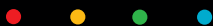


• • International Bestseller • •

# surrounded by psychopaths



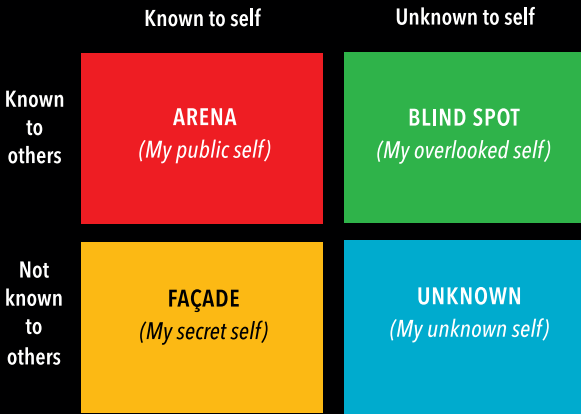
Or, How to Stop Being  
Exploited by Others



thomas erikson

*Bestselling Author of Surrounded by Idiots*

## JOHARI WINDOW



(page 35)

(page 54)

## THE BASIC PILLARS IN DISC



**surrounded by  
psychopaths**



ALSO BY THOMAS ERIKSON

*Surrounded by Idiots*



# surrounded by psychopaths

Or, How to Stop Being  
Exploited by Others

thomas erikson

 **Vermilion**  
LONDON

Copyrighted Material

Vermilion, an imprint of Ebury Publishing,  
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,  
London SW1V 2SA

Vermilion is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies  
whose addresses can be found at [global.penguinrandomhouse.com](http://global.penguinrandomhouse.com)



Copyright © Thomas Erikson 2017, 2020

English translation by Rod Bradbury

Thomas Erikson has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this  
Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published in Sweden as *Omgiven av psykopater* by Forum in 2017

First published in the United States by St Martin's Press, part of  
Macmillan Publishing Group LLC, in 2020

First published in the United Kingdom by Vermilion in 2020

[www.penguin.co.uk](http://www.penguin.co.uk)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781785043321

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable  
future for our business, our readers and our planet.  
This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council®  
certified paper.



# Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
1. What Actually Is a Psychopath?	19
2. Protecting Yourself: A Basic Defense Against Psychopaths	33
3. Who Are the Psychopaths?	44
4. Surrounded by Idiots? This Is How You Get Rid of Them	53
5. Manipulation Is Everywhere	84
6. What Manipulation Looks Like	94
7. The Dominant Red Psychopath	115
8. The Charming Yellow Psychopath	122
9. The Passive Green Psychopath	128
10. The Meticulous Blue Psychopath	133
11. How a Psychopath Manipulates a Red Person	138
12. How a Psychopath Manipulates a Yellow Person	149
13. How a Psychopath Manipulates a Green Person	158

14. How a Psychopath Manipulates a Blue Person	166
15. Common Manipulation Techniques	175
16. Everyday Manipulation and How to Handle It	213
17. What If Nothing Works?	234
<i>Postscript: Some Words to Help You on Your Way</i>	243
<i>Resources</i>	247
<i>Index</i>	249

*Loving you was like going to war; I never came back the same.*

—WARSAN SHIRE



Surrounded  
by Psychopaths



# Introduction

Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives.

—John Lennon

Imagine that an extremely attractive person of the sex you prefer sits down opposite you and exclaims with a smile: “You are the most fantastic person I’ve ever met!” You immediately sense that this is for real, that the person is sincere. They ask questions and want to know everything about you. They don’t talk about themselves, and they look at you as if you were the only person in the room. Their attention leaves you glowing, lit up in a way you’ve never felt before. This other person says the kinds of things you’ve waited a lifetime to hear. They somehow understand precisely who you are, the inner quirks of your personality, your every like and dislike. You feel as if you have finally found your soul mate. Through some magic, this person has gotten straight to your heart in a way you have never felt before.

Can you see it in your mind’s eye? Can you imagine the feeling? It would be fantastic, right?

And now the question: Can you look yourself in a mirror and honestly say that this wouldn’t affect you? That you aren’t susceptible to the lure of romantic nonsense and that you would immediately become suspicious and realize that this person wants

**Copyrighted Material**

something completely different? If not your body, then probably your money.

Think a moment before you answer. Because if you've never been in such a situation, then you'll never see the danger. This person is going to tell you their secrets, and they are going to get you to reveal yours. You will answer all their probing questions, the sole purpose of which is to find out as much as possible about you.

A few years ago, I wrote a book called *Surrounded by Idiots*. The book was about the basics of the DISC language, one of the most powerful methods in the world to describe human communication and the differences in human behavior patterns. The book was a success, which I hadn't really expected. I believe part of the reason for its success is that a lot of people are, like me, fascinated by human behavior—the behavior of others and, above all, their own. And I might as well admit it: *ME, I'm an interesting person!* At least to myself.

The behavior categories I use, in that first book as well as in this one, are based on William Moulton Marston's theories and consist of four main types of people, each of which is associated with a color: Red for dominance, Yellow for influence, Green for stability, and Blue for compliance. The following chapters provide an overview of what the colors mean in practice. These categories are a tool that can help answer many (but not all) of our questions about how people function.

People are too complex to be described completely, but the more you understand, the easier it is to identify the outliers. This method of behavior categorization encompasses perhaps 80 percent of the entire puzzle. Quite a lot, but far from everything. There are always other elements that we need to take into consideration to understand someone's behavior: gender, age, cultural differences, motivation, intelligence, interests, experiences of every sort, birth order, and countless



other factors. For the sake of simplicity, let's say that the puzzle has an awful lot of pieces.

## Now for the Problem

As the book became more and more popular around the world, there were some people who chose to use the DISC system in a malicious way. This was never my intention. In this book, I want to make you aware of such individuals, of people who would try to manipulate you, and to give you the tools to protect yourself. I'm often asked if an individual can have *all* the colors—be a little bit Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue. "I'm a bit of each color," readers have written to me in emails. "Is that possible?" It can certainly feel possible. I act Red sometimes, Yellow and Green often, but on other occasions I am undoubtedly Blue. The reason why this is possible is actually quite simple: We all have the ability to use whichever type of behavior we want, thanks to the fact that we are intelligent beings who can think for ourselves. As their self-awareness increases, a Yellow person will learn that it's time to close their mouth and open their ears. And a Green person can learn to express their heartfelt opinion even if that might lead to conflict. But the bottom line is that normally two colors dominate a person's behavior.

## An Unpleasant Experience

Approximately one year after *Surrounded by Idiots* was published, I had a strange encounter. A young man came up to me after a lecture I had given at a university. He stood right in front of me, face to face, more or less pushing aside others who also wanted to ask questions. With an intense gaze, he said that he didn't recognize himself in *any* of the colors. I asked him what he meant by that, and he said that

none of the behaviors I had described fitted him. He thought he was a fifth color. He also wanted to know more about how to best interact with the other colors, but his choice of words was interesting: He told me he wanted to know “how to take advantage of this knowledge.”

Okay.

I gave him a standard answer since I didn't have time to start analyzing him then and there, and when he realized that he wasn't going to get anywhere with his questions, he stepped aside. But he didn't leave; instead, he remained standing a few yards away, observing me the whole time until I packed up all my things.

“Observed” is not quite the right word. In fact, he stared at me in an almost embarrassing way for perhaps ten minutes. I saw people come up to him, say hello, and smile. And every time he smiled back. But he wasn't really smiling at all. He *pretended* to smile. His face was distorted into a weird, strange grimace, a sort of imitation of a smile. Some of the people he smiled at noticed and reacted with a questioning look, while others didn't seem to think there was anything out of the ordinary. And after every “smile,” he went back to his serious, concentrated staring. At me. It was decidedly uncomfortable.

And what did he mean by “take advantage” of the DISC system?

It struck me that the young man was right about one thing: the DISC language doesn't apply to everybody. A part of the population can't be categorized. We should be very careful of such unpleasant, maybe even dangerous, types of people. We've all heard the stories of the master manipulators, the con men, the imposters. *How could he trick me so totally?* their victims wonder. *Why didn't I see that he was a con man?*

The reason? Because these individuals know how they can use your own behavior against you. They have an instinctive understanding of how to manipulate a person to do virtually anything. And they can con virtually anybody using what *they learn about*

*them*. Their purpose is always the same: to get what they want. They leave behind a trail of chaos and disorder.

The question is this: If a person doesn't have a personality of their own, but simply mirrors whomever is in front of them, who is that person? They are not Red or Yellow, and definitely not Green or Blue. Are they all the colors? A fifth color? The answer is none of these. They are something much worse, something that cannot be categorized in the way we categorize normal people. They are people who don't have a personality of their own; instead, they mimic whatever they see for their own gain. They are a type of chameleon with a hidden agenda that only they know of. And we can be certain that this agenda only ever benefits them.

Instead of identifying these people as a fifth color or a combination of all the colors, I define them as having no color at all. Because a person who doesn't really have a genuine personality, who is always at least partially acting, is not a real person. They are more a shadow, a reflection of reality but not properly real. They are a sort of walking fraud on two legs. If you have met this type of individual, you'll know what I'm talking about.

But who *are* they, these people? What sort of people try to mimic what other people do? And what can their goal be?

## Pretending to Be Like Everybody Else

To put it plainly: they are predators in human form. Does that sound dramatic? The reason for that is very simple: it *is* dramatic! These individuals end up harming most people they come into contact with, and often the victims don't even know who is responsible for the disarray.

That, dear reader, is what psychopaths do.

### **Luckily, they're all locked up in jail. Right?**

Psychopaths are living in society just like the rest of us. They infiltrate companies and organizations, where they get comparatively little work done and only in exceptional cases do they make any positive contributions. They rarely offer to get the bill at the restaurant, and they never have any money when household expenses have to be paid. They are often unfaithful, manipulative, and duplicitous. They are notorious liars; most of them lie when there isn't even any reason to do so. They can fool anyone into believing them, and they turn everything you say against you. But they are often extremely popular. A lot of people like them, place them on a pedestal, and even respect them.

*How is this possible?* you might well ask yourself. Good question. How could we like a person who is so duplicitous? *Not me*, you're thinking to yourself, *I would hate them from the very start*. Exactly. If you knew their real self, you would hate them. But you wouldn't know. Because they wouldn't allow it to show. With a bit of luck, you might eventually discover it. In the best case, you'd realize who they were before things are desperate, when you've lost your job, and you are cut off from all the people you once called your friends.

*But hang on a moment*, you might be thinking. *Psychopaths are serial murderers and violent criminals. Most of these maniacs are obviously in prison*.

If only that was the case! It is true that a lot of them are behind bars since they have not been able to control their impulses. They are violent and sometimes crazy, to put it plainly. When they see something they want, they simply take it, often with violence, which quickly gives them away. But the majority of all psychopaths are not behind bars. The more intelligent psychopaths and those who don't commit serious violent crimes are walking around among us just like everybody else. They are people who will stop at nothing

to get what they want. And you have certainly come across some of them.

But are we really surrounded by them?

The title *Surrounded by Psychopaths* was chosen with care, since there are far more psychopaths than I think most people are aware of. I want to show you how to recognize a master manipulator and to protect yourself, should you come across one.

## What Are the Consequences?

The strange behavior of the young man at the lecture troubled me for several months. Those staring eyes, the artificial smile. It was all so weird. What happened to him? I got the answer on a subsequent trip when I returned to the university. I sought out the chair of the department where I had lectured and asked about the young man. Who was he? Did the department head know anything about him? The answer I got was horrific.

The young man was an employee who had been caught embezzling almost one hundred thousand dollars from the university before he was reported to the police by the department head. But by then he had gotten two women in the department pregnant. He managed to get one of them dismissed for sexual harassment (against him!), and the other woman tried to commit suicide after the affair was revealed (she had been married many years). Two postgraduate members of staff were on sick leave with chronic fatigue syndrome, after the young man had spread gossip and created chaos among the staff. The head of the department had resigned, and everything was in turmoil. Nobody knew what they should do, their research had been forgotten, and the department was falling apart.

But the young man had learned to smile. He had learned how to give the impression of being a nice, likable guy. He got away with it for two years before he was kicked out. Nobody suspected him.

He had an explanation for everything. And it was always somebody else's fault.

With a trembling voice, the department head told me that the young man had been let free after convincing the police as well as the prosecutor that he had embezzled the money *at the suggestion of the department head*. And the department head—with thirty-eight years at the university—had almost been prosecuted himself. Of course, the money was gone, and the evidence was so vague that nothing could be done to convict the real swindler. I asked what had happened to the young man. The department head told me that he had just gotten a new job at an IT company. He was now in charge of a project involving a large investment and was going to lead the company to new heights.

And so I learned that the young man at my lecture had indeed learned "*how to take advantage of the DISC system.*"

When the department head had finished his story, tears were running down his cheeks. It was terrible to see.

If I'd had the chance, I would have analyzed this young man. What would the analysis show? To be honest, I don't know.

The most frightening thing is that he is still out there. And if you bump into him or someone like him, it's critical that you know how to react. Because if he can sniff out your weaknesses, he will press all the buttons he can to destroy you. Not because he hates you or because he has some personal motivation. But because that is what psychopaths do. They take what they want from you. Using any means whatsoever. The consequences don't matter.

They seduce and deceive. They lie and manipulate. They are thieves and parasites. And they get their energy from destroying other people. That is their primary fuel.

Exaggerated? Not at all. After you read this book, you might find it difficult to sleep at night. If that happens, I apologize in advance.

I am going to explain how to recognize a psychopath, how to recognize people with psychopathic traits, and most importantly I will show you what you can do about psychopaths.

## Another Book About Psychopaths?

After *Surrounded by Idiots* was published, I gave lectures throughout Europe on the DISC system. The book put focus on certain things I had always taken for granted. People are different. Obviously. We already knew that. But how different, and in what way? And, above all, how do you deal with those differences?

The color-based DISC language that William Moulton Marston laid the foundations for explains quite a lot about how people function. But, as I mentioned earlier, it does not explain everything.

Marston was one of the first well-known psychologists who carried out research on healthy people. Both Jung and Freud primarily devoted themselves to the mentally ill. Can you fit everybody into the DISC system? No, actually you can't. It only works with neurotypical persons—the type of people Marston studied. If you have some sort of diagnosis such as borderline personality disorder, severe autism, schizophrenia, or the like—or psychopathy—it simply does not work.

## How Many Psychopaths Are There Really?

*But hold on there, you might say. Psychopaths are so rare that they're hardly worth worrying about. They can't be more than 0.1 (or even 0.2 or 0.3) percent of the population.* I can understand why you would think that. But there are more psychopaths than you imagine. According to the latest scientific findings, they comprise between 2 and 4 percent of the population. That is a significant number of people. As a point of comparison, I devoted quite a lot of pages in my previous

book to people that are completely Red in their behavior, and they only comprise about 0.5 percent of the population.

Just think about it: if you were a shepherd with one thousand sheep and you heard that there were two wolves in the vicinity, what would you want to know more about? The sheep . . . or the wolves? Of course you would want to keep track of the wolves. Even though there aren't that many, and even if they aren't going to kill all the sheep they come across, it's a good idea to understand how a wolf thinks and to know one when you see it. Because once it has decided to attack, it's already too late. Then it will take whatever it wants.

When it comes to psychopaths, we're concerned about not only their primary victims but also the effect they have on their surroundings. An enormous number of people are affected by psychopaths' behavior, because the impact is vast. The damage they cause has far-reaching consequences. They always drag many people down with them.

This book is about how you can protect yourself from this behavior. As my starting point, I will use Marston's system with the four colors to show how the strengths and weaknesses of different behavior types play into the hands of an evil-minded psychopath. They will turn your weaknesses against you. That is one of the reasons why therapy does not work for psychopaths. They cannot be healed.

If you haven't read *Surrounded by Idiots*, I will explain some of the science behind the four-color system in the coming pages so you will have a better grasp of the terminology in the book and the reasoning behind the examples. If you've already read my previous book and think you already know the system 100 percent, be patient. Remember repetition is the key to knowledge.

The closer to the truth, the better the lie, and the truth itself, when it can be used, is the best lie.

—Isaac Asimov



## An Example of Psychopathy

My first example of everyday psychopathy is one I experienced myself. I have written several novels in addition to nonfiction, and after my first thriller had been published a young woman who wanted to be a writer contacted me via email. She had read my book and thought it was fantastic and asked if I could help with her own writing. My interactions with readers are simple. I really do appreciate all the messages from people who have read my books, and I encourage you to share your opinion of this book with me. I'd love to hear from you. But I don't normally respond with more than one message. I don't start long dialogues, for the simple reason that I don't wish to work 24/7. I responded to her with a sort of standard answer and didn't think any more about it. But this woman continued to email me again and again, her tone becoming more aggressive when I didn't reply.

Some time later, my then-partner received an email from the same young woman—now using another name—which claimed that she was in a relationship with me and that we were going to get married. Both my partner and I were flabbergasted. In addition, the email contained a long list of nasty accusations against me. For example, the young woman claimed that I had had relationships with almost one hundred women and had gotten at least twenty of them pregnant. All within a few months. (This eventually led to my reporting her to the police.) There was far more of this craziness, but I can't describe everything. In all, my partner received about fifty emails with varying content, but all on the same theme.

While this was going on, I was also receiving deeply romantic emails from the same young woman. She missed me so very much. She longed to see me again. Shouldn't we go and have a look at that apartment in the center of Stockholm together? From my Facebook profile, which at the time was completely public, she had gathered

a large amount of information about me and my private life, which meant that some of things she wrote sounded quite credible. (Be warned: you don't know who sees what you do on the internet or what they can use it for.)

This went on for about six months before the police managed to stop her. It was a case of severe stalking. With the help of social media, the woman managed to cause me a lot of problems, particularly with a large number of writer colleagues. For me, it was all very embarrassing and horrible—at first, I didn't even know who she was.

*A mental case, you're thinking. An ordinary maniac. There are lots of them out there.*

Could be. But the pattern was there. The police investigation revealed that the woman had done the same thing at least once before. In that case, too, the man was much older than she was and a writer. You've probably heard of him. He took it so hard that he retired from his job. I talked with him several times to try to understand what was happening, but neither of us could fathom what the woman was really trying to achieve, apart from some sort of wild revenge because I hadn't helped her fulfill her writing dreams.

In their book *Female Psychopaths*, Lisbet Duvring and Mike Florette write, "Revenge tastes good and they [the psychopaths] delight in destroying; they enjoy it. Female psychopaths especially seem to delight in looking for emotional revenge, social aggression, and then wreak havoc in the form of rumors that create manipulative, uncertain and threatening relationships. It is a type of destructive revenge that is not as visible as physical violence and is thus harder to identify."

I know exactly what it feels like to be at the receiving end of that behavior. The police finally took the young woman in for questioning, and after that, all the harassment stopped as if by magic. Remark-

able, isn't it? When she was questioned by the police, she tried to suggest that someone else had been responsible, which reinforced my belief that she wasn't mentally ill. If she had had a diagnosis, some sort of disorder or compulsion, then she wouldn't have been able to stop herself so suddenly. But the entire time, she was fully aware of what she was doing. Things started to get too hot for her, and she presumably moved on to new hunting grounds, where she could continue her perverted behavior.

The police said that they had never met such a believable liar before. The woman seemed to believe her own words. Despite the fact that the police could show concrete evidence that she was responsible for the harassment and stalking (they had gone through her computer and found all they needed), she denied everything. And it didn't stop at that. She went on the offensive, by accusing me of threatening her. Suddenly it was *me* who was harassing *her*. She accused me of threatening to kill her, of having hired professional hit men that I, for some bizarre reason, had contact with. Serious allegations, to put it mildly. The only thing that saved me from being linked with this person was that I could easily show that I had not been in the various places where she claimed we had met.

The *pattern* of psychopathic behavior was there. This psychopath aimed to destroy my life and my writing career. She sought revenge for my refusing to communicate with her about her own writing, I guess. This time it didn't succeed. But she did manage to destroy my relationship with my partner. Our relationship was so badly strained by the whole exhausting nightmare that we finally went our separate ways. By that time, my former partner had become so scared that she developed true paranoia. She sat for hours every day on social media, searching for the woman and waiting for her to post. Nothing I said could stop her.

The young woman in question continued her life. On Facebook, I