

“i’m addicted to bad boys”

What makes troublemakers so sexy? One reader tells how she got hooked, then hurt—but went back for more. BY ERICA STRAUSS

Long before Aiden* broke my heart, I knew he was bad news. We were only in eighth grade, but he was constantly in trouble for fighting. We were neighbors, so Aiden would show up at my house to vent. I liked that he confided in me—it made me feel special to see a side of him no one else saw. We started dating, and I thought, If we stay together, I can fix him. But when I refused to have sex with him, he dumped me. I cried myself to sleep for weeks.

I was still hurting from the split a year later, when I met Ryder* at a local fair. His tattoos and pierced lip made him seem so mysterious—and I wanted to be the one to understand him. We began dating, but we fought all the time, even more than I had with Aiden. Still, it felt romantic—like we cared enough to fight for each other.

One day in the cafeteria, I yelled at Ryder for flirting with another girl. He cursed me out and hurled his lunch tray at me, covering me with mashed potatoes. I was so mad that I wrote “I hate you” in red lipstick on his car. I knew it was crazy, but I felt *powerful*. Even if I was only making things worse, I was addicted to the drama—and I didn’t want it to end. After that, he refused to take my calls and ignored me at school. It was over. I was crushed and desperate to get him back.

That same week, I hooked up with Ryder’s best friend. I didn’t even like him, but I knew that Ryder would find out about it—and I wanted to hurt him the same way he’d hurt me. Sure enough, when Ryder heard about the hookup a week later, he flew into a rage and tried to drive away in his car. I could have let him go—but instead, I jumped into the passenger seat and begged him to hear me out, until he tried to shove me out of

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the door. The truth is, I *craved* those dramatic moments because I thought they meant there was love and passion between us. As long as I could create that excitement, I thought, we’d be together—and I’d never have to face the loneliness I felt when I’d lost Aiden.

Eventually I had to say goodbye to Ryder because I was leaving for college. But without him, my life felt unbearably dull—until I found another bad boy at school. In my heart, I knew I was setting myself up for the same problems, but I couldn’t imagine any other type of relationship. This guy had a reputation for sleeping around and drinking, but it made me want him more—like dating a guy with

issues would make me feel less messed up. One night, after two years of drama, a girl burst into his room and screamed at me to get out of his bed—because he had been hooking up with her. I realized right then that my bad boys didn’t see me as

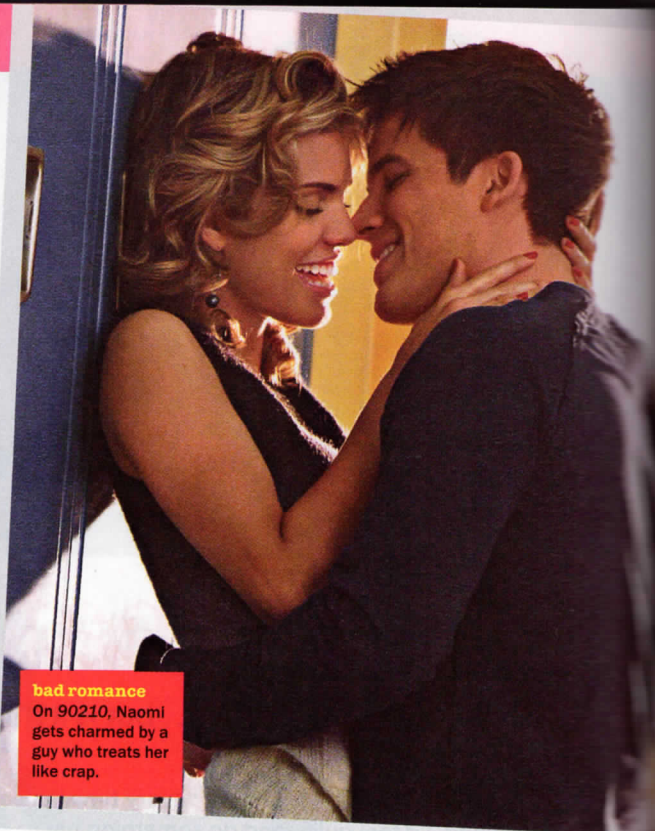
“special,” the way I’d felt when they’d tell me their troubles. They took all the love and energy I could give, then demanded more.

I never got anything back.

I started to see a therapist. She helped me find ways to focus more on my life, from being more assertive to exercising three times a week to changing my diet. I learned that I could be on my own—I didn’t need to be half of a relationship.

After two (happy!) years without a boyfriend, there’s a new guy. The old me would never have liked him: He’s career-oriented and into campus activities. Yeah, I still swoon a little when I look at bad boys, but I don’t relate to them. I don’t understand why they hate the world. But I do understand that it’s not up to me to help them. Now I’m helping myself. 17

*Name has been changed.



bad romance
On 90210, Naomi gets charmed by a guy who treats her like crap.



wild ride
Ryder was Erica’s go-to type: spiked hair, tattoos, and a bad attitude.

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