



It's Not You, It's the Dishes (originally published as Spousonomics): How to Minimize Conflict and Maximize Happiness in Your Relationship

By Paula Szuchman, Jenny Anderson

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Your marriage is fine, right? Sure, there are showdowns over who unloads more dishes, and some simmering discontent over who drives more car pools, cleans more dust bunnies, and keeps the social wheels of your existence greased. The sex is good, though you can't remember when you last had it. Come to think of it, you're plagued by a nagging sense that marriage used to be so much more fun. Marriage can be a mysterious, often irrational business. But the key, propose Paula Szuchman and Jenny Anderson in this incomparable and engaging book, is to think like an economist. We all have limited time, money, and energy, but we must allocate these resources efficiently. *It's Not You, It's the Dishes* is a clear-eyed, rational route to demystifying your disagreements and improving your relationship. Smart, funny, deeply researched, and refreshingly realistic, *It's Not You, It's the Dishes* cuts through the noise of emotions, egos, and tired relationship clichés to solve the age-old riddle of a happy, healthy marriage.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Letter from Co-author Jenny Anderson



When I told my husband I was thinking about writing a book about marriage, specifically a book that used economic principles to resolve common conflicts, he reacted as if I'd asked suggested we take up sea kayaking. "Sounds cool," he said.

At the time, I was eight months pregnant with our first kid and working as a business reporter at the *New York Times*. It was 2008 and the financial world was falling apart. I was working 12 hour days, and we were all hoping I wouldn't go into labor in the newsroom. But somehow in spite of this, I was convinced that writing a book was not just a good idea, but a fantastic family undertaking. I'd learn more about successful marriages! I'd become an amateur economist! I'd come up with all sorts of cool tricks to getting what I wanted. What genius!

Talk about overconfidence. In *It's Not You, It's the Dishes* [editor's note: this book was originally published as *Spousonomics*], Paula Szuchman, my co-author, and I write that overconfidence contributes not just to booms and busts in the wider economy, but booms and busts in marriage, too. Overconfidence is what causes CEOs of major corporations--think Merrill Lynch and Lehman Brothers--to blow up their firms: They didn't plan for the worst because they thought they were too smart to drive their banks into the ground. Similarly, overconfidence drives couples to assume they will be together forever and then fail to take into account how much strain certain events--say, a baby, a full-time job and a book--might put on their relationship.

Chalk that one up to inexperience. I hadn't yet started my research into the world of marriage and economics. But the more Paula and I researched the latest thinking in economics, while simultaneously interviewing hundreds of couples across the country about their own marriages, the more we realized just how much economics has to teach us about making marriage work. We were learning how to divide labor more efficiently, how sex comes down to a simple question of supply and demand, and how a smart incentive can get your spouse to do almost anything you want (almost).

We even hit on some anger-management techniques. When Paula and her husband would discuss something—say, why he’s incapable of signaling before making a left turn—Paula sometimes felt inclined to argue all night if he didn’t immediately concede that she was right about all his flaws. That’s because she was taught never to go to bed angry. So she’d amp it up until her husband would fall asleep, and she was apoplectic. “Woman, we need our sleep,” he’d say, rolling over and leaving her in a smoldering heap of fury.

At first she thought this “going to sleep” was heresy. But then she wrote a chapter about a concept in behavioral economics called “loss aversion,” meaning our strong dislike of losing. She learned we hate losing so much that we have to win \$200 to make up for the pain of losing \$100. Traders who are losing bet the house, for example (there’s a reason pawn shops are conveniently located next to casinos). Similarly, when Paula was losing in an argument with her husband, she dug in her heels and kept trying to win at all costs. She’s not alone: In our research, we found that two-thirds of married couples keep fighting even when they know it’s “a losing battle.”

Paula learned that a better approach was actually sleeping on it. After all, was she fighting about the turn signals or was it her loss aversion kicking in? So she’d go to bed angry and see how she felt in the morning. If she still cared, she could have a rational conversation about it. If she didn’t—and often she didn’t—well then, both she and her husband got some much-needed sleep. Another bonus: She could cut back on the tally of regrettable-things-said in the wee hours of the morning when winning is really the only objective.

I recall my husband’s original enthusiasm about the book with a twinge of nostalgia. We didn’t know our marriage would be put through the wringer, or that I’d have two kids during the writing of the book (Paula had one, too, bringing the offspring total to three). But in the end, my overconfidence was not totally misplaced. I did learn a lot of new tricks. I have a better toolkit. And so does my husband.

Review

“One of the most delightful, clever, and helpful books about marriage I’ve ever seen.”—Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love*

“Practical, compelling, and hilarious . . . The minute I finished this book, I started to experiment on my husband.”—Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*

“This clever and hilarious book is really a user’s manual for improving relationships in marriage, family, business, and society in general.”—*The Miami Herald*

“The book is grounded in solid research, makes economics entertaining, and might just save a marriage or two.”—James Pressley, Bloomberg

“A convincing and creative case for how the dismal science can help reconcile marital disputes.”—*The Washington Post*

About the Author

Paula Szuchman is a page-one editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, where she was previously a reporter covering the travel industry, college internships, and roller coasters. She lives with her husband and daughter in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Jenny Anderson is a *New York Times* reporter who spent years covering Wall Street and won a Gerald Loeb Award for her coverage of Merrill Lynch. She currently writes on education and lives with her husband and

daughter in Manhattan.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

George Nygaard:

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Jack Baldwin:

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Kristin Todd:

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