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Why Survivors Of Malignant Narcissists Don't Get The Justice They Deserve

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After years of domestic violence, 28-year-old [Jessica Haban](#) took her own life on December 16, 2015. In an unprecedented move, her abusive ex-husband, Long Vang, was charged for driving her to suicide. However, the murder charge that could've

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brought justice to this case was [dismissed](#) in 2016. In another case, a former United States Air Force veteran took his own life in March 2016. This was after he and his wife encountered chronic bullying and harassment by a narcissist via smear campaigns, job loss, hacking of financial accounts and cyberstalking. This led to a petition known as "[Shane's Law](#)" to propose a law that would legally protect victims from the underhanded bullying methods that narcissists often use to get away with emotionally harming their victims.

The year 2017 also brought with it some unprecedented and unexpected court cases in the realm of covert abuse. The [recent mistrial](#) in the case of Bill Cosby despite numerous women coming forward demonstrated that we have a long way to go in the justice system to protect survivors of sexual violence, especially if the perpetrator is a well-liked, charismatic public figure. The recent [conviction](#) of a young woman who drove her boyfriend to suicide through text messages, however, hopefully sets a precedent that one cannot cause such emotional harm without being held responsible for the consequences. It is clear that there have been mixed results when it comes to the legal justice system recognizing the covert, insidious yet highly damaging methods of malignant narcissists.

While there have been some cases where justice has been served to the survivors and victims of covert psychological violence, most of the survivor community can agree: whether it be through the enabling behavior of the court systems, law enforcement, family members or friends, the malignant narcissist or sociopathic predator can easily get away with their malicious behavior, usually without being held accountable.

What does covert psychological abuse by a malignant narcissist look like?

Narcissistic abuse is a chronic form of [psychological and emotional violence](#) inflicted upon a partner who meets the clinical criteria for [Narcissistic Personality Disorder or Antisocial Personality Disorder](#). It may or may not be accompanied by financial, sexual and/or physical abuse. In many cases, the partner may be undiagnosed (since narcissists rarely seek

therapy, feeling their behavior rewards them) but his or her behaviors can still cause considerable damage to their victims regardless of the presence of a diagnosis.

In an abusive relationship with a narcissistic or antisocial personality, the abusive partner can subject the partner to numerous forms of coercion, degradation and control that diminish the victim's sense of self, erode his or her self-esteem and distort the victim's sense of reality. Narcissistic abuse doesn't just take place in relationships - it can also occur in friendships, in the workplace and in the family.

At the very least, survivors of this form of emotional, psychological and physical abuse can suffer from depression, anxiety and low self-esteem after this experience. In the worst scenarios, like the victims we've seen these past few years, some of them commit suicide.

Unfortunately, tragedies like these beg the question – how many suicides were in reality driven by the abuse of narcissistic or sociopathic partners, friends, co-workers or family members?

“Due to the covert and insidious nature of narcissistic abuse, this form of abuse often gets the least amount of attention and validation in the realm of domestic violence discourses. Society is prone to victim-blaming survivors of this type of abuse because it does not always leave visible scars; those who have not experienced it can misunderstand it as simply compatibility issues or “normal” relationship problems, not recognizing the amount of psychological and emotional damage that is often involved.” - Shahida Arabi, POWER: Surviving and Thriving After Narcissistic Abuse

There are several reasons victims of covert psychological violence do not get the justice and protection they deserve:

1. While the abuser appears to be calm, charming and likeable, the victim that he or she has psychologically abused and violated over a period of time may appear emotional, erratic or unhinged due to the effects of trauma.

Narcissists and those with antisocial traits learn from a very young age to mimic the emotions they need to fulfill their

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agendas; they present a very innocent, compelling false mask to the world, duping even the most experienced members of law enforcement and the court systems. This means they can show displays of empathy, remorse, and pity ploys to convince the court systems that they are the innocent party or that they acted out of intentions that were not entirely malicious.

Given that malignant narcissists also build harems of supporters that look up to them and enable their behavior, sometimes even going so far as to carry out their dirty work for them, it is no wonder that they are able to also rely on outside support even when they are exposed for their crimes.

Even [Robert Hare](#), the creator of the Psychopathy Checklist, admits he still gets duped by these types and is no better than any layperson at detecting these predators – and it isn't difficult to see why. Their mask – what Dr. Stout, author of *The Sociopath Next Door* calls “the mask of sanity” - is quite believable unless one has been on the receiving end of the abuse. Even so, people continue to enable abusers even after slippings of this mask because they themselves lack the empathy or sufficient knowledge about covert predators required to sympathize with victims.

Some of the best lawyers, detectives, assistant district attorneys, psychologists, and psychiatrists can still fail to identify a covert predator in a case if they are not knowledgeable about personality disorders. They themselves may be deceived by the deliberate malice that is often present in a highly charged case involving a narcissistic abuser and his or her victim.

A narcissistic or antisocial manipulator is likely to have a lifelong habit of evading legal charges by flirting with the law without ‘technically’ overstepping it. Or, they may have access to the best lawyers that enable them to have their charges dropped or expunged from their record after a period of time. After a certain period of time has passed, the record of their previous crimes which could give insight into their predatory patterns might already have been sealed, and their newest victims are unlikely to see their abusers held accountable, especially if the abuse is considered “nonviolent” in the eyes of the law.

What makes this issue even more complex is that the most skilled manipulators can convince others of their capacity for empathy and can blend in quite well with the rest of society, without anyone knowing their true self behind the façade. [Research indicates](#) that narcissists, sociopaths and psychopaths have the *cognitive empathy* to assess the weaknesses and emotional vulnerabilities of their victims, but that they are unhindered by the *affective empathy* that would enable them to feel remorse for the way their cruel actions affect others. This is what makes them even more convincing and ultimately, more ruthlessly successful in persuading others than their empathic victims.

As victims of covert manipulators become increasingly terrorized, the effects of trauma take a toll, creating what psychotherapist Christine Louis de Canonville calls [“Narcissistic Victim Syndrome.”](#) It doesn’t help that victims of domestic violence are also more likely to develop mental health and substance abuse problems – potentially aggravated and provoked by the abuser; the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) reveals that 89% of their callers had experienced at least one of the three types of mental health coercion, and 43% had experienced at least one of the three types of substance abuse coercion:

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“Most survivors who reported their abusive partners had actively contributed to mental health difficulties or their use of substances also said their partners threatened to use the difficulties or substance use against them with important authorities, such as legal or child custody professionals, to prevent them from obtaining custody or other things that they wanted or needed.” - [The National Center on Domestic Violence and the Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

This is among the many covert tactics that abusers employ in order to depict the victim as the “crazy one.” Considering this, who do you think society is more likely to believe? The cool, calm, collected sociopath who provokes their victim to the brink of emotional instability and claims that their victims are “losing it,” or the seemingly irrational victim?

When a victim finally “reacts” maladaptively to chronic abuse, the abuser then uses those incidents against the victim, using it to “prove” the victim’s “instability” to the outside world. I’ve heard from a number of survivors who have had their abusers videotape or record their reactions to the abuse as “documentation” that their victims are the true abusers. What is missing from the picture that society sees on the surface are the years of abuse that the victim endured in silent terror.

2. Due to the strength of the traumatic and biochemical bonds they develop with their abusers, victims usually try to keep up the illusion of the perfect relationship even while abuse is happening behind closed doors – to protect the abuser and to survive the abuse.

Society then confuses the victim’s silence or skewed representation on the matter as an indication that the abuse they went through was not valid, when in fact, their silence and rationalization of the abuse were actually symptoms of the traumas they’ve been subjected to. In actuality, these were the same defense mechanisms they developed in order to survive the abuse.

It comes to a surprise to their loved ones and society when victims of covert emotional violence finally admit to the truth of the abuse, at which point, they might not seem credible to outsiders. Due to the trauma bond they develop with their abusers during the abuse cycle (a bond created through intense emotional experiences), victims may also attempt to try to protect their abusers from the repercussions of their actions. They may even go so far as to pleading for criminal charges against their abusers to be dropped or lessened, or failing to report incidents of stalking, harassment or physical abuse at all.

Society needs to understand that abuse has complex effects

on the survivor and that the bond a survivor develops with his or her abuser, as well as a fear of retaliation, can sometimes prevent them from coming forward. That doesn't mean that the survivor in question is exaggerating the abuse he or she went through when he or she finally comes clean – in fact, it may be that they are finally coming to terms with the truth for the first time.

Lawyers, judges, police officers as well as friends and family members need to take note that asking a survivor why he or she stayed so long, or insinuating that the abuse wasn't truly "violent" because it was emotional abuse can be retraumatizing and incredibly invalidating. The legal system also needs to understand why victims may sometimes go back to their abusers; stalking and harassing behavior is common after the ending of a relationship with a malignant narcissist, especially if the victim happened to "discard" the narcissist first.

This is also known as "hoovering" and it includes any and all attempts the abusive partner uses to reestablish contact with their former victims. Many victims are unfortunately "hoovered" back into the relationship, only to experience an even more horrific discard or more intense trauma than before. The bond between abuser and victim is difficult to break, but that does not make the abuse any less legitimate.

The trauma of chronic psychological warfare has long-term effects on the brain and diminishes a survivor's sense of self-worth and reality; it doesn't help that the abuser also works very hard to keep the victim in their place and gaslights them into believing that what they are experiencing isn't real. It takes a great deal of courage for a survivor to come forward, so the focus and emphasis should not be on the actions of the traumatized victim, but rather the actions of their perpetrators.

3. Society believes in the myth of "mutual abuse" and the idea that there is "two sides to every story."

Time and time again, we are fed the myth that survivors somehow contributed to the abuse or that the abusive behavior was somehow part of a dysfunctional relationship where both parties were to blame.

Let's get this straight: abuse arises from a power imbalance where the abuser is able to diminish the victim's sense of self-worth, subjecting them to name-calling, stonewalling, put-downs, sabotage and control for a period of time. A victim's eventual reactions to these tactics, while they can be maladaptive, should never be seen as "mutual abuse" – the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) dispels the common myth that it takes "two to tango."

In addition, law enforcement, the courts and society would do well to remember that in an abusive relationship, there is no such thing as a "bad break-up" or successful co-parenting. In an abusive relationship such as this one, the break up is either usually staged by the abuser to maximize his or her cruelty in the shortest amount of time, is part of an abusive tactic in itself known as the "discard" phase, and the abuser rarely leaves the victim alone even if he or she does break up with the victim. In the cases where victims leave their abusers first, it is common for abusers to retaliate in ways that retraumatize their victims – from stalking and harassing them to threatening to release their personal information and/or staging a smear campaign.

The narcissistic or sociopathic parent has no interest in compromise nor in responsible child-rearing. They simply want to "win" in court, save face and regain control over their victims. Children are often used as pawns by the abusive spouse to smear, humiliate and demean the victim. Abusive spouses may not genuinely care about their children to the extent that they portray in court – they may put on an act as father or mother of the year simply to regain control over the victim.

While the justice system has a long way to go to sufficiently protect victims of covert emotional violence, it is inspiring to see survivors come out and share their stories, as well as the growing number of therapists, coaches and advocates who are now recognizing the impact of this type of abuse. In 2016, the first ever [Narcissistic Abuse Awareness Day](#) was held in honor of victims and survivors of this form of covert abuse. As we continue to spread awareness about the methods these predators use, the dream of justice comes closer to becoming a

lived reality.

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