



IN OUR NEW COLUMN, DEPUTY EDITOR LOTTE JEFFS TAKES **A SIDEWAYS LOOK** AT A WORD **THE FASHION WORLD** CAN'T STOP SAYING AND ASKS: 'WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?'

LEXICON

'SASSY'

Adjective: Lively, bold, and full of spirit

Who is your sassiest best friend? The queen of side eye and acerbic observations? The one who's first on the dancefloor, last to leave a party and an endless compendium of OMG anecdotes that often begin with a wild one-night-stand and end with the hair flick emoji? If you don't think you have a Sassy Best Friend, maybe that's because you are one (or you need to get out more).

But have you ever stopped to wonder if there's more to the person in your life who is always a good time, won't take any bullshit and can deploy the Beyoncé 'boy, bye' wave at any moment? The adjective, an old English word that derived from saucy and means 'self-assured, spirited, bold,' as much as 'impudent, outspoken, provocative,' can fast turn people into clichés and diminish the nuances of personality.

On television, our favourite, most giffable characters are the sassy ones: Titus in *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, Cookie in *Empire*, Samantha in *Sex And The City*. They're often gay men, black women and/or powerful women. Defining them as sassy is a way of making their 'otherness' more palatable to the masses. God forbid a black woman was actually angry, or a female boss used men as playthings or a gay guy spoke

about sex without it being in inverted commas and punctuated by a pantomime wink wink.

Today, TV shows provide the Greek chorus to our real lives, so it's no wonder that these tropes have filtered out into the world and we find ourselves unfairly labelling people as sassy when they have an authentic point to make. Sometimes women are angry. Like, really effin' in a rage, and shouty and aggressive and red-faced and



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ugly. Or sometimes we're pissed off that a man has taken the credit for our idea at work, or keeps talking over us in meetings, or starts mansplaining Brexit and, sorry, but we're going to pull them up on it. 'Oh, she's a sassy one,' might be the response. Saying this is a way of containing and explaining female emotion. I suggest you do the same next time a man loudly expresses an opinion you disagree with. 'No need to be so sassy John,' is the ultimate passive-aggressive put down. Try it.

But before we start taking it all too seriously, let's not forget that the word essentially describes our favourite kind of people. We're not condoning rudeness or a lack of manners, respect or kindness to our fellow humans. But if we pick the 'vigorous, lively, stylish, chic' synonyms then sassy starts to redeem itself. My friend Emma has the word tattooed on her inner arm. 'I got it in 2012,' she says. 'It represents a time in my life when I was being just that – sassy – and I was going out a lot. I met my three best friends and we called ourselves the Sassy Four. To me, it means "I do what I want" in a self-assured and confident way.'

When I was a teenager, my favourite magazine was a US title called *Sassy*. Having it poking out of my school bag made me feel like the coolest girl in the world. It was aimed at female fans of indie music and famously featured Courtney Love kissing Kurt Cobain on one of the covers. It had sex, drugs and rock'n'roll section editors, and it taught me everything I knew about music, boys and how to customise my own T-shirts. It's this spirit of rebellion that I think sassy should really mean. It's not about being able to unironically say, 'Gurl, please.' It's more about feeling free and fiercely yourself – a bit brash, a bit sexy, and never afraid to be angry when you need to be.

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