

My sister Trudy is addicted to Big Brother. This is not a bad thing, all things considered. Last year she had an unnatural interest in *Slimfast* until she realised that she wouldn't get thinner if she ate more of the stuff. And the year before, she was infatuated with a guy from her gym called Cliff who was, she thought, built for action. It turned out that a skinny blond called James was getting all that action. She was devastated but quickly bounced back by developing a massive crush on, you've guessed, James. It seems, that gay men just do it for her. Which brings me back to Big Brother.

Since the arrival of Brian into the *Big Brother* house, Trudy has been smitten. "He's so funny and handsome and entertaining and he's so clean", she gushes before adding that phrase all gay men get to hear at least once, "It's such a waste".

Of what, I wonder. Hair gel? Then she popped the million-dollar question. "Shirley, how can you tell if they're... you know!"

"Vegetarian?!"

"No! Gay?"

"Tell if who is gay?"

"Brian Dowling"

"Because he told us on live television!"

"Yes, but how can you tell for sure?"

(This conversation ended with Trudy needing three stitches and my lovely new living arrangements, but I digress.)

Often, young girls just like my Trudy, come to me desperate to know if the object of their affections is batting for the other team. They seem to bow to my superior knowledge in the matter. Of course, I was as surprised as you were when Stephen Gately came out of the closet but that's neither here nor there – a bit like his career.

I like to torture these poor girls with some amateur psychoanalysis. Is your boyfriend really gay? That sounds like food for an insecure mind. Why not try it yourself?

Concentrate and, in your mind's eye bring up an image of your boyfriend, fiancé, husband etc. Once you have done this proceed. There are several key areas to examine so try to keep up.

(For my male readers, if you have got this far successfully, the odds are that your lover is actually gay and the rest of this exercise is unnecessary)

They say clothes make the man. In the same way, the words 'fashion' and 'style' should sound alarm bells when used in connection with your male love interest. Does he like clothes? And yes, I do mean men's clothes. But while you're in that headspace, would he ever wear women's panties? And even more of a tell-tale sign - for a special event, would your man ever, say, wear a kilt or a sarong? Is he vain to an extreme and always preening and grooming? And what about those elaborate tattoos and trendy hairstyles?

The choices that your man makes about his pastimes speak volumes about his inclinations. Do his hobbies seem excessively male-orientated? Does he, for example, like committing the male form to film? Or does he like being photographed himself? Or maybe, he is always down the club with a gang of like-minded fellas? It makes me wonder when a young man spends hours and hours away from the one he loves in the company of tactile rowdy rugby players. I mean we've all heard the stories.

A man's mannerism and voice are windows to his soul. Well, nearly! Does your man have a feminine voice? Is it unusually high in pitch? Or perhaps is it excessively butch or rough even though he has had a very middle-class upbringing? If your man can easily contrive his behaviour in one area, what's to say he can't tell another little lie or two.

Skimming through your man's record collection reveals even more clues. I'm not going near ABBA because that says less about someone's sexuality than it does about their age! Do the *Spice Girls* feature largely? What about Madonna? I don't know about you, but I saw that video for "Vogue" and them ain't no straight boys dancing with her.

Take a moment to reflect on your answers.

Getting worried? Well, you shouldn't be unless of course you happen to be either Posh Spice or Madonna because I have been describing both David Beckham and Guy Ritchie.

You see, like I told Trudy, if you judge a book by the cover, you miss the occasional gem. And if you could easily see into everyone else's lives and minds, how boring would that be? It would be like...*Big Brother!*