

Fantasies During Sex: Welcome Them

By Michael Castleman

The *New York Times* magazine published the results of a survey that asked married couples of all ages: “As long as you're sexually faithful to your spouse, do you think it's okay to fantasize about having sex with someone else?” More respondents said “no” (48 percent) than “yes” (46 percent). (Six percent declined to answer).

Meanwhile, other surveys have shown that while making love with spouses or regular lovers, the vast majority of people fantasize at least briefly about having sex with other people. In fact, in a survey by University of Vermont researchers, sex with a partner other than one's regular lover was the single most popular fantasy: 84 percent of the 178 respondents admitted having it during intercourse.

In the Vermont survey, many respondents expressed “significant guilt” about such fantasies, believing them the moral equivalent of unfaithfulness, and harmful to their relationships.

In addition, those who felt the most guilt about fantasies of other lovers also reported the least overall sexual satisfaction.

Fantasy and Friction

Fulfilling lovemaking is a combination of friction and fantasy. Most lovers enjoy the friction. But many feel uncomfortable with their own fantasies. What a shame to feel guilty about something as normal—and healthy—as sexual fantasies during lovemaking.

If you feel “mentally unfaithful” when you have fantasies of others lovers during lovemaking with your main squeeze, you might be able to forgive yourself if you view sex as a interpersonal form of spirituality, a mutual meditation, if you will.

In meditation people take an uninterrupted break from their usual activities. They sit quietly, breathe deeply, empty their minds of all conscious thoughts, and focus on their breath or repeat a word or phrase (mantra). With a little practice, you feel connected to the universe. But emptying the mind is not easy. For most people, it's impossible. Random thoughts dart in and out of consciousness. Meditation teachers advise simply accepting these thoughts without judging them, no matter how disconcerting they might be. Your thoughts during meditation are no reflection on you. They are simply there, like dreams. You're not responsible for them. Observe them, and then let them go.

Sex As Meditation

Lovemaking is surprisingly similar. It involves an uninterrupted break from the routine. Lovers breathe deeply, relax, and feel deeply connected with each other. Lovers don't sit quietly (at least I hope not). Instead, they substitute sensuality for mantra. But in most respects, sex is similar to meditation.

It might be nice during sex to empty your mind of all thoughts other than those of your lover. But as in meditation, that's impossible. Other thoughts—including fantasies of other lovers—almost inevitably come and go. Perhaps you flash on making love with a movie star or an adult vision of the kid who sat next to you in high school English. Perhaps you have fantasies of group sex, sex in public, or BDSM. As in meditation, try to accept your fantasies without judging them. They are no reflection on your morality, faithfulness, or mental health. In sexual fantasy, as in meditation, everything is permitted and nothing is wrong.

The only time a sexual fantasy of another lover might signal a problem is if you take steps to make it happen. But here we're not focusing on affairs. We're concerned with true fantasies—the strange, marvelous, weird, impossible, fleeting notions that occupy the mind for a moment then go their merry way.

Accept Your Fantasies

Sexual fantasies happen naturally. They are no reflection on you, your mental health, or the quality of your relationship.

Sexual fantasies also tend to diminish with age—in one study, 60-year-old women reported only half as many as 25-year-old women. But no matter how many you have, accepting them allows greater relaxation during lovemaking, and relaxation is key to sexual enjoyment. Feeling guilty about sexual fantasies injects anxiety into sex, and anxiety interferes with the pleasure of lovemaking. No wonder that in

the University of Vermont survey, respondents who said they felt guilty about their fantasies of others lovers were also the ones who reported the least overall sexual fulfillment.

The late comedian, Rodney Dangerfield, used to tell a story about making love with his girlfriend. But something is wrong. Neither of them feels passionately aroused. Finally, Dangerfield disengages and says: "What's the matter? Can't you think of anyone either?"

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