Dear Alice,

My current girlfriend and I started having sex last week. We have had sex a total of three times but each time afterwards something very strange happens. When we are finished we will get dressed and she will begin insulting me. Each time afterwards she gets in the worst mood, starts criticizing my sexual abilities and saying many other sexually offensive things to me. How do I react to all of this? It's really been getting me down. Your answer would be appreciated.

?Blighted Boyfriend

Answer

Dear Blighted Boyfriend,

People have many favorite post-coital activities — cuddling, showering, or passing out in a stone-cold sleep. And while some may incorporate insults or name calling into their dynamic, it doesn't sound as though it's what you desire. There are countless reasons your partner might be compelled to insult or critique you after sharing something as intimate and intense as sex, and it's possible she doesn't understand her motivations herself. Your partner might harbor conflicting feelings about sex or insecurities about her sexual abilities and desirability. Her moodiness and upset could also be a reaction to the increased vulnerability she may feel around you and the new stage you have entered in your relationship by sleeping together. Maybe this is something she did in a previous relationship and is carrying it over into yours.

Of course, there's really no way to understand her behavior without asking her. Some questions you might consider posing to get her thinking about why she's coming at you so fiercely: Have you felt this way in any situation before? Did I do something that hurt you or failed to make you feel safe, loved, or appreciated? Do you feel satisfied after our sex? Is there anything I can do differently? It might be helpful to listen carefully to what she's saying and to try to understand where she's coming from. If she has something she'd like you to do differently, that could be a great step in moving forward with greater intimacy and communication between you. Are there ways you could accommodate her requests?

It's equally important for you to let her know how her insults and bad mood makes you feel, asking her to think about the way she delivers her feedback so that it comes across as constructive criticism rather than harsh insults. Asking her how she would like to be spoken to after sex, and what her motivation is for offering the criticism might help her to put herself in
your shoes. A request might go something like this: "If we are going to continue to have sex with each other, I need to ask you not to insult me or criticize me afterwards. If you have something to say can you find a kind and loving way to communicate it?"

If you need help having this type of conversation, you can make an appointment with a counselor, either on your own or as a couple.

Your girlfriend's criticism might be a misguided attempt at getting closer to you through asking for something she wants, or it might be an attempt to get some personal space by pushing you away. In either case, if she isn't willing to work on her communication style, or to let you in on how she's feeling underneath her moodiness, you might want to consider whether this is someone you want to continue being with, and a dynamic you want to continue to experience.

Alice!
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Published date:
May 07, 2010
Last reviewed on:
Mar 26, 2015

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