

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

Easy ways to find out WHO'S THE BIG CHEESE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In relationships, as everywhere else, people assume or abdicate power pretty much for their own comfort. What about in your relationship? Is one of you more comfortable assuming the seat of power? Here are a few ways to find out.

The activity factor: What each of you does within the relationship is directly related to the power you hold. Which one of you regularly: 1. stocks up on the other's favorite brand of beer pretzels; 2. does something with meat around seven o'clock at night; 3. buys navy blue, wool-blend socks for the other; and 4. sweeps pretzel crumbs off of the carpet? On the other hand, which of you was the one to: 1. renew the subscription to *Hanky Panky* magazine; 2. pur-

chase fire and theft insurance on a set of baseball cards; 3. put up an antenna large enough to receive messages from outer space; and 4. have a pin-striped suit made to order? If your duties are more in keeping with the first set of chores, and his more in keeping with the second, then in this area of the power race between you, you're the runner-up.

The deciding factor: Who makes the important decisions at your house? If he decides what to do with grout and you decide what to do with your joint capital, then power is not his middle name. However, making big decisions can be a trap. If, for instance, you're the one who decides whether your state should have a death penalty, and he's the one who decides whether or not you should get married, suggest that he take on the weighty matters for a while, and you deal with the smaller questions.

The chain of command factor: Take an inventory of the exchange of orders in your household, i.e., who gives them the most and what styles of address are used to issue them. Do you ask your partner to pick up some milk on his way home from work as casually and as regularly as cows give milk? Or do you word your request as if you were asking for a Papal Dispensation? And in the meantime, does your partner ask you to

bring him some ice water in such a way that a bystander overhearing him would naturally assume he was making the request of a Pullman porter? If so, it's clear he's speaking from a position of strength.

The accommodation factor: Whoever accommodates the other more in a relationship is usually the less powerful member. If you are both invited to a publishing party for your friend's book on the private life of Tom Selleck, to be given at a swanky restaurant and attended by the subject himself, do you go there or, as your partner prefers, to a lecture his boss is giving on investment opportunities in the health-care field? Do you usually take the kind of vacation you prefer (a trip that involves little besides lying on a beach someplace where the temperature stays between seventy-five and eighty-five all year long and the last downpour occurred in 1962) or the kind of trip he prefers (like a "Tent 'n Trek" expedition through the more isolated foothills of Nepal)? Does he wear his hair the way you like it (à la Michael Douglas) or the way *he* does (just like his father, the General)?

The bundle factor: A recent study proved that the more powerless people are, the more they carry—or schlep. So a man carries a briefcase, while a woman carries bags of groceries, bundles of laundry, boxes of diapers *and* a briefcase. Check out yourself and your partner as you come through the door each night. If he walks in with the paper, and you walk in with a box of clean shirts from the laundry, hangers of clothes from the cleaners, a bag containing celery, yogurt, ground sirloin and a package of sponges *and* the day's mail, look around. It's not power with which you are burdened.

The P factor: Check out who it is who wields the *passive* power in the relationship, the one who keeps the authority while handing over the responsibility. Hint: This is the person who doesn't care where you have dinner—who says, "Sure, we can try the new Mexican restaurant if you want to"—and who later precedes the meal by saying, "I hope you haven't made a real boner with this one." It's also the person who asks, "Did you lock all the windows before we left the house?" implying that that partner will be to blame if everything you own is in a windowless van on the first leg of a journey to South America.

Remember one thing while you evaluate these factors: There are all kinds of power. Even if it *appears* that your partner is the one holding the reins, don't worry too much. Maybe you *are* the one who goes several miles out of the way to rent a movie for the VCR, but maybe you're also the one who picks the movie to rent (*Jules and Jim* as opposed to *1,001 TV Bloopers*). And maybe that's the way you both like it.



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