

# MailOnline

## Run your marriage with 'Spousonomics': A new book says applying economic rules with transform your relationship

By [Lydia Slater](#)

Last updated at 8:33 AM on 31st January 2011

Many people believe that love and money don't mix, but according to the authors of a new book, Spousonomics, using economics can be a powerful tool to making your marriage successful.

Their theory fuses the field of economics — the study of how to allocate resources to achieve the best results — with the problems in marriage, which also hinge on limited resources: how to use your time, energy, money and libido to keep you smiling and your relationship thriving.



---

**Tired all the time? Arguing about chores? Applying economic rules will transform your relationship, says a new book**

---

The trick is to boost those resources and allocate them more intelligently.

Instead of reacting from gut instinct, think of your marriage as a business. Take a deep breath and calmly apply basic economic principles to solving emotional problems. Here's how:

## COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE — who does what?

Division of labour is one of the first things companies have to tackle if they plan on getting anything accomplished.

But in a marriage most of us are content to muddle along swapping or allotting tasks randomly — all too often leaving one person feeling hard done by.

No wonder household chores are one of the biggest causes of marital discord.

Some couples think that the solution is to divide the housework 50/50, taking it in turns to vacuum, cook or empty the bins. That sounds fair, but you'll end up monitoring each other's workload and worry that you're being taken for granted.

Instead, utilise the theory of comparative advantage, posited by British economist David Ricardo, which says it's not efficient for you to take on every task, only those at which you're relatively better.

So decide together who should specialise in what (you do the laundry, he does the dishes) and each stick to those chores.

But what if you are at home and have much more time to sort out domestic issues — shouldn't you do the lion's share of the housework? No. That won't prevent you feeling resentful if you're lumbered with all the dreary chores.

A solution is to agree a value for various tasks — for instance, doing the family's laundry is equal to an evening's babysitting — then trade them for privileges.

## THE ENDOWMENT EFFECT — you don't always have to win

A term used by economists to explain why we put an irrationally high value on our belongings. Surveys show that house-sellers routinely overvalue their own property and undervalue other people's.

It's a behavioural quirk that stems from our aversion to loss. In a marriage, we need to get real, learn to give in and not always try to have the last word in an argument.

A good tip is that if you find yourself getting angry over a particular issue, hold back for 24 hours before picking a fight. Nine times out of ten, you'll find you don't want to quarrel over that issue after all.

Loss aversion also affects the way people perceive happiness in their marriage. A couple with young children may miss their youthful happiness and lack of money worries, for example.

Think like an economist and gather data. Write a list of the good things in your life now and compare them to what you used to have. You may have left behind many old pleasures, but there'll be a list of new ones to make up for it.

## WORK AT IT

**Couples who create a successful business together also tend to have a solid marriage**

## THE NEGATIVE SLOPING DEMAND CURVE — how to have more sex

This daunting term is all about cost: if a thing costs too much, you want less of it. For many couples, sex is too 'expensive' — meaning that it costs you to get it: the 15 minutes of sleep you'll miss out on or the emails mounting up.

The trouble is that a growing body of research suggests there's a link between sex and marital happiness.

The problem is that you may be failing to assess the cost of sex at its real value. For example: your partner wants sex tonight, but you're not keen. In economic terms, you're making a bad decision.

Would the marginal cost of having sex (the lost chance of a few minutes of extra sleep or finishing your bedside book) outweigh the

benefits — an orgasm, a happy partner, a peaceful home)?

So, lower the costs of sex and the quantity will rise almost instantly.

## INTERTEMPORAL CHOICE — take the long view

This is a term economists use for a decision we make today that has consequences in the future. Plainly, marriage is a long-term commitment. But once we're hitched, it can be tough to take the long view.

Therefore, we postpone tough conversations, put off sex, allow ourselves to grow a muffin top.

It's called 'hyperbolic discounting' — we don't value having things in the future nearly as much as we value having those things today.

A cream cake now can seem much more alluring than losing weight by the summer, just as going out tonight can seem worth the long-term bad feeling caused by leaving your spouse on their own with the baby yet again.

The good news is there's a proven way to make better intertemporal choices. It's called a 'commitment device' and it can be anything that forces us to do things we don't want to do, but that we know will pay off down the road. Put some into your marriage.

If your spouse complains you always work late, make some long-term arrangements that are not cancelled easily and hire a babysitter so you can both go out. It will make a difference.

## BOOM AND BUST — how to survive the bad times

This term doesn't just apply to the economy. Marriages, too, can be victims of boom and bust — the bubble of a 'perfect' relationship can burst when misfortune occurs (illness, financial hardship, an unwanted pregnancy).

You are in line for disaster if you focus only on the good sides of your marriage and ignore the danger signs.

When you're in a relatively good place — not euphoric, not despairing — draw up a graph and ask yourself how satisfied you are, how much sex you're having, how much quality time you spend together, your feelings about your spouse and what your last argument was like.

Then ask yourself the same questions six months later.

Getting a handle on where you are in the cycle may help you see the boom, enable you to anticipate the bust or force you to acknowledge you need some help.

And if the bubble does burst, capitalise on the collapse of your 'perfect' relationship and build something new and different — and more realistic.

## GAME THEORY — make sure you work together

Game theory is a branch of mathematics that analyses how people, companies and governments interact and make decisions in strategic situations.

In game theory, as in marriage, there are 'co-operative' strategies in which the two parties work together to come up with a solution that's best for both of them.

And there are 'non co-operative' strategies in which each party is out for number one.

When playing the marital game, it's important to use strategy to improve your outcomes:

- Think ahead. How will he react to what I'm about to do or say?
- Learn from the past. How did she react the last time I did this?
- Put yourself in his shoes. This doesn't mean considering what you would do if you were him, but what he would do.

It sounds like solid advice, and yet so many people routinely do the opposite.

Some disagreeing couples play games of brinkmanship with each other, refusing to give in.

Instead, ask yourself what kind of strategy you could use to get your spouse to meet your acceptable outcome.

And mix it up — if one method (say, nagging) isn't working, change your tactics. If your husband does nothing around the house, no matter how much you complain, then play a different game.

Don't do the laundry one week (make sure you've got plenty of clean clothes) or leave the dishes to pile up in the sink. With any luck, he'll pick up some of the slack without being nagged.

If you look hard enough, there's usually a plan C that can resolve any battle of the sexes. Don't think that being strategic with your marriage is bad. It might sound cold and calculating, but it's reality — and you might as well be good at it.

■ **Extracted from *Spousonomics — Or How To Maximise Returns On The Biggest Investment Of Your Life* by Paula Szuchman and Jenny Anderson, published by Bantam on Thursday at £10.99. To order a copy (p&p free), call 0845 155 0720.**

## Comments (4)

- [Newest](#)
- [Oldest](#)
- [Best rated](#)
- [Worst rated](#)

[View all](#)

Don't be a financial / emotional vampire it only leads to a one-sided and unhealthy relationship - Oliver Cownden, Reigate, 31/1/2011 02:29 reads: don't treat your partner as a mix of an unpaid housekeeper and a sex object

- eva, at home, 31/1/2011 10:55

Click to rate  Rating 13

[Report abuse](#)

what is this nonsense ?

- lilly, london, 31/1/2011 05:20

Click to rate  Rating 34

[Report abuse](#)

Don't be a financial / emotional vampire it only leads to a one-sided and unhealthy relationship

- Oliver Cownden, Reigate, 31/1/2011 02:29

Click to rate  Rating 11

[Report abuse](#)

What sort of rubbish bin were these experts born in? Are they joking ? It certainly is tongue in cheek , isn't it ? If you try to use their stupidity in your life, then you are a bigger fool than they take you for. Next !

- mick blair, thailand, 31/1/2011 02:01

Click to rate  Rating 19

[Report abuse](#)

The views expressed in the contents above are those of our users and do not necessarily reflect the views of MailOnline.

- [Femail Headlines](#)
- [Most Read](#)
- [My adopted boys had perfect childhoods. Now both are heroin addicts and in jail - just like their birth mother](#)
- [Star diets that can harm health: Fans of celebrity 'pure food' rules develop mental illness as they deny themselves vital nutrients](#)
- [The wedding planners: Kate's mum and sister drop a hint about the dress by visiting Oldfield's boutique](#)
- [A book by a woman who spent her life in the NHS exposes the uncaring cruelty of some today's nurses. Her words will shock you, but make a vital contribution to the debate over the NHS's future](#)
- ['People are so mean to me... but I don't care': Gwyneth Paltrow defends 'out of touch' lifestyle newsletter Goop](#)
- [You CAN have sex through pregnancy without harming your baby, say experts](#)
- [Has Cheryl blown it? She's not likely to get the U.S. X Factor gig, her new tattoo's silly... and now she's turned to her cheating ex](#)
- [MORE HEADLINES](#)
- [How to snare a millionaire: Sick of working as a shop girl, Kim reinvented herself with the sole aim of landing a rich husband - and got one](#)
- [Chop and change: Can women of all ages carry off the pixie cut?](#)
- [How Boris Johnson's publicity-mad sister was prompted by her teenage daughter to make a risqué confession on the perils of bikini-waxing](#)
- [Good news Victoria Beckham! Stilettoes give women shapelier legs than flats](#)
- [Why I swapped my party girl lifestyle to marry a Sikh warrior](#)
- [SANDRA PARSONS: Internet porn and a woman called 'It'](#)
- [Granny chic: How comfy cardies, warm tights and tweed skirts are part of the latest celebrity trend](#)
- [MOST READ IN DETAIL](#)

---

Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd

Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

**Glam**Entertainment

© [Associated Newspapers Ltd](#)