

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

Whatever your partner's scared of, be assured—**HE'S NOT CRAZY, HE'S MALE**

Often, we women are bewildered by our partners' behavior, because as women, we do not suffer from certain phobias that appear exclusive to men. Most of us are aware that they fear commitment and that mating for life doesn't come naturally to them (a trait they share with other large primates, such as the chimpanzee, orangutan and gorilla). But there are other, less well-known male phobias, a partial list of which follows:

Fear of sexual monogamy: Viewing sexual fidelity as a sort of living death is a common male affliction, often traceable to a youthful fascination with early explorers such as Vasco de Gama and Magellan. Boys are excited by the idea of exploring new territories, and somewhere along the way they start confusing women with land masses.

Because of its early link to world exploration, this phobia can often be treated by engaging your partner in frequent and strenuous travel. In fact, it's suggested that you keep him moving as much as possible.

Fear of cold entrees: This is often a simple case of conditioning, of going out to eat as a child and seeing his mother order salads and his father order goulash. Many men so conditioned may also have had a small pet—a guinea pig, rabbit or gerbil—and, finding the creature dead on the floor of its cage one morning, jumped to the conclusion that too much lettuce can kill.

Some women have found they can get around this problem by heating their partner's salads before serving, or by smothering them with onion rings.

Fear of short-haired women: You might have noticed that when you get a haircut your partner reacts with horror. This is probably because he has, like most men, an archetypal vision of women, from Eve on down, as having long hair, and he gets disoriented and confused when you come in the door showing a part of your anatomy he's never seen before: your ears. Remember, too, that from a man's historical perspective all the troubles in the world started when women shortened their hair and their skirts. Every time you cut your hair, you redramatize for him this painful moment in history.

You've got to do something quick to remind him that you're still the same woman. Do something reassuringly familiar. Like make a crack about his mother's beehive.

Fear of being taken for a married man:

If you've ever wondered why your boyfriend introduces you at parties with an offhandedness that suggests he just met you on his way in, or why your husband splits from your side as soon as you hit the room with an alacrity that leads observers to believe it's the first time he's been out of the house in three years, wonder no more. Your partner is exhibiting a pathological need to show the world that he is a free agent, and that you have no more claim on him than the person who took his coat at the door. For this you can probably thank his mother, who insisted on accompanying him to all of his grade-school dances and telling him to make sure his fly was closed.

It's your job to show him, as gently as possible, that being attached or married does not have the same social consequences as, say, being physically repulsive. Point out all the married men who are social successes: Robert Redford, for instance, not to mention Claus Vön Bülow.

Fear of being "emotional": You know your partner suffers from this phobia if the closest he's ever come to saying he loves you is a pat on the back accompanied by "You're not such a bad egg after all," and if, when you're feeling miserable about something, as close as he comes to empathy is advising you not to make a mountain out of a molehill.

Remind yourself of how often he was told that little boys don't cry, and try to show him that there are behavioral alternatives between those of the hysteric and the stone statue. It's your job to usher him into the fourth quarter of the twentieth century, where it's okay for men to feel something other than sexual arousal.

Fear of asking directions: If, when you suggest that your partner and you are lost and should ask for directions, he reacts as if you'd suggested he get a seeing eye dog, chances are, say the experts, that he once had a horrible experience being lost. This probably occurred in a department store, where he had to listen to a loudspeaker describe him to a store full of shopping women as a "lost, crying child found in the Boy's Chubby department." It's understandable if, from that time on, he resists admitting he's lost because it makes him feel like an unutterable wimp.

Try to get it across to your partner that being lost doesn't make him less masculine, and that it takes a big man to admit that he doesn't have a clue to his whereabouts.

Remember, putting up with a man's phobias is something you sign on for when you hook up with him. And it's only fair: You expect *him* to put up with yours, like the fact that your reaction to gaining three pounds is to throw out every morsel of food in the house. If he can love you when he's hungry, you can love him when you're both lost.

by Bette-Jane Raphael