

Book Review

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

Derek Lawson, B.S.
Kansas State University

Szuchman, P., & Anderson, J. (2012). *It's not you, it's the dishes: How to minimize conflict and maximize happiness in your relationship*. New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 368 pp., \$16.00. ISBN: 978-0385343954.

When was the last time you thought like an economist when it came to your marriage? *It's Not You, It's The Dishes* brings economic principles and theory into the married life of couples. The authors simplify economics by providing fundamental concepts while removing technical jargon in a funny, yet intuitive way. Readers are introduced to the basics of comparative advantage, game theory, and eight other economic principles, all while learning lessons on how to resourcefully allocate their limited units of time, money, and energy to yield a better return on their biggest investment of their lives, their marriage. At its core, this is a self-help book aimed at married couples. Nevertheless, financial professionals and academics may benefit from reading the book, particularly because it may be beneficial helping to brainstorm potential solutions with their clients or as "homework" for client couples.

The overarching purpose of this book is to help readers think of marriage as a business by thinking about how businesses effectively and efficiently utilize economics. Each of the book's ten chapters begins with an overview of an economic principle to be aligned with a particular marriage issue. Inserts highlighting important economists and other in-depth information help improve the academic quality of the book. Unfortunately, these may not appeal to everyone reading the book, as they may be construed as

It's Not You, It's The Dishes: How to Minimize Conflict and Maximize Happiness in Your Relationship

interruptions. Thus, some readers may skip it altogether (and miss out on a valuable learning lesson).

The main focus of each chapter is a case study, in which readers are introduced to a couple, their problem, and a solution to the couple's issue. Readers will enjoy this part as it helps them identify with any one or more of the couples highlighted in the text. Each chapter concludes with a brief summary, entitled "The Bottom Line," outlining what to do in order to maintain or regain marital bliss. Essentially, the chapter summary is a "how-to" about improving one's relationship satisfaction and is a must-read feature of each chapter.

The authors' abilities to match economic principles with marriage problems, while making the read interesting, fun, and meaningful, were very pleasant. Each chapter offers a quick and easy read, leaving the reader with the feeling of wanting to read more. Most economic principles mentioned were well done, although a few seemed as if the authors reached to align an economic principal to a marriage problem or solution.

Unfortunately, the strategies mentioned in the book may not be applicable to anyone but the couple that came up with the strategy because what works for one couple may not work for another. Additional variables, such as marriage length, age difference, and geography, also need to be considered. More details of the survey discussed within the book and including the results in an appendix would have been helpful. By doing so, this book could have been a better resource for both practitioners and academics.

Financial therapists, planners, and counselors could benefit from *It's Not You, It's The Dishes* and utilize it as a resource for their clients to read and try some of the solutions mentioned, or possibly help clients brainstorm additional solutions that might work. More importantly, the authors have initiated the idea that economics may help couples understand and solve their marriage issues. Although no real implementation strategy was provided, practitioners that read the book could utilize the strategies by making a list of the issues presented, and then take the strategies that worked for said issues and ultimately make a "cheat sheet." The frameworks presented by Szuchman and Anderson (2012) may also act as a guide for future financial therapists to show how a particular economic framework may result in a successful outcome with a client in a similar situation. Further research is needed to validate whether or not clients react positively to economics as a solution for their marriage problems.

In conclusion, *It's Not You, It's The Dishes*, is an easy read with many real-life stories of couples dealing with marital issues and how they overcame their problems. The creativeness to parallel marriage issues to an economic principle was refreshing and unique. While most of the content is not new, the incorporation of economics with the strategies offered allows this book to fill a void in the areas of blending finance with marriage therapy. It may also help clients better prepare for and manage marriage problems by providing economical solutions to be utilized in the daily operations of their married life. The book will introduce unfamiliar readers to economics, while potentially saving a marriage or two. Overall, anyone who reads *It's Not You, It's The Dishes* will come away reading a fairly interesting and funny book, while learning something that may help

to better one's own understanding of marriage. In regards to that, I recommend reading this book.