

Does  
**Chaos and Drama  
Run Your Life?**



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## **DOES CHAOS AND DRAMA RUN YOUR LIFE?**

Have you ever wondered why so many of your relationships seem to be toxic or why you constantly have “bad luck?” Is there a neon sign over your head that screams, “Use me! Abuse me!”?

The simple answer is yes. I have found that there are predictable patterns in women and men who are in unsatisfying relationships. I know this for sure: users and abusers are attracted to others who behave in certain ways and likewise, some women and men who behave in these ways are attracted to unhealthy people and situations.

It could be that you are a *people-pleaser, martyr, codependent, drama-and-chaos* junkie. So, let’s take a look at these four different but similar types of personalities so that you can see which category you fit into and why. When you get clear on your emotional needs and the unhealthy ways in which you attempt to get them met, you can then begin finding healthier alternatives.

### ***The People-Pleaser***

*“I enjoy being a wife and mother and living a traditional life. I stay home and take care of the kids and house and my husband works. Maybe it sounds a little ‘Father Knows Best’ to some people, but I find a lot of happiness and satisfaction in it. I worked until James and I had our first child and then I stopped. It was by mutual agreement, but mostly at my suggestion.*

*A single working mom had raised me, and more than anything else, I wanted to be a mommy who was at home with her kids when I grew up. I’m grateful to James that he works like he does so that I can do this for our children, who are seven, five, three, and nine months old. It’s a busy life, that’s for sure.*

*I can’t remember the last time I took a shower when there wasn’t a group of kids watching me. I feel like an exhibitionist but it’s the only way I can get a shower and make sure everyone’s safe and in one place. I would like to do this*

*before James leaves in the morning, so that he could watch them, but he's too busy getting ready himself.*

*He likes a cooked breakfast, so I get up at five and get that started. I feel like it's the least I can do for him since he works all day for us. When he sits down, I get the kids up and get them going. Shea needs to be at school at seven-thirty, Lilly at kindergarten at eight-thirty, and then Maddie goes to Gymboree at nine twice a week while the baby takes his morning nap. James leaves the house at seven and I guess he could take Shea, but he's usually running out the door, so I don't ask. He's so stressed and I want his day to go well without any additional responsibilities. And, after all, it's part of my job to get the kids where they need to be.*

*I have a hard time saying 'no' to all of them. I guess I have a hard time saying 'no' to most anyone. I try to work in the older kids' classrooms one or two days each week, but it's hard with the younger ones. I don't want anyone else watching them, so I just try my best. It's hard to be there for all of them at once. Their teachers will ask me to make cookies or cupcakes for a party and I do. Teachers have it so hard nowadays, not like when I went to elementary school, so I try to do what I can to support them.*

*I feel guilty a lot. I know it's hard for James to support five other people all by himself and sometimes I think about starting some sort of home business, but can't see how I'd fit it into my day with someone wanting me all the time.*

*Sometimes my mom just sort of shows up at the front door and wants to come in to chat or something. I don't think she's really grasped that I have four active young children to watch. She wants me to pay total attention to her and I'd have to say that she doesn't pitch in to help me while she's visiting. Sometimes, she'll be so frustrated that we can't sit down and have a conversation that she'll leave an hour after she gets there. I guess that's to be expected. I'm not exactly the best hostess.*

*I try to do fun things with the kids everyday, like go to the park or for a bike ride or to get ice cream. I really want them to remember having a happy childhood. It's important to me that they are all happy.*

*James gets home around seven and expects the kids to be bathed and in their pajamas, so we start at five. I think it's a little early for Shea, who still wants to be playing with his friends. I can't blame him, so I get him in the bath last. Then, we begin dinner so that everything's done at seven when James comes in.*

*There have been a few times when I haven't been able to get everything done in time and James is not happy. He tells me that he works all day so that I can stay home and he should be able to expect dinner on the table when he gets home and the kids ready for bed. That's my job. He's right, of course. This is what I asked for, so I should be able to do it without complaining. Sometimes, I don't think he understands what's involved with keeping the house and the kids all going so everyone's happy and everything gets done, but then I don't understand what it takes to get his job done well either, I guess.*

*After dinner, the kids want to play games and read, so that's what we do. Everyone's in bed—more or less—at eight-thirty, so I can get the dinner dishes done and try to have an hour with my husband before I fall asleep.*

*He'd like to have sex more often than we do, but I'm just too tired. I try to give him what he wants, though. He works hard and I want him to be happy.”—Delia, age 38.*

Delia is certainly a people-pleaser deluxe edition, isn't she? Her primary concern is that everyone be happy all the time, which is not realistic. She not only wants her children and demanding husband to be happy, but also her self-absorbed mother, her children's teachers, and who knows who else? The grocery clerk? The Gymboree instructor? The mailman?

It's easy to see where her need to please may have come from: her narcissistic mother who wants Delia's total attention even though there are four children (her own grandchildren) under the age of eight underfoot. When that doesn't happen, she pouts and flounces out of the house, leaving Delia feeling guilty and that she is a bad daughter. Do you think that Delia's mother may have taught her that pleasing mommy should be utmost in her mind? Then Delia essentially married her mother in the form of James, who is another demanding

narcissist who makes the rules that Delia follows to a “T” so that he’ll be “happy.” He expects breakfast early in the morning, won’t take one of the children to school to help her out (not that she’d dare ask), has unrealistic expectations about the children being bathed and dressed for bed as well as dinner on the table when he gets home. Then, after all that, he still decides to make Delia feel guilty if she’s not in the mood for sex, so she does it even when she’s too tired. We can guess that Delia’s own childhood was not a happy one, so she’s works overtime to try and insure that each of her children have the childhood she didn’t.

It’s nice to care whether others are happy, but you can’t really control that, can you? Happiness is very subjective: what is happy to one person is not happy to another and really, no one can “make” another person happy. It must come from within. Spend a moment taking this little quiz to gauge whether or not you are a people-pleaser (some questions are taken from “The Emotionally Abused Woman” by Beverly Engel). Do you:

1. Tend to blame yourself when things go wrong?
2. See yourself as a bad person if you make a mistake?
3. Try to anticipate what others want or how they want you to act?
4. Placate others, or try to “buy” them, in an attempt to please them?
5. Feel that you’ve “failed” as a person unless everyone in your life is happy?
6. Have more concern for others’ happiness than your own?
7. Only feel happy when others are happy with you?
8. Feel frightened when taking a risk?

At some point—and hopefully this is that point—you will need to look at whether your people-pleasing is accomplishing the goal you had originally intended. Is everyone in your life happy all of the time? Do you find that others become more and more demanding of you as you attempt to please them more? *Do you find that this need to please everyone all of the time is causing chaos and drama in your life?* If so, then your plan is not working as you had intended. The

answer is not to attempt to please everyone even more, but to take a look at your own need to please and what your payoff for that may be.

### ***The Martyr***

*“I don’t know why my life has to be so difficult. Don’t get me wrong; I love my life. It’s just that I don’t know anyone else who has to work as hard at their life as I do.*

*I try to be a good person and make everyone happy and make their lives easier. I help my kids with their homework every night, I make all the meals, I do all the housework, I work twenty-five hours a week so that we can afford extras that my husband would say are extravagant, I drop off and pick up the dry cleaning, I take the kids to soccer and gymnastic practices, I make all the social arrangements, and anything else you can think of.*

*I shouldn’t complain and I hardly ever do. I have a good husband and a good life. I really don’t have any right to complain. Sometimes, though, I don’t feel like I’m living my own life; I’m living everyone else’s. No one says ‘thank you;’ they just expect me to do everything for them.*

*Even when I do something to help my parents, they still have something negative to say about it. Then, I end up apologizing to trying to help. I say ‘I’m sorry’ a lot and not just to my parents, but to everyone. I don’t know how many times I apologize a day.*

*I know that my husband and parents can be overbearing and demanding. I just don’t want to deal with standing up to them. It’s not worth it. I don’t know what I’d do if they really started getting nasty. I think I’d just be paralyzed with fear. I know it’s not right to be afraid of the people you love. I shouldn’t even be talking about this like I am. I’m sorry.”—Barbara, age 31.*

Women, like Barbara, who see themselves as martyrs, may have learned this behavior in childhood from critical parents when her helplessness and passivity were rewarded in some way. They may have learned that when you

put others first, you are viewed as a good daughter, and later, a good woman. They may have also been taught that life is hard and a woman's life is harder, however it is her duty as a man's helpmate not to complain or ask for what she wants. To sacrifice her own needs, health, or happiness for others is almost noble.

Look at this list of questions and decide whether you have been living your life as a martyr. Do you:

1. Apologize frequently?
2. Feel that you have to be very careful so that others don't become angry?
3. Fear confrontation?
4. Feel that you can't do anything right?
5. Feel that you can't—or don't have a right—to say "no"?
6. Feel as though you're not running your own life?
7. Feel like running away?
8. Live day to day without any true happiness?
9. Constantly put everyone else's needs or desires before your own?
10. Feel that others don't appreciate you?
11. Feel frightened when you think that you will stand up for yourself?
12. Feel overpowered by significant people in your life?
13. Always assume the worst?
14. Become overwhelmed with fear and doubt when you are presented with a problem or feel helpless when you are in a crisis?

Ask yourself what your payoff is for being a martyr. Does anyone admire you or do they just take advantage of you? Do people of your gender pretend to be your friend long enough to ask a favor from you? Do they ever reciprocate? Do you ever feel like saying no, but are fearful to do so? Why? *Does your martyrdom create chaos and drama in your life?* Sit with the idea that you have received certain "goodies" for remaining a martyr and examine what may be your emotional fear: If I say 'no', others won't like me and then I'll be alone. Is that

truly a realistic idea? I agree with your sentiment but not the reality of the situation. If you said 'no' once in a while, others would undoubtedly initially be shocked and dismayed, but ultimately respect you more.

### ***The Codependent***

*"When I met Sam, he was a social drinker. Well, I thought he was but it turns out that he was drinking socially with me and then more than socially with his friends when I wasn't around. When I got wind of that, I told him that I loved him and wanted to help him stop. He got pretty mad about that and told me he didn't have a problem, that I had a problem, and he'd drink what he wanted when he wanted. He accused me of overreacting because my father was an alcoholic. He might have been right about that so I tried to keep my worries to my self and just go with the flow, even though I was very uncomfortable with the situation.*

*We got married a couple of years later and he was a drunken mess at our wedding reception. I was so embarrassed but didn't say anything because—other than that—it was the happiest day of my life and I didn't want to ruin anything for anyone else.*

*As Sam began to drink more and more, I tried everything I could to get him to stop. I begged and pleaded, I cried, I hid his bottles. Nothing worked.*

*We got into more and more fights over his drinking. Well, he'd yell and I'd keep quiet. I tried to keep everything at home together. We had a little boy and he'd cry when daddy picked him up and was rough with him when he drank. That made Sam mad and he accused me of brainwashing the baby or turning him into a mama's boy. I'd have to try and keep the baby quiet when Sam had a hangover and would be the one to call his boss when he was too sick to work. I'd tell him some lie about Sam having the twenty-four hour flu or a migraine. It felt horrible to do that, especially since he and his wife had been so good to us, and me in particular.*

*Sam got into a drunk-driving accident in which the woman in the other car was severely injured. It was his third DUI and this time, he went to jail. It was*

*horrible. He was there for quite a while and I didn't know what to do. I was angry with him and scared and sad. I didn't know what to tell people.*

*I went to see the woman who was injured at the hospital and didn't tell Sam. I apologized to her for what my husband did. She was bruised and had broken bones. She looked so terrible and I couldn't help but cry. She told me that her ex-husband was an alcoholic and by our brief conversation figured mine was too. She said she used to be just like me and that I was in a more permanent prison that he was. She said he'd be out soon and would begin drinking again, but her bones would never be the same and I would go back to my prison. I didn't know what to say. She saw right through me.*

*Sam got out of jail and had to go to an alcohol abuse program three nights a week, which he complained about. When he came home from the program, he drank and swore and treated the baby and me badly. He called me names and told me it was my fault that he drank and that he never wanted a kid. He'd tell the baby to shut up when he cried and one day, he pushed him over.*

*I don't know what happened to me but I told him to leave. He just laughed and told me I couldn't take a step without him and that no one else would ever want me because I was homely and scared and bad in bed. I picked up the baby, packed a few things for him, and left the house. He was laughing and yelling after me, "You'll be back, bitch. Where do you think you're going?" I called his parole officer and told him that Sam was consistently violating his probation by drinking several times a week and if he went to the house now, he could test him because he was drunk.*

*A year later, I'm still scared and shaky. He's out of jail again and bothering me. I try not to make him mad and let him see the baby when I'm with him. He resents that and calls me names. I want him to be happy. I don't want him to drink. When I see him, I try to remind him of what his choice of drinking has cost him, but he still won't listen. I know I still love him in spite of everything and wish he'd change. I don't want our son to have the same childhood that I did. My dad has never stopped drinking and neither has Sam. What do they have in common? Me."—Nadia, age 23.*

You have probably heard the word codependent bandied about but may have never really known what it meant. According to Melody Beattie, author of groundbreaking books on the subject, a person who is codependent is “one who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person’s behavior.” My own definition of a codependent is “I’m OK if you’re OK.”

Let’s think of Nadia for a moment. She let Sam’s behavior control her, spent inordinate amounts of time trying to keep him from drinking and when that didn’t work, lied for him, even though it went beyond her moral values. Her moods were fused with his, his needs with hers. She ceased to exist but to please Sam and her son.

Codependents are often raised in alcohol or drug-addicted homes, or where there were other compulsions such as food or gambling addictions or the parents were severely depressed. Because these children are often so neglected and their homes are so *chaotic and dramatic*, they attempt to gain control over their own behavior and also by attempting in vain to control the behaviors of their parents. They become little adults and try to rescue the parents from themselves. They learn to anticipate the needs of others. It’s no wonder, then, that if you grew up in this type of household, you are not only drawn to people who need your help, you feel best when you are being of help.

Take this short quiz to find out if you may be codependent. Do you:

1. Ignore problems or pretend they aren’t happening?
2. Pretend circumstances aren’t as bad as they are?
3. Tell yourself that things will be better tomorrow?
4. Stay very busy so that you don’t have to think about things?
5. Get depressed or sick often?
6. Become a workaholic, either at home, work, or school?
7. Overeat or overspend?
8. Watch problems get worse and feel helpless to fix them?
9. Believe lies others tell you?

10. Lie to yourself?
11. Feel responsible for other people's feelings, actions, choices, or well being?
12. Feel compelled to help others solve their problems?
13. Lose interest in your own life and goals when you are in love?
14. Leave bad relationships only to form new ones that don't work either?

Answering yes to just a few of those questions could indicate that you are codependent. Understand that codependent men and women have very low self-esteem and only feel truly worthwhile when they are giving and doing for others. They have seemingly sweet personalities and have savior/rescuer complexes. This makes them perfect targets for unhealthy relationships and *causes tremendous chaos and drama in their lives.*

The reason I stated that they are seemingly sweet is that underneath the sweet persona is a very controlling and angry person. Because she doesn't express her feelings directly, she feels silently used and resentful. It's not that she doesn't have needs or feelings, she just doesn't feel worthy of making demands. In fact, she really isn't honest with herself or others, so rather than feeling constant hurt and rejection, the codependent man or woman represses their own anger, fails to complain, pushes their own thoughts and feelings aside, and doesn't allow reality to interfere with their own little world.

Can you now see how the combination of sweet personality, rescuer, putting your own needs aside, never complaining directly or asking for what you want causes *chaos and drama* in your life?

### ***The Chaos and Drama Junkie***

*"I've never had a boyfriend who has a normal life. One was a drug addict, one kept losing jobs, one had a criminal record and kept doing stupid stuff that could have gotten him in trouble, another one was a recovering alcoholic, one*

*had a very turbulent childhood, and another one was deciding if he should join a motorcycle gang. It's been crazy!*

*No, understand that I didn't know any of this when I met them; it just happened. It makes my life hell. I'm always worrying about these guys and trying to help them. I've spent the savings account my grandparents set up for me to pay for college springing these guys from jail and paying their rent or other bills.*

*I don't know how I find these guys or how they find me.”—Gwen, age 18.*

Listening to Gwen's relationship life is enough to give you a splitting headache. How is it possible that every significant relationship in which she's been involved is full of *chaos and drama*? She's still a teenager!

I've met many, many women who are attracted to "bad boys" and men who are attracted to "nasty girls." Bad boys and girls are exciting and dramatic. Something wild and crazy always seems to be happening in their lives. Being with them is like being on a roller-coaster: you feel queasy most of the time and don't know when you're going to get whiplash, but boy do you feel alive on this relationship ride! Most of the people I know who think they are sick of the ride go on to date "nice" guys or girls, whom they invariably find very boring and drop after one or maybe two dates. Then, they go on to find another manic fixer-upper and complain about the chaos and drama in their lives.

Chaos and drama can be addictive...literally. Your body is in a constant state of heightened alert and adrenaline is pumping. When your body becomes accustomed to this high response state, it's akin to a drug that is difficult to quit.

What is your level of chaos and drama? Take this little quiz and judge for yourself. Do you:

1. Almost always find some sort of crisis occurring in your life?
2. Find that you are almost always angry with at least one person in your life?
3. Find that you are frequently in heated arguments with friends, coworkers, family members, or significant other?

4. See that your reunions after fights or separations from your partner are intensely erotic?
5. Find yourself needing to “stir things up” when things get too calm?
6. Get bored easily?
7. Tend to be unhappy with routine and instead prefer a lifestyle that involves continual change?
8. Ever wonder whether anyone or anything will ever really make you happy?
9. Tend to become attracted to and get involved with romantic partners who are unavailable, who aren’t interested in you, have a criminal background, who are abusive, have a drug and/or alcohol abuse background, or who have other problems?
10. Find that you are involved in legal matters more than most others you know?

Many women and men who are drama and chaos junkies were raised in a chaotic, dysfunctional home in which there may have been alcohol or drug use, mom was a drama queen, or there was very high negative energy. This level of drama, therefore, seems normal.

For many people in this situation, the more unavailable a potential partner is, the greater the challenge to him or her. The more disinterested the partner, the more interested she is. If the partner has a highly problematic life, then she knows she can be truly helpful for a good, long time. He will need her so maybe he won’t dump her. It’s sort of like job security!

Of course, one of the downfalls of these scenarios is that the underlying problem she has that drives her. Have you ever noticed that when you’re feeling pretty crummy about your life, if you watch a soap opera, you don’t feel so bad after all? Now, those characters really have it bad. You’ve distracted yourself for an hour, you haven’t had to focus on your problems, and comparatively speaking, your life looks OK. It’s the same reason women and men seek out partners with multiple problems or create drama in their lives: as long as they are

focusing on the partner or the chaos in general, they don't have to examine themselves and their own inner chaos.

You will need to decide for yourself whether or not going from one drama to another, feeling irritable and distracted, and never finding contentment is worth the effort it would take for you to take a few months to really look at your life and what drives you. Once you do that, resolution of your problems really doesn't take that long. Why don't you commit to putting yourself first for a few weeks, really working on yourself, and seeing where it leads?

Some ideas to think about are:

1. What do I achieve by creating or attracting drama and chaos into my life?
2. Would I feel more or less content if there weren't continual chaos around me?
3. What would happen if I let go of every person who is toxic and began again, even if it means losing friends, family members, or a job?
4. What affect has my drama and chaos had on my health and well being?
5. What affect has my drama and chaos had on my children? Do they deserve this type of lifestyle?
6. What has been my payoff for continually keeping drama and chaos around me?

When you decide that you deserve a better life with better people surrounding you—people who live contented, healthy lives—your life will instantly become easier and more peaceful. Only you can decide if that's something you *really* want.