Dear Alice,

I believe that one of the most aggravating things that can happen to a woman is to be noticeably rejected by a man she is attracted to. This has happened to me more times than I'd like to admit. I have actually experienced the embarrassment of a guy shaking my hand 'hello,' while at the same time eyeballing my best friend who's standing next to me, and telling her what beautiful eyes she has, not looking at me once! How can anyone have a fun evening after something like that? I did read the insightful advice you give in this website about self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness and I truly agree with every word you write.

Still, how can you get over actual, tangible rejection when it's hitting you in the face? Do you excuse yourself and rush to the ladies room, to look at yourself in the mirror, and repeat an emergency mantra like: "I am beautiful, I believe in me, etc. etc."? That feels self-deceptive, almost hypocritical. You don't feel so beautiful at moments like that, you feel you've just been smacked across the face! Or, do you try to stop caring whether the guy you really like won't give you the time of day, or in general about how other people react to you? That is even more intangible and hard to accomplish; humans are social animals and we do depend on others for approval, especially when one is a warm-hearted woman with needs and expectations. So what does one do at that embarrassing moment of rejection? Do you crack a joke like, "Hey, if you want your hand back you'll have to stop eyeballing my friend!" or do you stomp his foot by accident? Please offer me an insight, or a fresh thought on how to handle situations like this, because, truly, I have run out of ideas.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Being ignored or overlooked when you really want to make a connection with someone can really hurt. You're not the only one who has had this experience; it's probably happened to most people at one time or another. However, when it seems to happen over and over again, it can really make you wonder why. You're right that we are social animals — people crave affirmation and support from others, and you deserve it! The good news is there are ways you can address your feelings and set yourself up for success in these types of encounters.
When faced with a scenario similar to what you've described in your question, it may be helpful to keep in mind that not every response you get is a reflection of you as a person. It's possible that the people you're meeting aren't ignoring you out of meanness. Their response to you (or lack thereof) may not be about you at all. At times, people might seem uninterested when they are actually distracted, stressed, or tired. It may sound trite, but if people are rude to you on purpose, they're probably not relationship material for you anyway.

You might also consider how you are approaching people to show interest. Before beginning a conversation, do you anticipate rejection? If so, do you think you might be sending out certain vibes that affect your ability to connect with people? It may also be the case that some people aren't picking up on what you're putting down, ya dig? You might feel rejected, but they may not have even realized that you're interested. Making eye contact, asking friendly questions, and positive body language usually make it clear you're interested in getting to know them. On the flipside, some people might feel like you're coming on too strong. Do you think people might perceive you as overwhelming? If you're really working to gain approval from every person you interact with, people might sense that and feel uncomfortable or pressured. It might help to try to relax and not feel so emotionally invested in every interaction. You're right; it's hard to not care what people think, but maybe you could try to worry less about it.

If it's clear that you're interested and they're not feeling it, some of your other ideas make sense too. Humor can help diffuse tension, so you could try drumming up a laugh or two in the moment. Pausing to remember how awesome you know yourself to be, regardless of anyone else's opinion, might also help. And even if it feels hypocritical to try to be upbeat when you feel down, dwelling on negatives isn't likely to accomplish anything. Consider reframing the situation: "This person doesn't seem interested in me. Maybe we don't have that much in common anyway. I'm going to move on, and find other people who share my interests." Stomping on some toes may sound appealing in the moment, but brushing off the disinterest and moving forward might help you get on the right foot to feeling better.

Also, where you're at and what you're doing might have something to do with your success at meeting an interested person. Sometimes, parties or bars can add social pressures or distractions that make connecting harder. Meeting people through a club or organization, a volunteer project, or a sports team that caters to your interest might improve your chances. Doing so might give you something in common and make an interaction easier without having to battle the DJ over the volume just to have a conversation.

Feeling rejected is can really sting. Starting with a good base of support, i.e. your friends and family, may help remind you that you are a fantastic person, making those moments you feel rejected sting a bit less. And remember — while you might feel crumby in the moment, this too shall pass.

Alice!
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