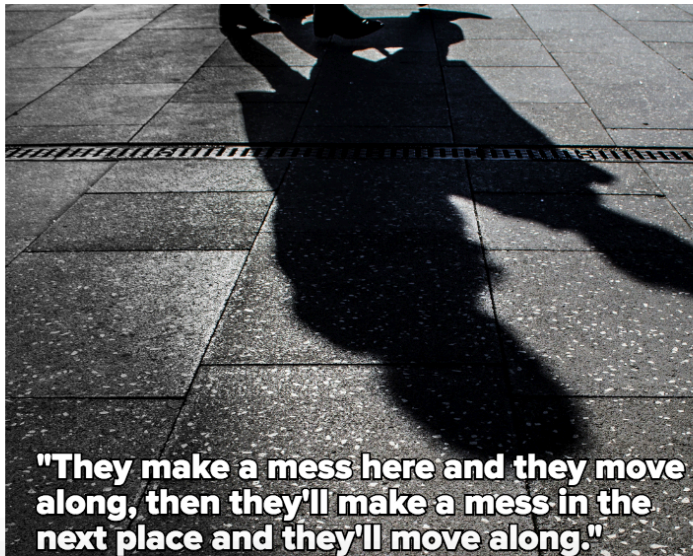


### 5) They don't seem to have friends.

Sociopaths rarely retain the people in their lives, said Strohmman. They may have some new friends from work, but if someone doesn't seem to have any high school or college friends, that could be a red flag.

"They may call them friends, but if you say 'Oh, why are you friends with this person?,' they can't tell you," she explained. "People who have that personality don't need anybody in their life."

"They make a mess here and they move along, then they'll make a mess in the next place and they'll move along," said Nance.



6) They're closed off about their lives.

It's really hard to get to know a sociopath, Nance said.

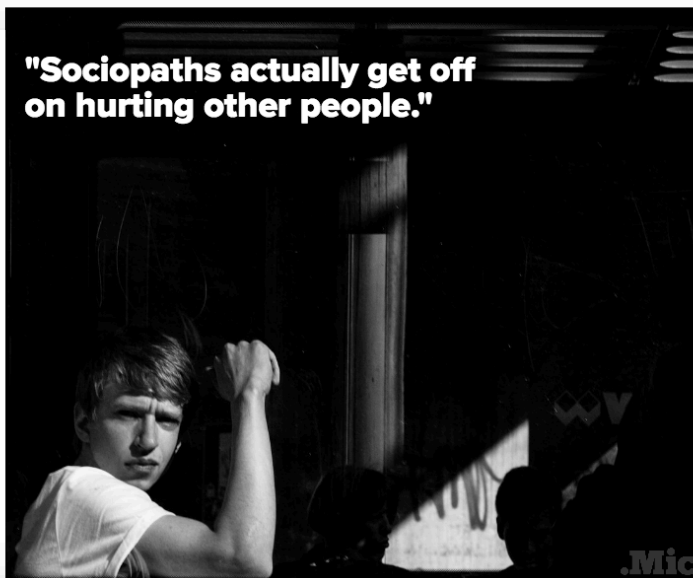
"Early on, they're really charming, but there's always a flaw in what they're saying or an excuse for really small things that wouldn't require someone to have an excuse," she said. "So, they might not tell you exactly who their friends are, or they might say they have an important job, but they won't tell you the details."

Since sociopaths are trying to figure out how they can use people, she said, "they're getting more information than they're giving. They like to talk, but they can't necessarily talk about themselves all that well."

7.) They hurt people for no reason.

Even if you'd let a sociopath borrow five dollars from you, they'd rather steal it, said Nance. While a regular asshole may manipulate others to get something they want, sociopaths do it for its own sake.

"Sociopaths actually get off on hurting other people," Strohmman explained. In other words, a jerk might lie to you because they're too cowardly to tell you the truth, but a sociopath will do it just to see if they can get away with it.



### 8) They have a job that involves persuading people — and they're great at it.

It's not that most sales representatives are sociopaths, said Nance, but you will see a disproportionate amount of them in professions that involve verbal persuasion, such as sales, law, the media and politics. "They'll say whatever they need to say to get the job done," she explained.

Strohman, who does corporate executive training, said she frequently comes across business executives with traits characteristic of antisocial personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder. "The higher you go in charge, the more narcissistic tendencies you tend to see," she said.

### 9) They don't feel remorse.

An asshole might feel a tinge of guilt over hurting someone, but a sociopath does not. For this reason, it's common for psychopaths and sociopaths to break the law, or at least break unspoken codes of ethics, without much thought, said Nance. Casually stealing or lying is a red flag.

### 10) They need to be the center of attention.

Not all narcissists are sociopaths, but all sociopaths are narcissists, Strohman explained. And one narcissistic quality that might become evident when you're dating someone is that they need everyone's affection and approval, not just yours.

Nance said you can sometimes spot a sociopath by the way they move through a crowd, chatting everyone up along the way. A sociopath will flirt with other people even when the person they're dating is around, because they need to be the center of attention.

### 11) They don't react to odd situations.



Source: Giphy

Strohman has seen several psychopaths act completely oblivious when building alarms went off. "If you're dating someone and something happens, like you're in a restaurant and the alarm goes off, and they absolutely don't react to it, that's a sign," she said. "They have this odd calmness."

This happens because psychopaths are completely disconnected, Strohman explained. "Their brains are independent of the world. They just do what they want."

Before you even reach the stage where you're trying to assess a date's sociopathy, Nance said there are ways to avoid getting entangled with them in the first place. Confidence and caution are two sociopath repellents, since they prey on partners who are insecure enough to fall for their lines.

"If anybody has a history of not doing well in relationships because they've been taken advantage of, they should take a look at [the diagnostic criteria](#) and memorize it," she said. "And if they see any of those things, they should run."



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