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Economist fascinated by naughty behaviour

Professor's book explains why more people should think about money when considering love and sex

Paul Luke, The Province

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Marina Adshade is trying to rescue economics from 200 years of erectile dysfunction.

Economics is dubbed "the dismal science" because two centuries ago Thomas Malthus warned that humanity could be screwed out of a square meal by its talent for reproduction.

Our old Malthus theorized that the world could face mass starvation as the population grew faster than the food supply.



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UBC economics professor Marina Adshade turned her most popular course into a new book on how sex and love is better understood through economics

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"Malthus, at the end of the 18th century, predicted that as long as British peasant women couldn't keep their knees together there was no hope for society to prosper," Adshade writes.

"When it comes to sex, Malthus, admittedly, was a bit of a downer."

Adshade, an economics professor at the University of B.C., has not taken this accusation of gloom lying down.

Her quest is to restore economics' seductive power by offering a glimpse of a simmering libido the field has long hidden beneath its prim and austere exterior.

She dresses economic theory in sexy lingerie in her book, released earlier this week, called *Dollars and Sex: How Economics Influences Sex and Love*.

ADSHADE IS AMONG a growing number of economists to take a sunnier view of what she calls "one of life's sweetest pleasures."

Research by economists into matters of the heart - and other body parts - is rising, she says in *Dollars and Sex*.

Economists are fascinated by human behaviour. This includes naughty behaviour.

Say goodbye to Tom Malthus, and hello to a new wave of professional peeping Toms.

"The resulting body of literature is a collection of theories and evidence that would give anyone, frankly, a hard-on for economics," Adshade claims.

Four years ago, Adshade created a course on the economics of sex and love. The course proved wildly popular, and she continues to offer the *Economics of Sex and Love* at UBC.

When she introduced it at Dalhousie University in Halifax, the course was swamped. Students jammed themselves into the stairway of her classroom week after week, hoping others would drop out and make room.

In one class, Adshade deflected a question about promiscuity, suggesting the student's mother would not approve.

The student disagreed. She said her mother, in fact, wished she could take the class.

"A bunch of other students nodded and said their mothers also wished they could come," Adshade says.

At that point Adshade - who was already blogging on sex and economics - realized a book would deliver the subject to a broader audience.

She took a sabbatical, spent nine months writing in Paris, and - voila - a book about how love is at the mercy of market forces.

Dollars and Sex is not a self-help guide to finding the love of your life. But seeing love as a measurable quantity might prompt people - married or single, straight or gay, young or old - to alter their behaviour, she says.

It might make them think more like economists.

"Almost every option, every decision, and every outcome in matters of sex and love is better understood by thinking within an economic framework," she insists.

Adshade, for example, suggests ordinary people adjust to a changing economy by altering their sexual choices. Recent media reports suggest that economic fear is a big factor in declining teen promiscuity.

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