Guy in love with my male professor

Dear Alice,

I am a male college student and I am in love with one of my teachers. The main problem is that I am male... and so is he. I can't get him out of my mind. What should I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

You raise a couple of issues in your question: sexual orientation and professor fixation. It sounds like the former is your bigger concern right now—a familiar "problem" for many college students who begin to more closely examine their sexual feelings in campus environments that typically foster more free thinking and experimentation. We all have varying degrees of sexual, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual attractions to other men and women. It is really our comfort level with these attractions that determines how we think about them (as good or bad), whether we explore them to learn more about ourselves, or whether we resist and perhaps deny their existence.

If you decide to pursue your feelings of being attracted to another man, have you considered social and academic groups, on campus and off, that might allow you to meet people with similar interests with whom you can develop relationships?

Now, about teachers: they are often wonderful mentors and role models, but university policies and ethical dilemmas can quickly become obstacles to amorous relationships between students and teachers. Actual rules vary by school. Additionally, some departments may adopt their own stricter policies. Whatever your school's policy, keep in mind that these types of relationships have an inherent power difference that can cloud issues involving consent. A relationship with a professor could also mean sacrificing any educational or other benefits that you garner from the class.

The dynamics between students and professors can also lead to feelings that may be confused with those of a romantic crush. For example, professors of any gender may possess qualities that students themselves desire: wisdom, confidence and status, enthusiasm for a subject, etc. People may also desire the attention or praise of a professor they particularly admire. Have you tried asking yourself questions about your feelings? Do these non-romantic emotions seem to best describe how you feel about your professor? Or does your "crush" seem to be more about sexual attraction? Perhaps you might try to set a boundary for yourself: enjoy all the good feelings that your student-professor relationship currently
provides, and do your best to separate your crush from the classroom.

You might also want to focus on developing other positive relationships, particularly with your peers? you may find that you get distracted from your crush, and even have an opportunity for a romance that doesn't involve all the power issues. If you still find yourself struggling with your crush (regardless of if it's because he's a man, your professor, or both), you may find it helpful to talk with someone about your feelings. Many universities offer counseling to their students.

All the best as you work through the complex nature of attraction, relationships and school.

Alice!

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