

# 'Nice' women earn less than their more assertive counterparts

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Credit: Tel Aviv University

A new study finds that the nicer, or more agreeable, a woman is at work, the lower her salary is likely to be. The new research, published in *The European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, examines status inconsistencies between men and women through the lens of traditional male and female characteristics.

Dominant, assertive [women](#), who clearly express their expectations and do not retreat from their demands, are compensated better than their more accommodating female peers. According to the researchers, the same goes for dominant men versus their more conciliatory male counterparts—but even dominant women earn far less than all of their

male colleagues, dominant or otherwise.

The study was conducted by Prof. Sharon Toker of the Tel Aviv University Coller School of Business Management, Dr. Michal Biron of the Department of Business Administration at the University of Haifa, and Dr. Renee De Reuver of the Department of Human Resource studies at Tilburg University in The Netherlands.

## **Sugar and spice and everything nice?**

"We have witnessed dramatic changes in the definition of traditionally male and female qualities over the past several decades. But some people still really cling to the idea that some qualities are exclusively male and exclusively female," Prof. Toker said. "Some professional women are still afraid to exhibit a trait that's incongruent with presumed notions of female character. The result is financial retribution."

"We found that women aren't aware that more agreeable women are being punished for being nice," said Dr. Biron. "The nice women we polled in our study even believed they were earning more than they deserved."

For the purpose of their study, the researchers surveyed 375 men and women at a Dutch multinational electronics company with 1,390 employees. The subjects were selected at random from all 12 of the company departments.

The researchers used both objective and subjective criteria for the study. For objective data, they analyzed tenure, education, and performance data relative to income and promotion statistics. For subjective data, they examined how the individual perceived the fit between their education, experience, and performance on the one hand, and their income and rank on the other.

## More effort for less return

"We found that women were consistently and objectively status-detracted, which means they invest more of themselves in their jobs than they receive; and are compensated less than their male colleagues across the board," Dr. Biron said.

"But dominant women were not punished for reflecting such female-incongruent traits as extroversion and assertiveness," Dr. De Reuver said. "In fact, we found that the more dominant a woman is at work, the less likely she is to be status-detracted. We found a similar pattern among men—the more dominant a man is, the more likely he is to be better compensated. But alarmingly, dominant women were still found to earn less than even the most agreeable men who aren't promoted."

In the subjective part of the study, nearly all the employees responded that they felt dissatisfied with their input-compensation ratio, but agreeable and non-dominant women answered that they felt they earned too much.

"This blew our minds," said Prof. Toker. "The data shows that they earn the least—far less than what they deserve. And they rationalize the situation, making it less likely that they will make appropriate demands for equal pay."

The researchers hope to replicate the study in Israel and the U.S.

**More information:** *The European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, [DOI: 10.1080/1359432X.2015.1111338](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2015.1111338)

Provided by Tel Aviv University

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