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Lonely foreign grad student ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Recently I have been doing something that I am not proud of. Before I go into the problem I would like to tell you my background briefly. I am a foreign graduate student working for my Ph.D. I am not good looking and am extremely shy. As a result, I have no girl friend to make love with, although I have quite a few friends who are women and who like me as a gentle, charming, reliable, and helpful person. All these girls are not sexually attractive to me. So far I have never met or made friends with a woman with whom I would like to be romantically involved.

In the meantime, I am always sexually aroused — I have been masturbating very often. Lately, I have been visiting a prostitution house — not from the street though — I would say frequently, to fulfill my sexual desires. I am not of course proud of this. However, I never ever had oral sex or intercourse with any of them. What I do with prostitutes is that I feel their bodies and masturbate; I am still a virgin although I am over thirty. Visiting the whore house is becoming my habit, which I would like get rid of. I need your advice in solving my problems. Is seeing in-house prostitutes unhealthy? How to get rid of this habit? etc...

Signed,
Lonely foreign grad student

Answer

Dear Lonely foreign grad student,

It sounds as if not only are you lonely, but you are also feeling negatively about masturbating and visiting a prostitute to satisfy your sexual desires. Let's begin with a bit of human sexuality 101. Several things you describe are perfectly normal aspects of sexuality; wanting a partner, having sexual urges, masturbating, and visiting prostitutes are feelings and behaviors that many people share. There is nothing wrong with masturbating, alone or with a prostitute, to fulfill your sexual desires as long as no one gets hurt and your sexual activity is safe (more information about safer sex with a prostitute in the Related Q&As). If visiting prostitutes is causing to feel badly about yourself, you may consider stopping the visits and finding other ways to satisfy your sexual needs and desires. You could try masturbating alone, fantasizing, and/or watching porn while you masturbate.

Moving on to your feelings of loneliness, something you'll want to keep in mind (that you already seem to understand) is that visiting prostitutes is not a substitute for a loving relationship. Many human needs are satisfied in an intimate relationship — needs for approval and affirmation, for companionship, for meaningful ties to community, for a partner who will share life's challenges. Truly satisfying relationships go well beyond sexual behavior.

You say that you have many friendships with women; often times, lasting relationships develop from friendships. Why not try spending some time alone with one or two of your female friends? Maybe they would like to help you practice dating! Since they are already your friends, you may already have some ideas about activities they would enjoy. You could ask them to go out to lunch, a movie, or take a walk. You also mention that you are not attracted to any of your women friends. If this is the case, think back to times when you have felt physical attraction. Who were you with? Were they female or male (again, either is perfectly normal)? What was attractive about them? How did they make you feel? Figuring out who you are attracted to is a big step towards preparing to date. For more ideas about how to begin dating, you may want to check out the Related Q&As.

If your loneliness is getting in the way of your personal or academic goals, or causing you a lot of distress, you could think about visiting a counselor, who can help you come up with individualized strategies for meeting people. Try not to despair. There are people out there for you. Dating, meeting people, and building relationships are all a process of trial and error — we all have to begin somewhere in order to discover the qualities we are looking for in a date or long-lasting partner.

Alice!

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