



## Horney

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### Case Study 10

At the age of 23, Shimin has just earned his master's degree in mathematics and is about to begin his first, full-time, permanent position with a General Motors Research Facility. He had other part-time jobs to get him through his education, but now he has finally begun his career. One of these part-time jobs was as an instructor in the department where he was completing his master's degree requirements. This position initially required that Shimin teach three sections of an introductory level math course each semester in return for a tuition waiver and a small stipend. However, Shimin did not enjoy his teaching experience, and apparently, his students did not either. Shimin was displeased with his students' lack of enthusiasm. He complained that his students were not really trying to learn and that they were not interested in the material. He frequently found himself comparing what he had been as a freshman to the students whom he was now teaching, and he always found that his perception of himself at that time was more favorable than his view of his students. He was more interested, more enthusiastic, worked harder and longer, was more persistent, and so on. His students complained that Shimin was difficult to understand, that he covered the material too quickly, and that he was unapproachable. They complained that he made them feel stupid when they asked questions, and so they stopped asking questions. Moreover, their grades suffered because of it. These complaints made their way back to the mathematics department chair, and she discussed them with Shimin. Shimin did not enjoy teaching anyway, so the chair and Shimin thought it would be best if he would not teach the following semester and instead become a teaching assistant for a professor. His duties would be grading exams and homework. This suited him much better, and Shimin was quite efficient at his task, earning the respect of his professor.

Shimin's academic performance was superior as well. He earned excellent grades in his graduate classes and he finished his master's thesis on time. In fact, everyone, including his advisor, was quite surprised he had completed his thesis and was asking for an appropriate date for his defense. He had met with his advisor a minimal number of times, although he did send his advisor a memo once a month about his progress on his thesis. Most other students work closely with

their thesis advisors and meet with them frequently. In recommendation letters that were sent out to prospective employers, Shimin's advisor noted how independent he was.

Not surprisingly, Shimin was a superior student before graduate school, in both high school and college. In high school, he was an "ideal" student. He completed his assignments diligently, aced his exams, and was never disruptive in class. In fact, he rarely spoke in class unless he was asked a direct question, and then he usually answered correctly. He gained a reputation for being self-motivated. His teachers and guidance counselors did not need to spend much time with him because he always worked things out on his own. He actually preferred things that way because he felt he could always depend on himself but that one could not always depend on someone else's help. One reason he could rely so much on himself to learn and to make decisions was because he was an avid reader and computer whiz. He could do research on something in the library or on the Internet and did not need to discuss it with anyone else or ask anyone questions.

This same pattern of behavior continued in college, with Shimin excelling academically, despite the fact that he was an international student from Hong Kong in the United States whose second language was English. One professor who did begin to get to know Shimin suggested that he needed to contribute more to class discussion. This was a disturbing concept to Shimin, who until then had used his academic success to discourage interaction with others. He thought that if one doesn't have any questions, one didn't need to talk in class. Shimin dismissed this idea of talking in class as being an idiosyncrasy of the professor. Certainly, independence and self-sufficiency was much better and would earn him the respect of others, or so he believed.

By his own choosing, Shimin has not had much of a social life. He rarely dates. Although he says (and believes) that this is because he is too busy, it is actually because he hates the process of getting to know someone. He is reluctant to talk about himself and finds it difficult to answer questions about himself on first dates. He did not get to know many other students in college or graduate school because he did not live in the dorms. He preferred to rent an apartment so that he could live on his own. In both college and graduate school, Shimin joined various clubs and organizations, but again, he rarely made it to the meetings because he was "too busy."

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