

Celebrity couples help each other navigate the ultimate gig economy, research shows

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Credit: Lynn Greyling/Public Domain

From Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall to Tom Holland and Zendaya, the Hollywood celebrity couple has always been an object of fascination and envy. But how does the Hollywood celebrity function as a business venture?

Project-based industries like film and television rely heavily on networks: the adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" applies

as much now as ever. In a study published in the journal *Family Business Review*, three Concordia researchers look at how celebrity marriages can affect both partners' career prospects.

The researchers examined how a spouse's professional network can help boost career outcomes, from more roles to ascending managerial ranks on the film production side. The study combines family business theory with network theory and is applied to a unique industry that prizes celebrity capital as a vehicle for [economic capital](#).

"Our motivation was determining whether or not marrying someone in the same field will help further a career when the whole industry is based on temporary projects," says Yasaman Gorji, an assistant professor of management at the John Molson School of Business and the study's lead author. "Does this kind of support exist, and could it help women especially shatter the [glass ceiling](#)?"

Michael Carney, Concordia University Research Chair in Management, and Rajshree Prakash, an assistant professor of management, co-authored the paper.

Rising stars get a boost

Gorji's research began with the construction of a massive database of film industry personalities and couples dating back to the late 19th century, at the inception of cinema. For this study, she limited her analysis to some 1,200 couples who were active between 1970—toward the end of the studio system era and the birth of a more diffuse and independent Hollywood—to 2010. These subjects were considered core crew members, either in front of or behind the camera, and had established careers in the years prior to marriage.

Noting that the industry they are studying has a distinct hierarchy, the

researchers designated one spouse as supporting and one receiving: one was leveraging his or her clout to support the other's career. True to Hollywood's reputation of being male dominated, the supporting spouse is more often male and the receiving female.

To determine the effects of the marriage on the careers of the subjects, the researchers studied data from five years prior to marriage to three years following it. They also tracked career roles, moving either upwards from acting into producing or directing, downwards from producing and directing into strictly acting, writing or other roles, or no change in role in the three years after marriage.

Controls for age at the time of marriage, gender and industry experience were considered in the data analysis. The receiver's role type before marriage, marriage termination type, if any (separation, divorce or death) and Oscar wins before marriage were also controlled.

Closed groups get more work

They found that the size of a spouse's professional network did have an impact on a receiver getting cast in more projects. But they benefitted more from access to networks that were tightly knit rather than those that were loose and wider cast.

"We often see content producers working recurrently with one another," Carney says. "It's like an ongoing team. We didn't look for that, but we did find evidence that access to cliques or relatively closed networks was more helpful than having people who could bridge large numbers."

They also noted that men were more likely to move into directing and producing after marriage than women. The researchers add that there was no evidence that women gained more from a marriage than men in moving up hierarchies into producing or directing.

"This paper is important because it brings up the idea of the hybridized family," Gorji explains. "They are in the same business but do not own a firm. But they are helping each other get more projects. Their networks help them get those projects but not necessarily rise in the hierarchy."

More information: Yasaman Gorji et al, Celebrity Couples as Business Families: A Social Network Perspective, *Family Business Review* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/08944865211050348](https://doi.org/10.1177/08944865211050348)

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