

'Disagreeable' married men who shirk domestic responsibilities earn more at work

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Married men who don't help out around the house tend to bring home bigger paychecks than husbands who play a bigger role on the domestic chores front.

New research from the University of Notre Dame shows that "disagreeable" men in opposite-sex marriages are less helpful with [domestic work](#), allowing them to devote greater resources to their jobs, which results in higher pay.

In contemporary psychology, "agreeableness" is one of the "Big Five" dimensions used to describe human personality. It generally refers to someone who is warm, sympathetic, kind and cooperative. Disagreeable people do not tend to exhibit these characteristics, and they tend to be more self-interested and competitive.

"Why Disagreeableness (in Married Men) Leads to Earning More: A Theory and Test of Social Exchange at Home" is forthcoming in *Personnel Psychology* from lead author Brittany Solomon and Cindy Muir (Zapata), management professors at Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, along with Matthew Hall, the David A. Potenziani Memorial College Professor of Constitutional Studies and concurrent law professor at Notre Dame, and Elizabeth Campbell from the University of Minnesota.

"Across two studies, we find evidence that disagreeable men tend to earn more money relative to their more agreeable male counterparts because they are more self-interested and less helpful to their wives at home, which allows for greater job involvement and ultimately, higher pay," Solomon said. "This effect is even stronger among disagreeable men with more traditional gender role attitudes and when their wives are highly conscientious, presumably because in these cases their wives take on more household management and more seamlessly carry out the responsibilities."

The concept may bring to mind the '50s and '60s sitcom "Leave it to Beaver," where Ward Cleaver always arrived home in time for dinner and June Cleaver wore dresses and pearls to clean floors. Did they have

advanced understanding of their respective roles?

The study suggests that because these men are able to preserve more time and energy at home, they can invest these resources into their work and earn more. However, the team found that disagreeableness does not predict [career success](#) for more egalitarian men, those whose wives are less conscientious, or any men outside opposite-sex marriages.

"While disagreeableness in the workplace may lead some employees to success, those hoping to attain higher pay should at least hesitate before leaning into a disagreeable workplace persona," Solomon cautioned.

"Indeed, if self-interested and less communal work behavior was the only key to higher pay, then disagreeable men would tend to earn more, regardless of whether they were married, how they viewed gender roles or to whom they were married."

Prior research has shown that disagreeableness predicts financial success (especially for men), and this association is attributed to workplace behavior. However, this effect remains puzzling given that disagreeableness is negatively associated with valued workplace behaviors, such as cooperation and prosocial behavior. In contrast, the team theorizes the male disagreeableness premium can be further understood by considering imbalanced social exchanges at home, specifically with one's spouse.

"Our findings build on the conventional wisdom that organizations seem to reward disagreeable workplace behaviors and highlight the importance of social exchange at home for success at work," Solomon said. "Our research suggests that organizations acknowledge the role that spousal exchange plays in individual success and points to the potential for organizations to refocus efforts to fuel job involvement on lightening the burden of at-home responsibilities. Doing so could allow employees to preserve resources that could then be invested in their jobs."

"Presumably, this type of initiative would be especially beneficial to those who do not have the persona and gender that we found naturally drives individually advantageous spousal exchange—that is, everyone other than disagreeable, [married men](#)," she said. "To help those who do not have the built-in at-home arrangement that enhances job involvement and pay, organizations may consider investing in infrastructure that helps establish more level career-related playing fields."

These may include providing non-work resources, such as lists of reputable providers for home services and maintenance, establishing child care programs, pre-vetting caregivers or having couriers on retainer, which Solomon speculates may enhance job involvement even more than traditional work-focused incentives like bonuses.

"Practices that situate employees more equitably outside of work may offer more employees the opportunity to succeed," Solomon said. "Also, some research shows that men are stigmatized for taking advantage of flex work policies. Changing the [organizational culture](#), in addition to implementing such policies, may influence calculations within a marriage or partnership about whose career should take priority and who should do more at home. Consequently, organizations may also help support initiatives aimed to promote gender diversity and inclusion, especially efforts to reduce male dominance in high-income positions."

The study also carries implications for career self-management. Most notably, the findings may influence how employees view other people's roles in their own success, beyond their boss and other organizational members, and help improve the understanding of how one's choice of romantic partner and social exchange at [home](#) can have substantial implications for one's career success.

"Professionals often publicly thank their spouses when receiving

achievement awards or earning promotion," Solomon said. "And, at least for disagreeable men, our findings quantify the truth behind this sentiment."

More information: Brittany C. Solomon et al, Why disagreeableness (in married men) leads to earning more: A theory and test of social exchange at home, *Personnel Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/peps.12454](https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12454)

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