

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

THE MESSAGE IN YOUR FANTASIES Is it, "Why am I with this Bozo?"

We all fantasize in one way or another: Some of us think about what it would be like to have thighs like Jamie Leigh Curtis instead of like Nestlé Crunch bars, others dream about being a guest star on *Dynasty*—or about starting one. Creating fantasies is a satisfying pastime that can enhance everyday life considerably, including the part of everyday life we share with our partners. In fact, when, what and how much we fantasize about our partners can tell a lot about our relationships. To find out what *your* fantasies say about *your* relationship, answer the following questions:

1. HOW MUCH DO YOU FANTASIZE? While there's no strict rule about how much is *too* much, don't ignore the fact that fantasies are used in part to perk up drab reality. It's okay if, occasionally, while watching your partner doing his morning exercises, your mind erases his body and substitutes Arnold Schwarzenegger's. But if you find yourself daydreaming about being on a beach in the Caribbean every time your partner starts talking about (1) his job (working for a firm specializing in synthetic denture material), (2) his family (all of whom refer to you as "What's-her-name"), or (3) his dreams for

the future (early retirement in a condominium community with bowling facilities), you've got to ask yourself just how drab your reality actually is.

2. ARE YOUR FANTASIES POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE? Fantasies come in two categories: the constructive kind that bring you closer to your partner, and the destructive kind that separate you. For example, fantasizing that your partner is willing to die for you might say one thing about your relationship, while fantasizing that he is someone else from the moment he walks in the door at night until the moment he falls asleep says something very different. While both may be unrealistic, the former has an old-fashioned, romantic quality, while the latter seems to imply a somewhat negative connection to your mate. In assessing your fantasies for their positive or negative quotient, it's safe to assume that those in which your partner appears are more affirmative than those predicated on the supposition that he's never been born.

3. WHEN DO YOU FANTASIZE? Pinpointing the specific times you are likely to fantasize is a surefire way of zeroing in on those areas of your relationship that are least able to stand on their own. For instance, if, when the two of you are spending an afternoon together, you often fantasize that you are engaged in an activity other than the one you are actually doing—that you are having a shiatsu massage, say, instead of learning how to fire an automatic weapon—then you can be pretty sure that whatever else is holding you together, it is *not* your common interests.

When analysing the timing of your fantasies to target the weak areas of your relationship, be sure you don't confuse them with

other mental activities. For instance, when you are spending a social evening with your partner and some of his friends, if you start imagining that you are in the monkey house at the zoo, understand that this is *not* a fantasy but a hallucination. A hallucination differs from a fantasy in that it is not something one willfully conjures up so much as it is something forced upon the mind by intolerable circumstances. Like a fantasy, however, a hallucination can tell you a lot about your perceptions, such as the fact that you believe that your partner's friends barely make it into the category of higher primates.

4. COULD YOU TELL YOUR PARTNER YOUR FANTASIES? The answer to this question should tell you a lot about your relationship. If the answer is "Yes, I could tell my partner that the last time we made love I imagined he was that nice man in the tight jeans who came to put down our kitchen tile," then the chances are that you have a close, trusting relationship in which a fantasy is a useful tool. If, on the other hand, the answer is "No, I couldn't tell my partner that sometimes when he makes love to me I recite the Dewey Decimal System in my head," then perhaps you should weigh the possibility that this is not the right relationship for you.

Fantasy can help you here. Try imagining what it would be like to live alone, and see whether that image sends waves of dread through you—or waves of unmitigated relief.

by Bette-Jane Raphael

Bette-Jane Raphael's book, Can This Be Love, was published by Arbor House in November.