

The Reality of Your Toxic Relationship Can Creep Up on You

Even long after it is over



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I had a conflict with my girlfriend. That's not an exotic occurrence for any couple. It is not in and of itself an indicator of a toxic relationship. Lots of couples have arguments. And if they don't, that is a surefire way to tell that their relationship is a capsized boat. Or whatever analogy you want to insert instead.

The key is not about not having arguments. The key is to communicate, work it out, and resolve those conflicts. And sometimes, you get to understand more about yourself in the process. I had such an epiphany during that last argument.

There was something that set me off. That is how most arguments start. But when I talked it out with her, I realized that there were two sides to the coin. Yes, her behavior was not okay. She agreed. But the question is, why it triggered me so much that I exploded?

My own reaction was, in fact, disproportionate to what happened. There was lots of shouting involved. Needless to say, the atmosphere was thick. And I was almost about to pack my stuff and stay somewhere else for the night.

I now believe that it was my previous, toxic relationship experience creeping up on me. That emotional baggage I keep carrying around.

You Can Define, What a Toxic Relationship Is, by What It Is Not

I thought I was over it. But something has happened that most self-help books neglect. Even many therapists can not prepare you for it.

You see, I was doing therapy by myself after that relationship had crashed and burned. It was painful and involved shattered dreams and a near relocation to Brazil. It is a tale for another day, I suppose.

The point is, I had not healed. I had just patched up the wound a bit. And now, that I am in a new relationship, that band-aid is coming off. And it revealed a wound that is still festering quite a bit.

I love my girlfriend. She is the kindest soul. We communicate well. We resolve our conflicts. It is the opposite of a toxic relationship. And that is exactly what triggers me, sometimes. Because I subconsciously keep waiting for that toxicity. So my amygdala latches on to every opportunity it finds to perceive an attack.

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Sometimes, the best way to define something is not by what it is. But by what it is not. Relationships can fall into this category of things. My self-worth is attacked. because I am starting to realize how toxic past relationships have been, exactly. Because that toxicity is not there in my current relationship.

Things that I considered normal weren't normal at all. Things that I did were hurtful to others. And I was hurt more than I care to admit. When that realization creeps up on you for real, it does so with a vengeance. You blame yourself for not realizing it sooner. For not recognizing toxic behaviors. For not putting up boundaries. Or not respecting those of your previous partners. And it makes you feel very vulnerable. At least it does for me.

In Connection With Others, Our Patterns Emerge

This is where dating advice often falls short. It usually tells that you should not date until you are ready. But sometimes, you just can not know, if you are. Because your issues and trauma responses only show up, when they are put to the test. This can often only happen, once you engage with others.

Most self-help advice falls into the same trap. It is too focused on the individual and rarely acknowledges the role our social settings play. That is hardly surprising since we live in a culture of individualism.

That does not make it better, though. When your destructive habits and behaviors show themselves, you still have to take responsibility.

It Is Still Your Responsibility to Heal From Your Past Toxic Relationship

Myself, I have started yet another round of therapy. I am convinced, that I have not yet unpacked nearly enough of my emotional baggage. That is the true key to a healthy relationship. It is not about not facing challenges. It is about addressing these challenges when they show up.

But we do need to remember one thing. Your partner is not obligated to stick around. They will not always wait for your destructive behaviors to resolve. If they think they are in a toxic relationship with you, they are allowed to leave.

But if they do stick around, you should honor your agreements and commit to working on yourself. And learning to leave those past toxic relationships

behind you. Only then can your relationship blossom.