Personal grooming? Can I tell my date to spiff up? [1]

Alice,

I've dated a new man three times and I like him enough to want to know more about him. In fact, I find him more interesting than every other man I've dated since I've been single this whole year. There's palpable chemistry between us and I look forward to our next date. He's successful and prides himself on being unconventional.

Big problem! His grooming isn't up to my standards. When he kissed me on our last date, his stubble made my chin red. I did say something, so he knows to shave before our next date or he won't be able to kiss me. But I also noticed his face didn't smell freshly washed (as in same-day!). Good news: his breath was fine and he's a great kisser.

More: his hair has split ends, different textures, is shoulder length, and is thinned at spots on top. It looks disheveled and unkempt and he wears it down and too much in his face.

Third: his clothes do not smell fresh and his white socks and undershirt did not look clean. Good news: I love his style and the vest, overcoat, jeans, and shoes he was wearing.

Last: His fingernails were not clean!

Question: How do I approach the subject to find out if these things are negotiable? I want to increase my chances of his considering my concerns without being insulted. I feel promise in our budding relationship and would hate to see it end before it's begun. Should I wait until he's more hooked on me? Please share some of your wisdom with me.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Your new love prospect has piqued not only your interest, but also your awareness of your own standards of acceptable cleanliness, hygiene, and grooming. Each person's level of cleanliness, hygiene, and grooming is not only a unique aspect of who they are, but is also influenced by upbringing, daily schedule or routine, comfort, convenience, culture, etc. What's more, fashion and grooming choices can change throughout a person's lifespan. So, when it comes to your beau? he may be going grunge for the moment, but it may also be his personal style for the foreseeable future. There may be some hinting at your preferences to encourage a different look, but it'll be up to him to decide if he's down for change. If you're into this person though, it's wise to also look beyond just his aesthetic attributes to determine
if he's truly the apple of your eye – stubble and all.

First, you might consider that your acceptable level of personal grooming and hygiene may just be different from his. Since you're still getting to know one another, it may be difficult to assess his nature and sensitivity to the subject matter. You can start a conversation by complimenting him, being real with what you say, something along the lines of, "I love how smooth your face feels against mine when we kiss. Mmmm..." The idea is to play up his finer features, or his assets, without sounding condescending or phony. This reinforces that he's doing something to please you. You might also broach the subject while channel surfing on the couch together. If you're a fan of reality-type television shows that hone in on grooming and style makeovers, or dating culture, they also might just be the kick-start needed to initiate further discussion.

You can also ask yourself, if his "disheveled and unkempt" appearance weren't an issue, would he still fit your checklist of what you seek in a potential mate? And, if he doesn't consider and follow-through with your suggestions, would you be willing to date him "as is"? This is a chance to identify your values and to learn to express them to him. Make a list of the characteristics you'd like in a partner, designating them as pluses, negotiables, or deal-breakers. This process may help put things into perspective, allowing you to prioritize what you value, and possibly saving you some heartache and time. If you find the pros don't outweigh the cons, you might determine that while chemistry is good in a relationship, it may not be enough to hold it intact.

A better route, however, might be to dedicate some more time to get to know him first. Concentrate more on how he treats you, how you feel when you are with him, and what you share in common. If they are positives, over time, you might talk with him, being upfront, honest, and caring about your grooming preferences. You might learn that he, too, has different expectations of you.

Alice!
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