



Spousonomics: Using Economics to Master Love, Marriage, and Dirty Dishes

Paula Szuchman, Jenny Anderson

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Are you happy in your marriage—except for those weekly spats over who empties the dishwasher more often? Not a single complaint—unless you count the fact that you haven’t had sex since the Bush administration? Prepared to be there in sickness and in health—so long as it doesn’t mean compromising? Be honest: Ever lay awake thinking how much more fun married life *used* to be?

If you’re a member of the human race, then the answer is probably “yes” to all of the above. Marriage is a mysterious, often irrational business. Making it work till death do you part—or just till the end of the week—isn’t always easy. And no one ever handed you a user’s manual.

Until now. With *Spousonomics*, Paula Szuchman and Jenny Anderson offer something new: a clear-eyed, rational route to demystifying your disagreements and improving your relationship. The key, they propose, is to think like an economist.

That’s right: an economist.

Economics is the study of resource allocation, after all. How do we—as partners in a society, a business, or a marriage—spend our limited time, money, and energy? And how do we allocate these resources most efficiently? *Spousonomics* answers these questions by taking classic economic concepts and applying them to the domestic front. For example:

- Arguing all night isn’t a sign of a communication breakdown; you’re just extremely **loss-averse**—and by refusing to give an inch, you’re risking even greater losses.
- Stay late at the office, or come home for dinner? Be honest about your mother-in-law, or keep your mouth shut and smile? Let the **cost-benefit analysis** make the call.
- Getting your spouse to clean the gutters isn’t a matter of nagging or guilt-tripping; it’s a question of finding the right **incentives**.
- Being “too busy” to exercise or forgetting your anniversary (again): your overtaxed memory and hectic schedule aren’t to blame—**moral hazard** is.
- And when it comes to having more sex: merely a question of **supply and demand!**

Spousonomics cuts through the noise of emotions, egos, and tired relationship clichés. Here, at last, is a smart, funny, refreshingly realistic, and deeply researched book that brings us one giant leap closer to solving the age-old riddle of a happy, healthy marriage.

Spousonomics: Using Economics to Master Love, Marriage, and Dirty Dishes Details

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From Reader Review Spousonomics: Using Economics to Master Love, Marriage, and Dirty Dishes for online ebook

Steven says

This book has some seriously good concepts and ideas that are easily taken out of economics and into a marriage. Marriage is full of transactions, and as such, economic theory can be applied in some interesting ways, and this book translates them well.

Ann says

I'm not finished yet, but I wanted to put down my thoughts while my baby is sleeping(!) and I have the time. So far the book is interesting enough for me to keep reading it, but also a fairly large disappointment. The tone is a little too...smug?...shallow?...glib? Something annoying anyway. I like popular science books and appreciate that they are qualitatively different from more hardcore science works, but at the same time, I sometimes felt like the anecdotal case studies were only a step or two away from a women's magazine article.

And that is probably my biggest fault with the book: it is clearly written for women. There is only the vaguest token effort to occasionally throw in a male perspective, otherwise the authors - both female - are obviously speaking to a female audience. With that in mind, it is curious that so far most of the anecdotes are about how the woman had to change her behavior drastically in order for the marriage to work. Even the one chapter so far where the man is clearly at fault (he's a total slackass free-loader) the problem is framed largely as the wife enabling him and what she needs to do to fix that. The women in the sex chapter all are frigid people who need to just have sex already, the "sleep on it" example features a woman portrayed as a harpy, and there are several women shown to be chronic nags. Some of the anecdotes feature the couple working together towards a solution, but if one partner is giving in or giving up, it's always the woman. (And were there no same sex couples interviewed for the book?) In a book aimed at women, you would think that there would be less negativity. Maybe the second half of the book will be more balanced, but I'm not counting on it.

It also somewhat upset me that that the authors were "quite pleased" to see that the majority of respondents had sex when they were not in the mood - for reasons such as "feeling guilty" or "earning goodwill". Umm, whatever happened to respecting your own body? I understand the point they were trying to make about sex and inertia, but at the same time it makes me a little uneasy that the chapter could have been subtitled "Not in the mood? Suck it up and put out!"

Gregg says

Yes! This frames problems in the form of economic theories—to which I can relate. Then it shows you how to apply the economic solutions to achieve optimal results in your relationship. Recommended for thinkers that trend towards the logical end of the spectrum.

Caroline says

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Loss Aversion

Loss aversion is why the average consumer tends to notice price increases more than decreases. When have you ever noticed that a gallon of gas was *cheaper* than it was the last time you refuelled? Yet the minute gas goes up a tenth of a penny, you're outraged....

If you're like us, now that you know what loss aversion is, you'll start to see its dirty fingerprints all over your life - and that includes your personal life. Because here's the punch line:

Jessica (Books: A true story) says

***Spousonomics* is a marriage book that appeals to the logical side of your brain, written with a lot of sarcasm and humor to make it fun to read.** I liked that it didn't go into "feelings" and crap (and thank heavens there was no personal quiz/workbook at the end). It focuses on practical ways to solve common marriage problems with economic principals. It doesn't seem like economics should be applicable to marriage, but economics is the study of allocating scarce resources and marriage is full of scarcity. Not enough time, energy, mental capacity, money, sex etc. It talks about weighing the costs and benefits of solutions. Trading with your spouse. In fact, I think taking emotion and feelings *out* of the problems helps you actually solve them.

Here's an example from the book. A couple is having a "game of chicken" to see who will break down and go to the grocery store first. The book compares this kind of argument to the Cold War between President Kennedy and President Khrushchev:

Now replace Kennedy and Khrushchev with Joel and Lisa. And replace the nuclear missiles with Joel and Lisa's refrigerator, which has been empty for three days. Husband and wife are in a standoff, neither one backing down. They're been ordering in from Gino's Pizza every night this week, and they're never had such indigestion in their lives. But god help Joel if he's going to go to the supermarket..

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So what's the economic solution to that argument? Answer: Collusion. Collusion means giving up the information you've been withholding so you can make an actual compromise. Collusion is actually illegal to do in the business world, but it can work out really nice in a marriage. If each side shares honestly why they won't go to the grocery store, then they can compromise. Most marriage books would point out that yeah, they need to compromise. And then talk about how important your husband's feelings are blah blah blah. I like this solution better. Much more practical.

Each chapter discusses an economic principal and how it applies to marriage. **Then there are three specific examples, called Case Studies, of how those principles can solve a problem. I found myself**

relating to a lot of these stories. The burnt out housewife. The house chores no one wants to do. I felt like the case studies gave me ideas instead of preaching to me. Marriage books can be so preachy.

The authors gathered tons of data to write this book because economics is all about making decisions based on data. It's like Freakonomics for your marriage. I like that it challenged traditional solutions and gender roles. **If you want a fresh, interesting way to look at your marriage with creative solutions to common problems, you should check out *Spousonomics*.**

Arukiyomi says

Context: Finished this off on the bed with Shiraz for company.

Review:

Get two women together. One wants to write a book about economics and the other a book about marriage. The result is this curious arrangement. While it does contain some good tips here and there, I felt overall that some of the advice was a bit idealistic.

Each chapter is focussed on a different aspect of economic theory (bit yawn) and, using well-illustrated real-life example of marital issues, they then apply this theory to demonstrate how it can help to solve issues that couples run into. While some of this may well work for some couples, as I said, I thought some of the application was a bit idealistic. We are after all living, changing beings. Solutions that might work at one point in our marriage, may well cause problems at others.

Even worse, and this is where the book really falls down for me, we're not rational rule-bound objects like pounds and pence. We're anything but, especially at a time of conflict in a close relationship like marriage. For all sorts of reasons, we behave in ways that do not make sense economically because, when push comes to shove, it isn't economy we're motivated by. And when you're in the deep end and thrashing to get out, someone explaining the technical theory of breast stroke from the side of the pool is only going to make you feel worse.

What I thought this book lacked was any admission that we are broken beings and always will be. There will always be conflict, within ourselves, with our spouses, with the world in general. The book didn't seem to say to me, try this and, if it doesn't work, know that you are in company. That makes sense. I mean, you don't sell books by admitting that the advice you're giving probably won't work in most cases. But without the empathy such an admission brings, I felt the book was clinical and a bit cold. Dare I say ivory tower?

So, in the end, although it was an interesting idea, I felt that the book was a bit too simplistic. We can all attempt to follow patterns of behaviour that, ideally, will solve everything. In reality though, things don't usually work out that way. At least that's my reality. Habits are hard to break and even harder to form. At best I think this book will provide an idea or two for couples to try out and, if it works, good luck to 'em. At worst, I think this could set some couples up for a fall as they take ideal solutions and apply them to less than ideal realities.

OPENING LINE

Who should do what?

99TH PAGE QUOTE

If you've got it, why not use it?

No reason, unless you care about something called "moral hazard" the danger that people with insurance will behave differently – sometimes taking greater risks – from those without it. Look at you, you had no qualms about racking up thousands in doctor's bill (for a stomach ache that, let's face it, was never going to kill you) because it wasn't your money you were risking.

In contrast, your friend Dina, a freelance art therapist who coincidentally had a mysterious stomach problem but had no insurance, went to a walk-in clinic, was prescribed an endoscopy, found out it would cost her \$2,000 and decided to try lemon-ginger tea instead. Dina's problems didn't go away immediately, either, but like yours, hers got better with time and a concerted effort to eat better and reduce stress. Total out-of-pocket expenses for Dina? Just \$3.50 a week in teabags.

CLOSING LINE

If you look hard enough, there's usually a Plan C that can resolve any battle of the sexes – whether it's two vacations a year, sex in the afternoon, or the book you've just finished reading.

RATING

Key: Legacy | Plot / toPic | Characterisation / faCts | Readability | Achievement | Style *Read more about how I come up with my ratings*

Paige says

I wanted more out of this book, a lot more. I found it to be sexist in that the female spouse is usually the one to make the sacrifices and/or find the solution to fix the marriage problems. Disappointing.

David says

While I have read a few books about maintaining relationships, this book is quite different. It draws upon the principles of economics to inform the reader how to deal with issues in a marriage. Many of the basic principles of economic-behavior theory are described here; supply and demand, loss-averse behaviors, game theory, cost-benefit analysis, moral hazards, incentives, signaling, asymmetric information, and many more. For each of these principles, the authors tell an anecdote from the business world that illustrates the principle. Then they show how the principle applies to spousal relationships, concretely with anecdotes.

The authors tell their stories with fantastic humor and straight-forward bluntness. This made the book a lot of fun to read! Some reviewers--especially women--take offense at some of the advice, but as a man, I see the

advice as taking economics principles to their logical, realistic conclusion in spousal relationships.

Just to give an example of how different this book is from other marriage advice books, consider the following dilemma. The standard advice about how to get more sex from your marriage partner includes things like: have more foreplay, go on a romantic vacation, talk about it, and rekindle the mystery. This book shoves all of this advice aside, and instead recommends, "make sex more affordable". Well, the meaning has nothing to do with paying cash for sex, but to ... well, I won't spoil the details here.

I didn't read this book; I listened to the audiobook. The narrator, Renée Raudman, does an excellent reading, and made the book all the more enjoyable.

Tiffany Seelye says

I loved this book! A must read for anyone in a long term relationship. Great advice for all types of couples.

Tatyana Naumova says

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Jamie Kline says

My opinion: Usually I don't read books on marriage help, thinking I've got everything all figured out. I admit now I was wrong; thanks to this book, I have learned a lot of tips and tricks to make my marriage better. The authors use common terms and concepts normally used in economics and apply it to marriage. Better yet, they throw in case studies of couples that used these approaches with great results. It helped to cement the fact that although some of these ideas seem small, they can have a big impact. Such as, when approaching the concept of chores, it's more efficient to assign tasks based on who does which chore better (quicker); this was the concept of specialization. It might not be the chore you enjoy the most, but the quicker these unpleasant tasks get done, the more time you have to spend with your spouse. Another concept I found very interesting was loss aversion. People hate losing and most arguments turn into who can win, and lose the bigger picture of why they're even fighting. They point out that it is best to "sleep on it". If it still bothers you in the morning, confront your spouse; if not, then let it go. I guess you could also call it "picking your battles" or "don't sweat the small stuff". A lot of sections of this book had me chuckling to myself and in a lot of the case studies I could relate to some of their struggles. The economics portions were quite boring to me, but it is obviously essential to the book, relating ideas in economics to marriage, and the authors did explain all of the concepts very thoroughly so that even someone with no economics knowledge (for example, ME!) could understand. All in all, this book was very informative, witty, and definitely brought up some good points. I will definitely be using some of these tips and tricks to better my marriage (guess I'll be doing the laundry from now on, even though I hate it...hey if it means more time with my hubby it's worth a shot!)

My rating: 3/5 stars

Joel says

To review this book (Spousonomics) I have to reference another book I just started reading:

I just picked up Jared Diamond's book "The World Until Yesterday" about traditional societies. Right in the beginning is a striking point - the vast majority of "studies" we read are from societies he calls W.E.I.R.D. (Western Educated Industrialized Rich and Democratic.) Not only that, but even more specifically tons come from studying kids in Psychology majors.

The problem with this is that there are lots of different ways that societies, and in this case marriages, can work. But the authors of this book feel like they did even LESS digging than most books. Basically every single relationship is between two stock traders or hedge fund managers. It just comes across as really shortsighted, and annoying.

They even specifically talk about "confirmation bias" in this book - seeking out things and selectively listening to research or advice that confirms what you already think. I can't think of a worse example of this than only testing all your little marriage/economic theories on such a small set of people pulled from a pool with which you are utterly familiar.

Anyway, probably not worth your time. There was one useful thing I gained from the book which is why it has two stars and not one - choosing and dividing chores based on competitive advantage. That chapter is worth a read. You can skip everything else.

Michelle says

Saw this on a friend's to-read shelf, then it jumped out at me at my next library visit. I couldn't resist picking it up, I love the books applying economics to real life. Mostly, I liked this one.

The economics is pretty basic. No real novel stuff here. Relies on quite a bit of game theory, and even some not-so-reliable economics. Why on earth anyone would want to put Keynes in a book on marriage is beyond me, and if I were writing a book on economics he'd just be in the endnotes. :-) So this is a rather mainstream-towards-left economic interpretation. Another odd thing for me is that all the couples were pretty much yuppie types--most of them fairly young, city dwellers, with ginormous high-profile, high-pressure jobs. There were not a lot of typical Midwestern middle-class couples with normal jobs. Also there seemed to be little, if any, religious influence on any of the couples profiled, except the one couple out of the book that ended up getting divorced. The language was occasionally bad, always self-consciously trendy, and the sex discussions were a lot franker than I liked.

Also, while I'm happy to see discussions like this for "on the margins", the little details of how to solve small problems, I'm a little unsettled by using this as a GENERAL approach to marriage. It seems to me that focusing on common values and commitment and genuine, sacrificial love is a lot better basic foundation, although deciding who will do the dishes might benefit from an "economic" approach. I guess I'm a little troubled by the authors' tone of "If you want your husband to do x, then just have sex." That seemed to be the prescription for rather a lot of troubles.

I guess I'd love to see this general idea treated again, but instead applied to couples more like me--the kind who did things a bit more traditionally. We do still exist. :-)

Natalie says

Read the "It's Not You, It's the Dishes" edition of this book. Usually I eschew self-helpy relationship books as I despise with a great and searing passion the whole notion of Mars vs Venus BS. (I view evolutionary psychology with a great deal of skepticism peppered with contempt for the MASSIVELY overreaching theories that seem to keep spinning out of that field.) THIS book however does not presume that your chromosomal distribution dictates anything other the occasional need for Midol or a jock strap. What it does do is assume that 1) You are in a relationship with a generally well-adjusted person who wants to work with you to create the best possible relationship for you both(do not use this book to make relationships with crazy dead-beat losers of either gender work. You will not change them.) 2) That you subscribe to the Rolling Stones theory of relationships- you can't always get what you want, but you can get what you need and 3) you and your partner are generally rational (big assumption sometimes). It's a great book, full of fabulous advice and should be issued to anyone in a committed, long-term relationship. Because it is based on the interaction of two individuals who are trying to achieve the best possible relationship given the possibilities, gender isn't as important so would apply pretty well to same-sex relationships as well.

The ONLY bone I have to pick with it relates to a non-essential example of the theory of moral hazard and their choice of health care and health insurance as an illustration. Poor example and just wrong, but not relevant to the point of that chapter.

I might actually give it a second read (which I NEVER do) just to be sure I haven't missed anything the first time around. Highly recommended for anyone who is seeking to improve their ability to be the best partner possible and to find a happy equilibrium with someone they love.

Youghourta says

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