Dear Alice,

I am a college grad who has always had trouble finding a girl to have a romantic relationship with. I have had only one real relationship during my junior year in college and it ended before the point in which we would have had sex. (Alas, I am still a virgin!). The other day my older brother (by one year) and I were talking about this and he advised me to be more aggressive. (I am admittedly somewhat shy). However, I fear that it may be something more basic than that. I used to not think that my brother was that much better looking than me but seeing girls walk across a crowded room to talk to him on more than one occasion while I stood right beside and watched has changed my mind and affected the confidence I have in myself. I'm starting to realize that all the girls I am interested in don't see me as attractive. Without even asking, I can see it in their eyes: "Let's just be friends." If my problem is lack of physical charms maybe I should set my sights lower.

What do you think??
Signed,
Lonely without Love

Answer

Dear Lonely without Love,

There are no generic standards for attractiveness? different people are attracted to different features in other people. Physical looks, charm, quietness or outgoing?ness, sense of humor, long hair or short hair, it's impossible to determine which qualities might attract a potential mate. The women who are attracted to your brother are not necessarily the same women who would be attracted to you. This is not a bad thing. You and your brother are different; you've already acknowledged that. In spending all your time watching the women who are attracted to your brother, you may be missing the women who might be attracted to you.
It seems as though you may be struggling with your self-esteem. This is the thing that has perhaps been diminished somewhat by comparing yourself or your experiences to your brother's. Stop for a moment and take a look at yourself. Think about and recognize all that you have to offer a potential partner. Write these qualities down. If you are having a hard time coming up with this list, ask someone you trust. When you start to notice that you're dwelling on your shortcomings or otherwise feeling down on yourself, take a gander at that list. Read and study it, and add to it, until you believe it with every fabric of your being.

Then think about the qualities you would enjoy in someone else. Next time you go out dancing or are in another public place, as you're looking around, remember that you're a good catch for the right person, and be discriminating about who you choose to socialize with. Talk to lots of women, knowing that you will not have a relationship with all of them, but that you're open to exploring the possibility with a select few — your selection! Try not to fear rejection (though it's easier said than done), it happens to everyone at some point. That's part of the process of finding someone compatible.

It may also be helpful to explore why a relationship is so important to you. Of course, having intimate human connection is an experience that many people seek and value, but what else about it appeals to you? What meaning do you attach to being attached? What meaning does being single have for you? Society sends a lot of messages that singledom is undesirable and these messages can make single people themselves feel undesirable, which may in turn make it harder to trust that there is someone out there for you. But your minimal dating in the past is not evidence for your future.

Talking to a counselor can help you work through limiting beliefs that you may have about yourself and about your romantic potential. It may also help you identify sources of your insecurities as well as the meaning relationships have for you. And remember this about meeting people and dating: It never works? until one day, it does.

Take care,

Alice!

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