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## FYI

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

# There's a certain logic to sex and economics

Reviewed by: [Steve Lafleur](#)Posted: 01/26/2013 1:00 AM | [Comments: 0](#) | Last Modified: 01/26/2013 3:39 PM | [Updates](#)
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(MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)

### BOOK REVIEW

#### Dollars and Sex

#### How Economics Influences Sex and Love

- Marina Adshade
- 
- HarperCollins, 272 pages, \$30

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*Lipstick plays a role in economics as well as grooming and love: dating can be like*

Economics isn't the most exciting subject.

Because of the difficulty of relating abstract economic concepts to everyday life, economists have typically relied on examples such as the trade-off between guns and butter to illustrate core economic concepts.

While such examples bring economic concepts down to the ground, they often aren't particularly interesting.

Recognizing this, University of British Columbia economics professor Marina Adshade turned to a subject that will pique the attention of many economics students: sex. In *Dollars and Sex*, Adshade uses everything from prostitution to online dating to demonstrate how economics work in practice. The result is a book that is both provocative, and informative.

While Adshade's book is not a substitute for a first-year econ textbook, it is a wonderful primer on economics that should appeal to lay readers as well as professional economists.

Economics influences almost all human behaviour. Adshade illustrates how economic factors influence broad social trends, and how those trends influence individual behaviour.

For instance, she delves into prickly subjects such as the impact of the economy on divorce rates (with surprising results), and how lipstick sales are affected by economic conditions.

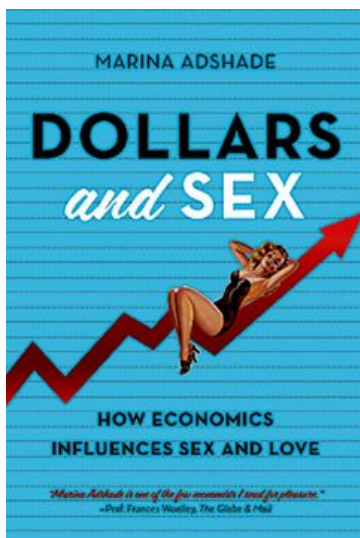
She also speculates on how future technological advances may affect infectious disease, and birth rates. Her speculation often seems counter-intuitive at first glance, but makes sense upon explanation.

In this she has clearly taken a page from the 2005 American bestseller *Freakonomics*, by University of Chicago economist Steven Levitt and New York Times journalist Stephen J. Dubner.

Social phenomena are rarely as simple as one might hope, Adshade notes. Dating is a major component of her book. Economists view dating as a market like any other.

Several parties offer varying services that are valued at varying levels by other parties. Adshade recognizes the humour in such a clinical analysis of relationships but demonstrates the value in this approach.

*an economic exchange and lipstick sales are affected by economic conditions.*



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The most compelling analytical tool used to analyze the dating market comes from online dating sites. Because people freely share information, and express their preferences in ways that can be quantified more easily through only dating sites, it gives economists data to infer how much people care about factors such as income, education, and race (the latter providing the most surprising results).

An interesting dynamic that is introduced into the dating model is spatial. Dating markets in small towns are less efficient than those in large cities because the odds of meeting someone with one's own specific preferences are lower when there are fewer people available to date.

While the Internet has mitigated this dynamic to an extent by increasing the possibility of dating outside of one's own town, this book serves as yet another reminder that the world isn't flat. Place still matters.

Adshade points out that there is another sexual market (aside from prostitution) -- the market within a relationship. Both partners bring value to a relationship, and divide up responsibilities.

She uses the theory of comparative advantage to examine how families divvy up household chores, and make more substantial decisions about work and child rearing. It seems odd to think of everyday interactions between mates as

exchanges, but they often do mimic market transactions.

In sex, as in all things, incentives matter. Adshade illustrates this point by using concepts that are very relatable, and of great interest to those who are either in the dating market, have children in (or soon to be in) the dating market, or who may return to that market in the near future.

While its value as a self-help book is less than its value as a companion to an introductory economics textbook, it will no doubt cause many readers to see sex and dating through a new lens.

Demonstrating how economic principles apply to the reader's most primal needs could help to reinforce the validity of economic logic, in a way that discussing the production of widgets cannot.

Hopefully, readers will also come to a better understanding of how the economics of everyday life apply to public policy. That is the Adshape's hope, and it's almost guaranteed that the book will have that impact on many readers.

*Steve Lafleur is a Winnipeg-based policy analyst with the Frontier Centre for Public Policy ([www.fcpc.org](http://www.fcpc.org)).*

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## HISTORY

Updated on Saturday, January 26, 2013 at 3:39 PM CST: adds fact box

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