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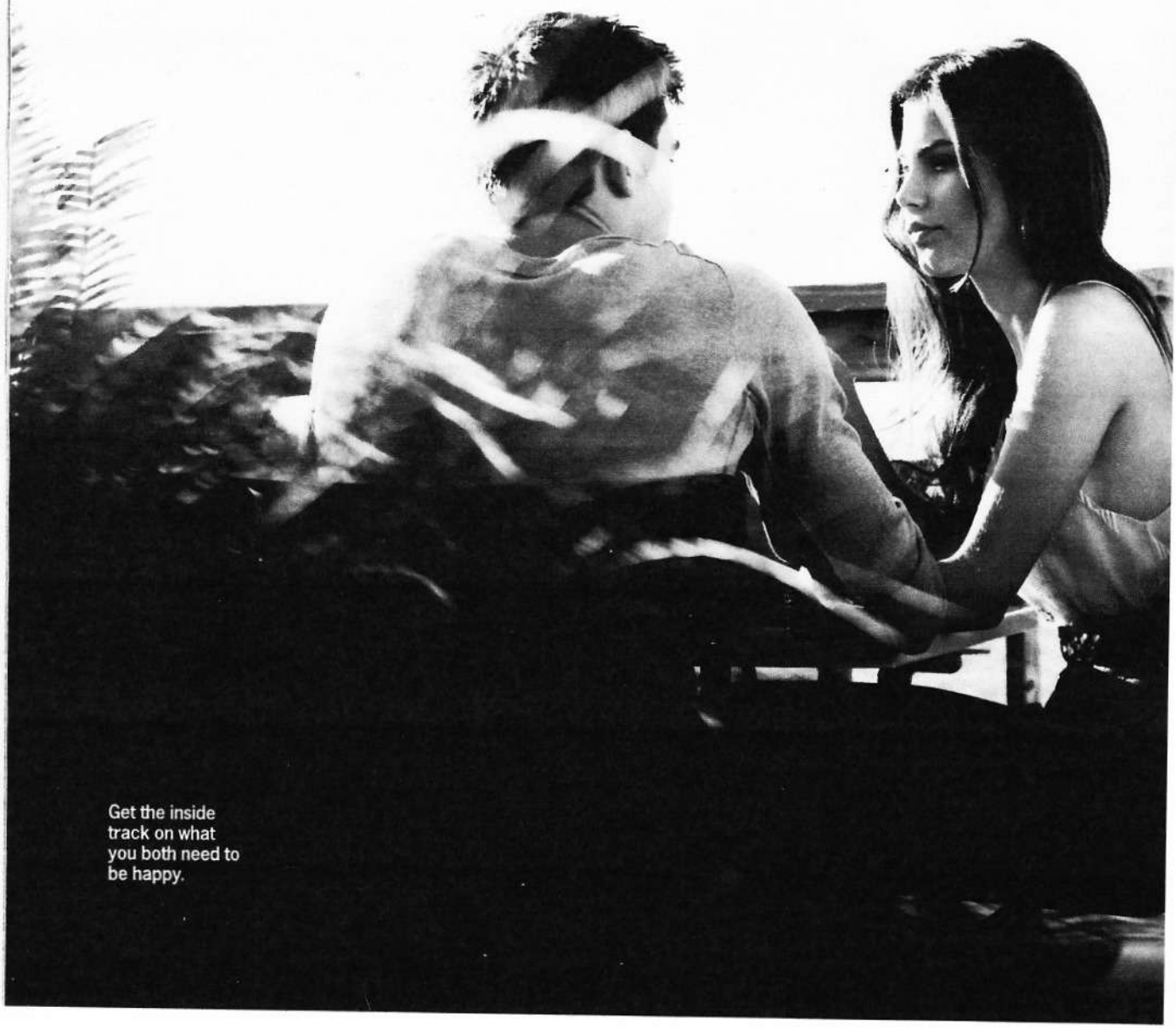
# Decode Your Love Style



Get the inside track on what you both need to be happy.

*You have an overall sense of what you're like in a relationship (as in high-maintenance versus chill), but researchers at Columbia University have found that almost everyone falls into one of three categories. Use our checklists to determine where you land, then heed our advice on handling the pros and cons of your particular type.*

**By Bethany Heitman**

Recently, doctors decided to take a close look at how people interact when they're in love. What they uncovered is fascinating and can make your relationship even better. The big discovery: "People tend to be one of three romantic types—anxious, avoidant, and secure," says study coauthor Amir Levine, MD, a professor in the department of neuroscience at Columbia University.

These types are based on a well-respected form of personality assessment called attachment theory. Mainly applied to how babies bond with parents, it turns out that it's just as helpful when looking at how adults deal with their partners.

"Which category you fall into can influence everything from how you communicate with your boyfriend or husband to what your biggest relationship worry is," says Dr. Levine. Ideally, you want to be secure—a levelheaded person who doesn't let her fears sabotage love. But don't worry if you're anxious or avoidant. Psychologists gave us tips that'll help you feel more secure. Already fall into the secure category? Read up on the other types since you very well may be dating one.

First, figure out your love style. Mark off the traits that you identify with most on the checklists below. You may have checks on all three, but wherever you have the most is your style. Then find out exactly what you need to know about your relationship MO.

## LOVE STYLE #1

- ☐ You're a big fan of PDA—whether it's holding hands in the movie theater or a long smooch on a street corner.
- ☐ Generally, you forgive people easily.
- ☐ In front of others, you always take your guy's side of an argument to be supportive—even if you're not convinced he's right.
- ☐ You tend to be the peacemaker in your relationships and hate fighting.
- ☐ When other chicks post on his Facebook wall, you get a little jealous...although you know you shouldn't.
- ☐ His birthday isn't for another month, but you've already planned all the details, from where you're taking him to dinner to what gift you're buying.

## LOVE STYLE #2

- ☐ You go out with your friends, sans him, on a weekly basis.
- ☐ In your opinion, women who are constantly texting their boyfriends to check in are annoying.
- ☐ You love being in a relationship but don't need to be in one to be happy.
- ☐ You're really attracted to guys who have hobbies and interests that are completely different from yours.
- ☐ You've never snooped through a boyfriend's phone or e-mail.
- ☐ You've taken the relationship-status question off your Facebook completely. No one needs to know if you are committed.

## LOVE STYLE #3

- ☐ Almost all your friends come to you regularly for relationship advice.
- ☐ Conflict between you and your guy seldom bothers you because you know it'll get sorted out quickly.
- ☐ You've been in a mix of flings and long-term relationships since you first started dating.
- ☐ You and your guy trade off picking which restaurant/travel destination you're going to check out next, and you're always open to whatever he suggests.
- ☐ A majority of your exes are still in your life as friends.
- ☐ It truly doesn't worry you that he's still friends with some of his exes.

## LOVE STYLE #1
# ANXIOUS

You're a woman who goes out of her way to make her other half feel appreciated and cared for. "That means you never get so wrapped up in other parts of your life that you let your relationship take a backseat," says Dr. Levine. "You crave intimacy and will do what it takes to keep it in your life."

Just because you make love a priority doesn't mean you're a doormat. You may treat him like a king, but you fully expect to be treated like a queen in return. "Women tend to take care of people the way they want to be taken care of," says Patricia Covalt, PhD, author of *What Smart Couples Know*. "You like to be made to feel special, so you take the time to make your boyfriend feel that way by doing lots of nice little things."

To accomplish that, you pay attention to details. For example, if he texts you that he's having a bad day at work, you might grab food from his favorite restaurant on the way home and cue up his favorite playlist to boost his mood when he walks through the door.

The downside is that if he doesn't reciprocate, you're devastated. "The anxious type of woman tends to be a passive communicator and will think 'I do these things for him, and if he loved me, he'd do them for me too,'" says Jill Murray, PhD, author of *Destructive Relationships*.

But according to psychologists, men tend to focus more on big gestures like getting you a pricey necklace for your anniversary than day-to-day stuff, so you're better off just telling him what you want. It may feel weird at first to ask someone to do these things for you, but the more you fill him in on your needs, the more they'll be met.

You'll face the most relationship roadblocks if you're with a guy who is avoidant. "This is because the anxious type needs a lot of attention, and avoidant people need a lot of space," says Dr. Levine. That said, it's not like it's impossible for you to be happy together. You just need to be aware that if he wants to spend multiple nights a week alone or with friends and isn't as into cuddling as you are, it doesn't mean he loves you any less.

"Of course, if he is *always* ditching you and isn't willing to meet your needs halfway, you have every right to put your foot down," says Murray. "Not only will you be letting him know it's important that he hangs more with you, speaking up will make you feel more secure and powerful so you can better deal with this type."

**If he wants to spend multiple nights a week alone or isn't as into cuddling as you are, it doesn't mean he loves you any less.**

### SIGNS HE'S THE ANXIOUS TYPE

- **He regularly writes little love notes on your Facebook wall.**
- **He's accused you of flirting with other guys when you're out.**
- **He has teared up at a sad movie.**
- **After a fight, he's usually sullen for at least a day afterward.**
- **When you go out with the girls, he tends to text at least once to see where you are.**

## LOVE STYLE #2
# AVOIDANT

You are all about doing things on your own and enjoy calling the shots. Given that relationships require more of a 50-50 collaboration, they scare you a bit. You worry that being committed to someone will mean a loss of independence. "This can lead to your running hot and cold. You love your guy and miss him when he's away, but when you feel overwhelmed or like you can't stick to your agenda, you may attempt to create a little distance," says Dr. Levine. This constant craving for freedom makes being part of a twosome challenging, but it has its upside too. Because you're so happy being alone, when you do take that leap, it's because you know you're with the right man.

Once you find the guy, you're constantly trying to make sure there's a balance between spending time together and alone. "You don't buy into the idea of two souls becoming one. Instead, you believe relationships are about two individuals who maintain their own lives and create another one together," says Murray. Most guys—unless they fall into the anxious category—will dig that about you because it allows them to be around their buddies without feeling guilty.

Where does your attitude backfire? Because you're so intent on maintaining your own life, you sometimes exclude him from areas that he'd like to be a part of. "Of course you can handle things on your own, but by doing that, you make him feel unneeded and deprive yourself of important support," says Covalt. "Force yourself to talk to him. He'll feel closer to you because you're coming to him for help, and you may realize that his input is incredibly useful."

One other area you need to work on is learning to compromise. Should your guy have a problem with something, you have no qualms about setting him straight. "This trait can be good because you stand up for yourself," says Murray.

CHRIS CLINTON

Anxious types benefit from lots of loving PDA.

"On the other hand, if you never compromise, he's going to think you don't care enough to attempt to see his side of things." The first step is to work on your listening skills. Make sure to give him time to talk rather than just cutting him off to get your point across, which is what your instinct will be. And who knows, when you actually consider his points, you may be willing to admit when he's right.

### SIGNS HE'S THE AVOIDANT TYPE

- **He gets a little freaked any time you bring up your future together.**
- **It's not unusual to go a full day, sometimes two, without hearing from him.**
- **When he introduces you to friends or colleagues of his, they've seldom heard much about you beyond your name.**
- **If you're spending the night together, he prefers to do it at your place rather than his.**
- **He uses the words I and me more often than we or us.**

## LOVE STYLE #3 SECURE

When it comes to being in love, you have a serious advantage—for the most part, you are even-keeled and emotionally available and have faith that love can last. "Women in this category are very comfortable with who they are and don't think of love as something that has to be dramatic or difficult," says Murray. Since you're so together, you really need to tweak your thinking about relationships only if you're with an anxious or avoidant dude.

Don't get us wrong. Life with a secure guy won't be perfect, but you can work through problems without all hell breaking loose. "If two secure people fight, neither stresses about it because they're sure it'll get ironed out eventually," says Dr. Levine.

Unfortunately, your low-key attitude about arguing can get under an anxious person's skin. "They may interpret your calm consideration as ambivalence." Sound like your guy? You'll need to pay him special attention when things are tense. Rather than give off that "Don't worry, babe" vibe, make a point to sit down and tell him that you take his feelings seriously and want to work it out because you love him. And that's no doubt exactly how you feel—you just may not realize he needs you to verbalize it. Get the words out and, instead of leaving him guessing, you'll give him the reassurance he craves.

A less needy, more standoffish dude will dig your drama-free nature. He never has to worry that just because he said something positive about a female friend, you'll freak out and think he's cheating. Your chill persona allows him to maintain that sense of independence that's so important to this type. However, you do need to know when to call him on his BS.

"Being a go-with-the-flow person means you may not notice immediately that he's been spending way more time with his boys or at work than he has with you," says Murray. "But if going your separate ways becomes too regular of a pattern, it can weaken your bond, as couples require quality time together to stay connected." Since you're not prone to getting wildly upset, once you present the problem and let him know you need more attention, he'll give it to you. Your natural levelheadedness makes it almost impossible for him to brush off your request because you have a track record of only making a big deal when it's truly important.

### SIGNS HE'S THE SECURE TYPE

- **You know you can go to him with any kind of problem and he'll help you solve it.**
- **He almost always calls when he says he will.**
- **He's usually comfortable telling you how he feels.**
- **When he sees you need to let off steam, he suggests that you schedule a girls' night.**
- **When you fight, he never resorts to low blows or storms out on you.** ■