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 universal standards for attractiveness — different people are attracted to different features in other people. Physical looks, charm, being quiet or outgoing, sense of humor, long or short hair, it's impossible to determine which qualities might attract a potential mate. The women who are attracted to your brother aren't necessarily the same women who would be attracted to you. 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. Embracing yourself as you are, rather than focusing on how you're different from your brother, may help you increase your confidence and attract others.

It seems as though you may be struggling with your self-esteem. It may perhaps have been diminished somewhat by comparing yourself or your experiences to your brother's. Try to stop for a moment and take a look at yourself. Consider thinking about and recognizing all that you have
to offer a potential partner, and then write these qualities down. If you're having a hard time coming up with this list, you could ask someone you trust. When you start to notice that you're dwelling on your shortcomings or otherwise feeling down on yourself, you may find it helpful to take a gander at that list. Reviewing and adding to the list when you're feeling low may help you feel better and may encourage you to remember and embrace these aspects of who you are and what you can offer.

You could also think about the qualities you would enjoy in someone else. Next time you're out with friends or are in another public place, as you're looking around, remember that you're a good catch for the right person, and be selective about with whom you choose to socialize. Talk to lots of women, knowing that you won't have a relationship with all of them, but that you're open to exploring the possibility with a select few. 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 of significance 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 singlehood is undesirable and these messages may 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 isn't indicative of your future.

If some self-reflection and rethinking your partner-seeking don't seem to change your current experience, talking with a mental health professional may 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. Hopefully using some of these strategies will help you find the person you're looking for and appreciate yourself for the attractive partner you are.

Take care,

Alice!

Related questions

- Looking for the right person
- Finding a partner
- Need help to start dating

Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
- Mental Health Services (CUIMC)