

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

GIVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP THIS CHECKUP

The end of the year is a perfect time to evaluate relations with your partner, and to ask whether the relationship as a whole is better or worse than it was at *last* year's end. The following questions can help you find out.

1. A year ago your partner's annoying habit (of absently pulling at his eyebrow hair, perhaps, or picking his teeth with a comb) bothered you a lot. These days when he indulges in it, you
 - a) don't notice.
 - b) slap his hand.
 - c) feel your skin begin to crawl and a wave of almost uncontrollable nausea rise in the pit of your stomach.
 2. A year ago you and your partner's differing practices with money (he spends it, you bury it) caused arguments that lasted for days. Now these fights
 - a) hardly ever occur, except when he finds you've again skimmed on toilet paper and bought a bargain brand that's impossible to get off the roller.
 - b) still occur, but end more quickly, usually before sunrise.
 - c) have increased in frequency and intensity, to the point where your neighbors have petitioned you to pad your walls and install soundproofing material in your flooring.
 3. A year ago your partner's cronies bored you to the point of semi-unconsciousness. Now you find that his friends
 - a) are soothing, like bromides.
 - b) prompt you to ask yourself the unsettling question: If he has such bad taste in people, what does he see in you?
 - c) make you want to scream.
 4. A year ago you and your partner's sexual rhythms were annoyingly out of sync, since your erotic urges usually coincided with the late-night TV news, while his usually surfaced about the same time as the early morning sermon. Now you
 - a) feel you're beginning to get religion
 - b) often wonder whether your partner would have a better relationship with Jane Pauley than he does with you.
 - c) often wonder what sex felt like.
 5. A year ago communication was something of a problem between you and your partner, since, when it comes to discussing emotional issues, he does a fair impersonation of an inanimate object. Today when he does this, you
 - a) don't mind, since it gives you a chance to perfect your declamatory style without interruption.
 - b) feel it's a blessing, considering what
- he says when he *does* open his mouth.
- c) feel like grabbing him by the throat until some sound comes out of it.
6. A year ago your partner's demonstrations of the fact that he is biologically incapable of neatness caused constant difficulty between you. Now, when he leaves the kitchen looking like it did duty as a pirates' cove, you
 - a) enjoy the feeling of adventure it lends to your life.
 - b) clean it up, and present him with a bill for your services in the morning.
 - c) go into his drawers and tightly refold all of his shirts in the manner prescribed for American flags.
 7. A year ago your differing food tastes—i.e. *your* taste, his appetite—caused friction between you. Nowadays,
 - a) he's learned to enjoy food that hasn't been frozen for six months before reaching your table, while your body has developed a tolerance for Disodium Dihydrogen Pyrophosphate.
 - b) you cook dinner for yourself and he opens cans.
 - c) you cook dinner for yourself, and he eats elsewhere.
 8. A year ago your social life together was a problem, since your partner seemed to believe that entertaining should always coincide with a sports event and be accompanied by salty snacks. Today
 - a) he admits you may have a point when you say that if people get together for an evening they should look at one another and not at a television set.
 - b) he agrees to actually talk to the people that you invite over to your home for dinner, as long as you reciprocally agree not to serve your guests any food that he's never heard of.
 - c) the two of you haven't spent an evening in the company of another couple since the night a month ago when the plumber and his assistant spent several hours fixing your toilet.
- Now give yourself 1 point for every "a" answer, 2 points for every "b" answer, and 3 points for every "c" answer. If you garner 8 to 12 points, nice going! Your relationship is prospering to the point where you might want to have it listed by Standard & Poor's as a good investment. If you pick up between 13 and 18 points, you're holding your own, certainly, but don't make retirement plans together just yet. If you rack up between 19 and 24 points, face the fact that your relationship probably has the life expectancy of a guppy. Sorry about that.

by Bette-Jane Raphael

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