My need for sexual attention is getting out of hand [1]

Dear Alice,

I am afraid my need for sexual attention is getting out of hand. The past several weekends I have wound up kissing guys in bars, and I find myself less interested in flirting or having interesting conversations with them than I am in getting that rush of meeting someone new. This weekend I had sex with a guy I had just met in a bar and I have no idea why. Making matters worse is that he was much younger than I am and I don't think we had anything in common whatsoever. I feel like I am devaluing myself and I don't want to lose my self-respect. How can I find the cause of my behavior and how can I stop?

Mrs. Robinson

Answer

Dear Mrs. Robinson,

While for some casual kissing in bars or an occasional one-night stand is no big deal and/or fun, others aren't interested in that at all. Many people may feel differently about casual encounters at different points in their life as well. It may help to consider why you get such a rush from meeting new people right now? are you bored with your current social circle? Does it make you feel good to know others are interested in meeting (and/or kissing) you? These and other feelings are valid to have. Exploring them may actually help you discover some new things about yourself and what you want from your life.

However it sounds as if you're concerned about your recent run of bar-inspired flings. Maybe exploring your intuition would bring up some behaviors or feelings that you would like to change. Is it possible you have been using alcohol or other substances differently these past few weeks and feel that this is contributing to your actions? Or are you using this string of striking strangers to soothe a broken or lonely heart? It's true that bar encounters such as these can serve as a harmless, and even valuable, boost to one's self-esteem, particularly post-heartbreak. However, as you mention, if the reasons behind the actions don't mesh with your personal values, your self-esteem and self-respect could suffer.

A healthy self-esteem and self-respect are essential to our well-being, physically and psychologically. Self-esteem is, simply, how good we feel about who we are and can come from many places, most importantly from inside yourself. However, the impact of self-esteem, or the lack of it, is complicated and far-reaching. Self-esteem and respect affect the choices we make in our lives, whom we choose to be involved with, and our ability to take action to
change things we feel need changing. If you feel as if your behaviors are atypical, and you are worried about harming your self-esteem, being aware of your feelings and looking for potential solutions are positive next steps.

The need for sexual attention is normal, but if or when you feel as though your choices or behaviors are getting out of hand, it might be helpful to look at what else is going on in your life at the moment. Your actions may be your way of dealing with recent changes or stresses. Maybe you've moved, find school stressful, are looking for work, are dealing with a difficult family circumstance, or are going through some other kind of transition. Or, perhaps there are unresolved problems that are now resurfacing.

Depending on your level of concern, or your desire to change your behavior, you may find it useful to speak with a counselor. You can ask your primary care provider for a referral. Alternatively, you may find that spending some time with a trusted friend who is willing to pore over recent events with you is all you need to clarify your feelings.

As for the age issue, having sex with a much younger or older partner, if all involved are caring and consenting adults, is fine. What does matter is that you are comfortable with yourself, that your actions make you feel good about yourself and those around you, and that you are protecting yourself and partners from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unwanted pregnancy.

The process of self-realization may help you figure what is behind your actions. Try to give yourself the freedom to honestly assess your feelings. Remember that a one-night encounter isn't bad or wrong in and of itself; it's the feelings that come up for you before and after that may, or may not, need to be addressed.

Best to you,

Alice!

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