

Intermittent Reinforcement of My Romantic Behavior

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At the beginning of summer, while visiting my hometown, I met Mark during an evening visit to a bar. We started talking and learned that we had mutual friends and were surprised that we had not met before. At night's end Mark requested a ride back to his truck, so I drove him. On the drive, we talked and learned that we enjoyed the same music. After I dropped him off, I drove home and went to bed.

The next morning, I received a text message from a friend. She told me that Mark found me attractive and would like to meet again. She gave me his number and told me he was waiting for me to text him. So, I sent him a message and, once again, we started talking. We agreed to meet that night. We got a few drinks at a bar and it wasn't long before I was intoxicated. Mark asked me to go home with him and I went without hesitation. That night was the first time we were intimate.

The next morning I returned to Milwaukee and was surprised to see that Mark was texting me. He asked when he could see me again and I told him I would return in two weeks. While I was away, we spoke frequently.

Once I returned, Mark and I spent every day together. He was always kissing and holding me. Friends often commented on how much he attended to me. Mark was always disappointed when I had to return to Milwaukee. I told him that this was my last year of college and that, if he were patient, I would be moving home after graduating and then

we could be together. He told me that he would try to wait for me, and we continued to see each other whenever possible.

Once school started, it became very hard for me to travel home. I had class five days a week, and worked every weekend. Mark continued to say that he would wait for me, even though we wouldn't see each other for a while. After the first few weeks of school, however, his rate of calling and texting decreased. Sometimes, an entire week would pass before I would hear from him. I would worry about whether or not he still sought to be with me. I could not stop thinking about him. When he finally did call, I was surprised that he still thought about me.

Mid-September, Mark told me that he would like to see me. I said I would drive up after work that Saturday and stay for one night. I was so happy to be back with him. Once again, he showered me with affection. The next morning he did not say much; he was cold and distant. I left for Milwaukee, worrying about the future of our relationship.

Mark and I talked over the next month, but not enough for me. His text messages used to be long and often funny; now, they were short and emotionless. In late October, I returned home for the funeral of my great-grandmother. I had told Mark that I would be there, and he had called and asked me to meet him shortly after I arrived. At his house, he was happy to see me. Though I was very depressed about the loss of my great-grandmother, I was happy that I at least had Mark to comfort me. The night after the funeral, Mark called and asked me to meet him at a bar. But when I arrived, he was gone. No one could tell me where he went. I tried to call him but he didn't answer. The next day I returned to Milwaukee, more depressed than ever. I never heard from Mark again.

Physically speaking, Mark was not attractive, and he treated me so inconsistently. I could not understand why I continued to let him treat me this way. Indeed, my friends insisted that I could do much better than Mark. From my behavior analysis class, I see that Mark controlled my behavior by intermittent reinforcement, much like a slot machine. You may win on your first spin, but there is no telling when you will win again. Mark would reinforce my behavior by providing much affection for a short time. Then, he would stop providing affection for an undetermined time. Receiving affection required my contacting him. Right now, it seems as if an extinction schedule is in place. But what will I do if I run into Mark?