

Arrangement anarchy

Guys, girls and the politics of making a plan

Guys have vague arrangements down to a fine art. Call it care-free or careless, buttoning down plans is not an area in which most guys excel. There must be some brotherhood understanding of this ad hoc plan-making phenomenon. I haven't seen too many guys reproaching each other in wounded tones or getting the silent treatment about lateness or arrangement misunderstandings. It seems that conflict can potentially arise only when cross gender plans are hatched.

My gorgeous friend gets an SMS from an elusive guy she quite likes, suggesting coffee on the weekend. She SMS's back that anytime Saturday is good, he can suggest the place. She doesn't hear from him and assumes he has gone weird and cold and she must have said something hideous in her reply. He rocks up to fetch her at 9.30 on Saturday morning. She's asleep in bed. He thought they had plans.

Why is it that men have arrangement issues? They phone, say they are coming over and arrive three hours later, having played tennis along the way after they bumped into Wayne who was keen for a game. Or Dave phoned and wanted to quickly check out a mini-disc player and needed some advice.

When this happens, the most aggravating thing for a girl is having to point out why she might be slightly huffy. For the guy who has managed to get himself into this situation and not informed said aggro woman of possible lateness or change of plans, brash stupidity is an amazingly common line of defence. He pretends nothing is amiss, greets fuming female cheerfully and asks innocently what she has been up to.

He looks so innocent she starts to wonder if the words, "I am coming over" could mean something in a language he's been studying to better understand foreign sport.

Sometimes, in the absence of sobering female influence, male minds left to their

own devices enter the dangerous zone of what I call blind masculine optimism. In this zone, any prior information about how women have responded to past irritating or gormless behaviour is erased. The girl is fondly recalled with a male disposition when it comes to arrangements.

So, our guy, let's call him Alan, is about to come over and receives the diversionary phone call. Dave wants to pick him up and take him to check out the mini disc. This won't take long he thinks, no need to burden the flexible and reasonable woman, let's call her Julie, with this trivia.

Dave arrives and Alan remembers Dave, a musician, hasn't seen his new cool bass amp. An hour later the guys head off. The delayed arrangement with the by-now slightly miffed Julie is just a dull sense of foreboding in the back of Alan's mind.

Two hours later, having managed to extricate himself from the male magnetic field that is any gadget emporium, Alan may start to feel a twinge of unease. He reasons that he was obliged to help out his buddy. If he hadn't been around Dave would have bought that dubious extension cable from Borneo. The Bornean cabling industry is way too young to warrant that kind of risk. Jules would surely agree.

Jules, however, when confronted with the cheerful, three-hour-late Alan, is icy. He would rather try his luck against the heinous hordes of Hades than have to wangle his way out of this one under her blood-chilling gaze. Something is terribly wrong. She is smiling thinly and greeting him, but it is as if electric eels were silently exploding from her lips with each civil utterance, attaching themselves to his temples and administering Electro Convulsive Therapy.

The ECT exposes the sad illusion of his male optimism. He's in real trouble and he is not quite sure why, but it might have something to do with Bornean extension cables. "What's wrong?" he offers.



"Nothing," she says, too quickly.

Great, he thinks. He was worried there for a minute, but if she says she is cool, fantastic. Why is it then that he feels like the eels are after his liver?

So, girls like to button down their plans and stick to arrangements while guys, not averse to making plans in their own right, seem to struggle with definition, specifics and the limitations of linear time.

The next time Alan phones and says he's coming over, Julie smiles and says sure. Off she goes to gym, confident in the fact that she will be back way before Alan arrives.

Twenty minutes later, Alan's at her door and no one's home. Didn't she understand the plans?

"Chicks!" he mutters.

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