

# the FIGHT club

BY SHERYL BERK

The four biggest, baddest newlywed battles—and how to avoid them

After just four months of marriage, Kerrie Nolan\*, 31, uttered three words she never thought she'd hear herself say: "I'm outta here!" But she and her husband, Josh, had been arguing constantly—to the point where she could barely stand to be in the same room with him.

"We had blowouts practically every week about everything and anything—money, my mother, whose turn it was to change the cat box," she recalls. "I remember calling up my best friend, who'd been married for two years, and asking, 'Is this normal?'"

Newlyweds often feud during the first year of marriage—most couples will tell you it was one of the toughest times in their relationship. "The honeymoon is over," explains Kimberly Bytheway, coauthor with her husband, John, of *What We Wish We'd Known When We Were Newlyweds* (Bookcraft, 2000). "It's lovely to think that everything will always be as magical as your big day, but the reality is that someone has to wash the dirty dishes and take out the garbage."

Which isn't to say that it's all downhill from the moment you say I do. "You can keep the romance alive and nurture



the intimacy so it grows," points out John Bytheway. "But it does take work, as does getting to know what makes each other tick. Think of all the time you two spent planning your wedding—and that was just for one day! You're planning a marriage now, and isn't that worth the effort?"

The key, experts advise, is to communicate from the start. "If you know where you stand and where you see eye-to-eye, you can address the issues before they snowball," he continues. "And let this be your motto, even when the problem seems insurmountable: 'We can work it out.'"

## dinero dilemma

Pamela Lynch, 28, of San Francisco, is a self-described shopaholic. "I admit it—the word *sale* makes me salivate," she says. But when her husband, Paul, got their new, joint American Express bill, he hit the roof. "She'd spent two hundred dollars on manicures, four hundred dollars on clothes—she was spending like there was no tomorrow," he says.

Arguments arise when financial styles clash, say experts. That's why it's important to understand where your spouse is coming from, literally. Paul came from a working-class family and he had to help to pay his way through college and grad school; Pam grew up in a well-to-do home with a generous allowance. Bearing this history in mind, both of their reactions were understandable: One wanted to build a nest egg while the other wanted to enjoy the fruits of her labor.

The best solution, say experts, is to plot out a monthly and yearly budget, figuring how much money is coming in and how much needs to go out—including a reasonable amount for miscellaneous costs (such as clothes, vacations, and entertainment). Think ahead, too, to future goals, like buying a house. Figure out, for example, how much you would have to save each year to amass a sizable down payment.

To avoid further conflicts, you should also consider maintaining two individual accounts for personal expenses and one that you both share and contribute to. That way, if you want to use your own mad money for a pair of python sandals, that's between you and your checkbook.

## the lust is lost

"I remember when we were dating and we were all over each other," says Dominique Murphy, 32, of Norwalk, Connecticut. "Now that J.P. is up for partner in his law firm and working longer hours, we rarely

have sex more than once a week. I feel like I'm the one who always has to initiate it, and that gets me mad. We fight about it when we should be having fun."

When you get married, there is a tendency to take each other for granted, says Kim Bytheway. "You're secure and don't feel the need to woo or wow each other anymore." But before you assume that sex will never be special again, think about this: Isn't there a great excitement in making love to someone you truly know inside and out? Intimacy can—and should—send your sex life soaring. Still, there's nothing that says you can't throw in a few surprises now and then to spice things up. Tell each other naughty bedtime stories featuring your wildest fantasies. Declare next Saturday and Sunday an "All Naked Weekend" and do everything, from eating breakfast to

## in the HEAT of the FIGHT

For a happy marriage, 10 phrases to banish from your spousal battles:

- 1 "I hate you!"
- 2 "I want a divorce!"
- 3 "You sound just like your mother!"
- 4 "Tonight, it's Sofa City for you!"
- 5 "Get out!"
- 6 "If you do that, we're through!"
- 7 "Who do you think you are?"
- 8 "You have no right to..."
- 9 "You're so stupid!"
- 10 "My dad was right!"

watching TV, in the buff. (You'll end up doing a lot more than sitting in front of the tube!) The point is, get creative.

"Make a date with each other once a week—and stick to it," Kim Bytheway suggests. "That way, no matter how busy you both are, you have something to look forward to all week."

## family choke hold

The idea of spending every Sunday night at his in-laws' made Andy Goldman groan. His wife, Emily, 24, an only child, insisted it was a family tradition. "After six weeks of pot roast and Sunday-night football, I began to feel like it was an imposition," Andy says. "We had our own lives—but Emily just couldn't seem to sever the ties."

Instead of discussing it calmly, Andy issued an ultimatum: "It's them or me." Bad idea. "I didn't know what to do," Emily recalls. "Was I supposed to tell my mom we wouldn't come anymore, and break her heart? We had a huge fight about it."

Marriage is a new beginning, says John Bytheway. "And with that comes a separation from the past." It doesn't mean you have to completely alienate your family or your close friends, who may miss having you around. "It simply means you have to set your priorities, and your partner and your partnership should be number one." Instead of going every Sunday for dinner, Andy and Emily compromised and now go once a month. Emily also meets her mom every few weeks for lunch and sees her folks on the nights Andy has to work late.

Her parents were pretty understanding—which, says John Bytheway, is sometimes not the case. "If it's a situation where your spouse and your parents don't get along, you're better off not being the referee—you'll wind up the bad guy," he points out. But as a rule, stand by your man. "Chances are, the ill will between them will gradually subside as they accept the fact that you love him and he's now a part of the family."

## labor pains

"Do I look like a maid to you?" Allison Ebersole, 27, remembers screaming at her husband, Jake, when she saw the dinner dishes piled high in the sink for the fourth night in a row. "I put up with it every day—I always cleaned up and let him lie on the couch after dinner. But I couldn't take it anymore. Why was I doing all of the cooking and cleaning? I thought a marriage was supposed to be fifty-fifty."

It's a fact: The wife often winds up with more work around the home than the husband, says John Bytheway. And when the work scale is tipped too much in your direction, it's time to sit down and delegate. He suggests drawing up a list of the chores that need to be done weekly and monthly. "Next to each task, write the name of the person who currently does it. Then reorganize it so that both partners have fairly equal assignments. "Jake had no idea I was angry," Ally admits.

Your spouse is not a mind reader—and you shouldn't be a martyr, adds John Bytheway. "No matter what your feud, nothing is ever solved with silence."

The final message: Get it out, and chances are excellent that you'll work it out. ■