

HI JONATHAN,

In reading your question, I wonder about whether this issue is yours, your boyfriend's, or both of yours. Sometimes if we are sensitive or over-react to something someone else says to us, it tells us more about ourselves than the other person. If we are not conscious of this we tend to believe it is coming from what the other person said or did, which is often not the case. When I read that he insists on paying for rent and asks if you can afford things it initially makes me think he is just being thoughtful and anticipating a financial difficulty for you. He may also just be expressing his love by being generous to you. Some men show love in that way.

I also wonder about you and why you are allowing him to do and say these things without talking to him about it. He might have no idea how you feel and will feel badly when he hears all this and be more than willing to change his ways. On the other hand it might be that what you are concerned about is true and that he feels his career is more important than yours. Either way, communication between the two of you is essential.

Before we go into what to do, understanding the fact that you are both men in a relationship is essential to understanding the dynamics between you. The literature on gay male and lesbian relationships is clear: When two men or two women pair up there is something called a "doubling" factor.

THE DOUBLING FACTOR

When two males enter into a relationship, there's an impact from bringing their gender roles and socialisation traits along with them. When working with male couples I often notice their difficulty with – or even absence of – relational skills. Often I have to teach gay clients how to be in relationship with one another in terms of interpersonal skills, dependency, intimacy, and expressiveness. Men – gay and straight alike – disengage emotionally as a way of coping with relationship pressures. It's different with lesbian couples: by the time they enter therapy, they're so overinvolved and fused with each other that I joke that I'd need the Jaws of Life to pull them apart! They laugh because they know it's true – plus the literature supports this. Women in general are so relational that for them, the doubling factor can create too much closeness. But for male couples, there isn't enough.

We men are socialised to be the breadwinners; to be sexual predators whose conquests are cause for pride and status. We're taught not to

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show strong emotions, making for difficulty in expressing our anger, hurt, and vulnerability in healthy ways. Even heterosexual and bisexual men in relationships with women who make more than they do report feeling inadequate and challenged by it. Consequently, conflicts in gay relationships frequently involve money, jobs, sex, jealousy, and emotional closeness.

I remember when I started making more money as a therapist. When I met my husband Mike he made twice as much as I did. I remember feeling embarrassed and a bit inferior to be honest. I had gone through more schooling than he had and felt that I should at least be at the same financial earning power as he but I was not. Then my practice took off and I made more than he did. I never felt that he was less than me nor did I even think about the financial discrepancy any longer. One day I was counting all the money I had received in a week in front of Mike, not even thinking about how it would make him feel and he asked me to count the money in a different room. I realised then that he now felt challenged by making less money in our relationship.

MASCULINITY ISSUES

As gay men we are constantly receiving messages from childhood into our adulthood that we are not really men or aren't the right kind of men. If we come to believe that, then how can we ever feel good about ourselves and other gay men and be able to date and maintain healthy relationships? You say you feel emasculated; perhaps that is because as gay men we are in general, and are more vulnerable to feeling that way than feeling like real men! Terrence Real, psychotherapist and author of *I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*, writes about how "boys are pressured to yield attributes of dependency, expressiveness, affiliation – all the self-concepts and skills that belong to the relational, emotive world... the price of traditional socialisation for boys is disconnection – from themselves, from their mothers, from those around them." We gay men need to examine our disconnection with ourselves and one another. We restrict ourselves emotionally with other males, yet we have been able to connect with women – more than is permitted our heterosexual male counterparts.

WHAT YOU BOTH SHOULD DO

Both of you need to have a conversation that allows you the ability to express a range of emotions and vulnerabilities with each other. Telling him how you feel just like you did here as you wrote to me is the first step. He might have a negative reaction and your fear may come true that he doesn't value what you do or what you make as much as he does his own income and job, but you need to face this with openness and find a way to tolerate his possible disagreement. Men – both gay and straight – need to learn a greater comfort around being vulnerable and that starts with sharing things about yourself that you fear will be judged. Doing this will allow you to attach more with each other and increase your emotional connection.

And remember; incomes and careers are common concerns amongst gay male couples because we are socialised as men to put a lot of our identity into what we do and what we make. Don't let this interfere with your relationship.



DR JOE KORT IS A LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER AND BOARD-CERTIFIED SEXOLOGIST. HE IS ALSO THE AUTHOR OF *10 SMART THINGS GAY MEN CAN DO TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES*
JOEKORT.COM



MY BOYFRIEND IS THE BREADWINNER AND DOESN'T TAKE MY JOB SERIOUSLY

▶ DEAR JOE

My boyfriend and I met at university about two years ago but we've since moved to London, where our careers have taken very different paths. I've been working as a retail manager while my boyfriend works at a high-powered accountancy firm where he is really well-paid. He's definitely become the breadwinner in our relationship and it's started to make me feel emasculated. As well as paying most of the rent for our flat, he insists on paying for everything when we go out, and

if I do treat him he'll always make a comment about whether I can afford it, which really bugs me. I know he works hard but sometimes it feels like he doesn't take my job seriously. We recently fought because I'd had a bad day at work and his response was effectively to say, "Well how hard can it really be?" I feel like our lives revolve around his career and it's starting to drive a wedge between us. What should I do?

ALEXANDER, LONDON ▶