

Men's Health

HOW YOU'RE SPARKING HER JEALOUSY

Little Things That Make Her Jealous

From holding doors open to liking Facebook posts, these are the tiny landmines you might step on in her presence

BY SARAH JACOBSSON PUREWAL, IMAGE FROM THINKSTOCK

You're out with your girlfriend, and everything is going smoothly. Suddenly, your phone vibrates. It's a text! From another woman. Never mind that the "other woman" is your female colleague or your childhood friend, both of whom you enjoy completely platonic relationships with. If you jump on the text too quickly (or maybe at all), your girlfriend suddenly grows huffy and annoyed, and she's no longer in the mood to do anything fun.

Sound familiar? You're not alone. Plenty of guys have been blindsided by jealousy triggered by a seemingly innocent action. You paid for your co-worker's meal? Why would you even do that? You helped your admittedly hot neighbor move some boxes? Do you want to sleep with her, or something?

"Jealousy is an emotion with a useful function," says psychotherapist Vinita Mehta, Ph.D. "It helps preserve long-term relationships, which in turn promotes survival and reproduction. It's technically called 'evolutionary adaption.'" According to Mehta, jealousy has worked so well over the years from an evolutionary standpoint that it's basically written into our brains as a survival instinct. "It's a forceful emotion, which is why little things, such as a casual comment about another woman's looks, intelligence, or personality, can make her feel threatened," Mehta says. "And yes, if she already feels insecure about her looks and you compliment someone else's looks, it cuts deeper."

While you shouldn't let her jealousy rule your relationship, there are certain things you do that are more likely to set her off. Here are four small, innocuous things you do for other women that fuel her jealousy—and how you should handle the fallout.

Paying for a female friend's cab

Dropping cash on a female friend—whether you're picking up the tab for coffee, a cab ride, or dinner—can trigger her jealousy in a very primal way. You're directly spending your resources (cash) on another woman, and that's exactly what her hindbrain is trying to prevent you from doing. "Gender role orientation teaches women that, in order to survive, they need to 'get' a man for his resources," says relationship expert Tracy Thomas, Ph.D. "It's irrelevant and outdated, but it's natural, and that's why we feel it." There's nothing wrong with paying for a friend, just make sure your girlfriend knows you don't make a habit of buying your female colleagues dinner.

Being overly friendly on Facebook

"The online world tends to fan the jealous flames, as it were," Mehta says. "She can unwittingly learn that you're spending time with a 'mating rival' by 'liking' or commenting on that rival's status." Online interactions may be small, but they still reflect—at least in her eyes—investments into other people's lives. Luckily, fixing this one is easy: Just point out to her all the other peoples' status updates and photos you 'like' and comment on, and she'll see that you're a social media champion, not a Facebook flirt. Of course, if you are a flirt, you may want to start 'liking' your guy friends' statuses, stat.

Mentioning your neighbor's hot body

Noting that your new neighbor happens to be in great shape is actually okay, if you don't overdo it. (There's no need to go into detail, for example.) But if your girlfriend has been mentioning her love handles recently, or lamenting how her busy schedule keeps her from hitting the gym every other day, it's probably wise to keep all comments about female bodies to your circle of

guy friends. “We’re threatened by the things we feel most vulnerable about,” says psychologist Alicia Clark, PsyD. “Our looks, our smarts, our attitude, our earning power—you name it, we can be sensitive about it. And what we’re sensitive about is exactly what we notice in others and feel threatened by.”

The easiest way to fight this trigger is actually to avoid it, Clark says. “Try not to add to her insecurities by pointing out other’s assets.” But you should try to find out what her insecurities actually are, by asking her why she’s reacting the way she is—is it an insecurity, a painful episode in the past, or something else motivating her emotions? “Except for the unusually paranoid personality, most jealousy is founded at some level,” Clark says. “Even if what you did was harmless, jealousy could be a signal that something in the relationship is amiss.”

Defending another woman in front of her

Maybe you’re just a chivalrous guy, and you stand up for the women in your life, whether they’re your girlfriend or just your friends. That’s fine, says relationship expert April Masini, as long as your girlfriend knows that she’s number one. “Women do want their men to be chivalrous, but they also want to be at the head of the pack,” Masini says. “If she doesn’t feel like she’s numero uno, she’ll see your chivalry for other women as a prickly betrayal.” This can start to be an issue if you’ve been in a relationship for long enough that you’re no longer in the ‘crazy in love’ phase.

If you’re comfortable with your girlfriend, you may not bother opening every door for her, and that’s fine—just make sure you don’t ever open doors for other women and not her. “A little competition and a pinch of jealousy can be good for a relationship,” Masini says. “Dating is competitive, and marriage isn’t death. Both people in the relationship are going to interact with other attractive people along the way.”

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