

# BUDGET INFIDELITY

## Couples need to agree on spending

By GREGORY BRESIGER

I want to spend. You want to save. This marriage is on the rocks.

Even the healthiest of unions can be endangered by money disputes, according to a Kansas State University study.

"Arguments about money are by far the top predictor of divorce," said Sonya Britt, assistant professor of family studies and human services and program director of personal financial planning at Kansas State.

"Results revealed it didn't matter how much you made or how much you were worth. Arguments about money are the top predictor for divorce because it happens at all levels," Britt, who conducted the survey, says.

"I don't know if it's sex, money or rock and roll that commonly breaks up a marriage, but certainly money is a big issue," says Ray Mignone, a Long Island financial adviser who has had to mediate marital money disputes.

"I had two clients where one was a saver and the other was a spender. I've had to work hard with these people to get things straightened out, and still there are problems," Mignone says.

"Another time, in a second

marriage, there were arguments about who paid for what and what asset belonged to who," he says.

Mignone recommends couples compare financial philosophies before marrying or living together.

As unromantic as it sounds, Britt advises couples to seek a financial planner as part of premarital counseling, pull each other's credit reports and talk through how to handle finances fairly for both individuals. Money is the most difficult marriage issue because disagreements often persist, she says.

It takes longer to recover from money arguments than any other kind of argument, Britt says. "Couples often use harsher language and the argument lasts longer."

Britt's study used data from some 4,500 couples as part of the National Survey of Families and Households.

Another professional, Dr. **Anne Brennan Malec**, warns that, "as with sex, arguments about money are probably connected to underlying issues, such as trust and self-esteem."

Malec, who has a group counseling and psychotherapy practice, says, "There are so many layers to this, but much of it stems from the inability to communicate, from

### Financial disunion

Being upfront and honest about spending habits and saving plans can keep couples from having to divide up assets in a divorce, new study says.



- Be partners in a common cause of planning and saving.

- Avoid financial infidelity with a monthly budget.

- Be open to money issues beyond marriage, like school or credit card debt.

one spouse just expecting the other to take care of all money problems."

The author of the recently released book "Marriage in Modern Life: Why It Works, When It Works," Malec says sex, poor communication and money issues are why marriages fail.

Malec offers these tips.

- Be partners in a common cause.

When one partner carries most of the financial burden, it can thrust that partner into an almost parental role over the other. This can affect other areas of the relationship and erode a marriage, creating resentment by each partner.

- Avoid financial infidelity.

Every couple has to determine how its joint and individual expenses will be

shared. Having an agreed-upon monthly budget helps minimize financial tension.

- Be open to money issues beyond marriage.

Most adults have some degree of debt because of a college loan, child support, a medical history or other reasons. Ideally, you will have discussed and come to terms with a spouse's debt before marriage.

