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Til money do us part

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It's a sad but true fact of married life that money is a huge source of trouble. And the 2008 stock market crash and subsequent recession have aggravated the situation. So much so that a recent survey of 828 Canadian couples commissioned by Credit Canada and Capital One Canada found 86% of couples admit they regularly argue about money.

That's why the theme of this past week's third annual Credit Education Week was Couples and Money. Not surprisingly, conflicting views about spending came out near the top of the disagreements list, with 48% of couples surveyed arguing about spending compared with half that percentage arguing about debt. I'd say the two are directly related -- once in debt, the financial pressure on a couple intensifies and brings into play conflicts over different spending priorities.

As moderator Alison Griffiths noted in a panel discussion this week, money has become a bigger issue than infidelity for many couples. Griffiths, an author and host of the TV show *Maxed Out*, said the main two grounds for quickie divorces in Nevada in the 1950s were adultery or extreme cruelty. She half-joked that in modern times, bad money-management skills should also be grounds for divorce. I can think of more than one couple in my own circle who have split directly or indirectly because of financial stress.

Even the nation's politicians agree on the need for couples and their offspring to become more financially savvy. Jim Flaherty, the Finance Minister, and Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's Education Minister, kicked off the week with appeals to boost financial literacy among the young. Wynne, who announced plans to integrate financial literacy into the school curriculum in Ontario between Grades 4 and 12, said one of the biggest reasons couples separate or divorce is financial pressure or disagreements.

Laurie Campbell, Credit Canada executive director, said divorce rates are high enough even without added financial stress. "We found couples are not managing their money very well. They're hiding their debts and their savings from each other." For 15% of couples, money fights are more frequent than arguments about sex, chores or children.

Among the six panelists -- including myself, fellow columnist Ellen Roseman and broadcasters Sean O'Shea and Pat Foran -- was Patricia Lovett-Reid, TD Waterhouse senior vice-president. She painted a scary retirement picture, where couples end up getting too much of a good thing in terms of time spent together. Once they end their working lives, one or both spouse may live past 90. "What if you

live too darn long? You'll have more than 4,000 hours to fill each year, so you need a plan."

In my remarks, I read a sentence Lovett-Reid wrote in the foreword to my book *Findependence Day*: "Love and money are more intertwined in the lives of most modern couples than most realize ... When you enter into a relationship, you are in it emotionally and financially."

But financially, it seems, men are from Mars and women from Venus: 48% of the people surveyed believe they have a different philosophy from their spouse when it comes to managing money. Men worry about being able to retire, while women fret they won't be able to send their kids on to higher education.

The sad part is it may not be money per se that causes splits, but a failure to communicate properly about finances before problems develop. About one in three couples enter relationships without having had frank, open discussions about money. This group is 66% more likely to end up at a marriage counsellor talking out their financial problems.

In the worst case, "Till money do us part" describes the ultimate outcome if the issues aren't tackled head on. Or, as Lovett-Reid says: "Work through the issues, confront the facts, be honest and you stand a better chance of not becoming a divorce statistic."

If you prefer that your union be parted by the grim reaper rather than the almighty dollar, you and your significant other can improve the odds by taking a 10-question quiz together. The financial compatibility quiz can be found at crediteducationweekcanada.com.

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For from Jonathan Chevreau on this topic, listen to the [Nov. 7 edition of the FP Big Picture Podcast](#).

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