

Ask a psychotherapist

Question: I'm currently dating two men. The guy I'll call ?Glenn? is really nice ? sweet and kind. He'd do anything for me. The other one, ?Peter?, can be kind of a jerk when he drinks. Sometimes he flirts with other women right in front of me! But I find him really hot and can't stop thinking about him. Why would I be more attracted to the guy who treats me badly than the nice guy (who is also very good-looking, by the way)?

Answer: Attraction can be a mysterious thing until we examine the kind of relationships we've had with important people in the past. You don't give any indication of your age but if you've had dating experience with more than these two men, you may be able to detect a pattern in the kind of man you're most attracted to. Some women find themselves repeatedly choosing alcoholic or abusive men as partners. Both women and men may lurch from one bad relationship to another throughout their lives.

When a pattern like this exists, it can be useful to consider the lessons that were learned about romantic relationships from one's own parents. So, for instance, if Dad was an alcoholic or abusive to Mom, their heterosexual children may quite unconsciously seek out the same type of partner as their parent of the opposite sex. While this may seem odd ? why repeat the kind of relationship that caused so many people pain? ? it appears that we're often more comfortable with what's familiar than with something new and different.

So how does one interrupt a pattern of choosing hurtful partners and initiating relationships that are destined to fail or limp along painfully for years? The best way is to work with a therapist to discover the relationship patterns in one's past. Becoming aware of these patterns is half the battle. Once a person gains such awareness, they are able to make healthier relationship choices.

Alison Kerr, Ph.D., Psychotherapist can be reached at 905 936-2400 or at allikerr@rogers.com

By Alison Kerr, Ph.D.