

# The Long Reach of One's Spouse: Spouses' Personality Influences Occupational Success

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## Abstract

You marry your spouse “for better, for worse” and “for richer, for poorer,” but does your choice of partner make you richer or poorer? It is unknown whether people’s dispositional characteristics can seep into their spouses’ workplace. Using a representative, longitudinal sample of married individuals ( $N = 4,544$ ), we examined whether Big Five personality traits of participants’ spouses related to three measures of participants’ occupational success: job satisfaction, income, and likelihood of being promoted. For both male and female participants, partner conscientiousness predicted future job satisfaction, income, and likelihood of promotion, even after accounting for participants’ conscientiousness. These associations occurred because more conscientious partners perform more household tasks, exhibit more pragmatic behaviors that their spouses are likely to emulate, and promote a more satisfying home life, enabling their spouses to focus more on work. These results demonstrate that the dispositional characteristics of the person one marries influence important aspects of one’s professional life.

## Keywords

occupational success, personality, spouse, partner effects

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Your choice of a spouse influences many factors in your life, such as where you live, how you spend your free time, and who is in your social circle. But does your spouse’s influence extend beyond your personal life and seep into nonrelationship domains, such as the workplace? Given the association between one’s own personality and occupational outcomes (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003; Sutin, Costa, Miech, & Eaton, 2009), might a spouse’s personality also influence one’s workplace performance? Although previous studies have found that home life can influence work experiences (Lambert, 1990) and that spouses can influence each other’s job satisfaction (Westman & Etzion, 1995), very little is known about whether people’s stable individual differences influence their spouses’ work success. In the study reported here, we used a couple-level approach in a large representative longitudinal sample to examine whether the personality of one’s spouse plays an important role in one’s intrinsic and extrinsic occupational success.

## Crossover Effects Between Home and Work

Experiences that occur within romantic relationships, such as negative interactions, sometimes spill over and color experiences in the workplace (Barling & MacEwen, 1992; Chan & Margolin, 1994; Jones & Fletcher, 1996). When spillover between home and work is due to one’s partner (e.g., one’s moods at work are positively associated with the moods of one’s spouse at home; Song, Foo, & Uy, 2008), this is referred to as a *crossover effect*. Like mood, stress can also be transferred between work and home across partners (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Saxbe & Repetti, 2010; Westman & Vinokur, 1998). Although most studies of crossover effects have examined short-term effects brought on by

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transitory events (e.g., bad news at the office sours dinner at home), it is currently unclear whether broader associations across home and work occur. Could something about one's spouse consistently lead one's home life to spill over into one's work life?

### **Partner Personality as a Link Between Home and Work**

One possible pathway by which home life could influence work life is through the personality of one's spouse. Most of the research on the influence of partner personality has focused on relationship outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010; Solomon & Jackson, 2014). However, the personality of a spouse can have influence extending beyond the relationship and affect a person's life satisfaction (Russell & Wells, 1994) and physical health (Roberts, Smith, Jackson, & Edmonds, 2009).

Only two studies have examined the association between work outcomes and partner personality. The studies suggest that wives with high-status jobs tend to have husbands who are high in individuality (Helson & Roberts, 1992) and who have low power motives (Winter, Stewart, & McClelland, 1977). However, both of these studies used small, nonrepresentative samples, and the analyses did not account for dependency between spouses. Furthermore, both studies were conducted at times when it was less common than it is today for women to have careers. Given the proliferation of dual-income households and the evolution toward gender equality, it is unclear whether these reported associations are still meaningful or apply to men. We therefore investigated whether spouses' personality, assessed using a comprehensive measure, influenced multiple measures of occupational success in a modern, large-scale, representative sample.

The personality of one's spouse could facilitate one's own work success through at least three possible pathways. First, people may outsource certain responsibilities to their spouses. That is, although people can perform certain tasks on their own, they can avoid personal costs by "contracting" such tasks to their spouses—just as businesses outsource time-consuming or difficult tasks. Presumably, spouses with particular characteristics will be better suited than others to such outsourcing. For instance, a conscientious spouse is likely to help manage household chores and finances, remember appointments, and plan ahead (Jackson et al., 2010), thereby permitting his or her partner to expend fewer personal resources (e.g., energy and cognition) at home and to preserve enthusiasm for facing work instead. Traditionally, women specialized in the household, and men specialized in the workforce (Becker, 1981). The outsourcing we are referring to can be thought of as a more contemporary version of this process for people to negotiate roles and benefit from their spouses' strengths.

Second, a spouse's personality might also create an emulation effect, in which one partner adopts certain aspects of his or her spouse's traits, which subsequently affects his or her own work life. The literature on relationships demonstrates that spouses tend to take on each other's traits, especially when their partners possess ideal attributes (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009). Although sharing activities is a part of being in a marriage (e.g., partners influence each other's exercise habits; Darlow & Xu, 2011), not all people adopt their spouses' hobbies and leisure activities to the same degree (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). Presumably, couples who do adopt each other's activities are more likely than others to emulate each other, and such emulation could influence work outcomes if the emulated qualities are pragmatic. For example, as a result of such a joint lifestyle, someone may emulate a conscientious partner's ambition and industriousness, and thereby increase his or her own occupational success over time.

Finally, someone's personality may influence the occupational success of his or her spouse as a by-product of relationship satisfaction, just as mood, for example, connects marriage and work life (Heller & Watson, 2005; Judge & Ilies, 2004). Consider a conscientious spouse who is especially reliable, increasing his or her partner's day-to-day happiness and lowering his or her stress levels. The partner's good mood at home is likely to lead to satisfaction with the relationship, which could then spill over into the workplace. Likewise, conscientious spouses with higher levels of self-control may create less disagreement at home, thereby positively influencing relationship satisfaction (Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004) and, potentially, spillover into job functioning.

### **The Current Study**

In the current study, we tested whether the personality of one's spouse influences one's future intrinsic and extrinsic occupational success above and beyond the effect of one's own personality traits. We used a representative longitudinal sample of married couples. Given previous research indicating that conscientiousness has pragmatic utility (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Roberts et al., 2009), we hypothesized that partner conscientiousness would be especially important. Our initial findings supported this hypothesis, so we then tested whether outsourcing, emulation, and relationship satisfaction helped explain the crossover between partner personality and occupational success.

### **Method**

#### ***Participants and procedure***

The data used in this study were from the confidential unit record files of the Household Income and Labour

Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. The HILDA survey, which began in 2000, is a panel study in which economic and social information has been collected annually from a large, nationally representative sample of households. Although our data were collected from Waves 6 through 10 of the full HILDA data set, we refer to these here as Waves 1 through 5 for the sake of simplicity. We used data collected over a 5-year period, from 2005 through 2009, from all households in which there was a married heterosexual couple, at least one of whom was employed at Wave 1. Any participant who was employed was considered an actor (mean age = 44.2 years, range = 19–83 years), and all actors' spouses were considered partners. Our total sample consisted of 4,544 participants; 22.7% were in single-income households (i.e., in which only one couple member was employed at Wave 1;  $n = 1,030$ ), and 77.3% were in dual-income households (i.e., in which both couple members were employed at Wave 1;  $n = 3,514$ ).

## Measures

**Personality.** Personality traits were assessed using a 36-item self-report measure of the Big Five traits (based on 40 Big Five minimarkers from Saucier, 1994). At Wave 1, participants were asked to rate the extent to which each of 36 adjectives described themselves, using a 7-point scale (1 = *does not describe me at all*, 7 = *describes me very well*). Extraversion was measured with 8 items ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and agreeableness ( $\alpha = .78$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .81$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and openness ( $\alpha = .68$ ) were each measured with 7 items.

**Occupational success.** Our index of intrinsic (i.e., subjective) occupational success was job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was assessed at Waves 2 through 5 using a single item that asked participants to rate their overall satisfaction with their jobs. Participants responded on a scale from 0 (*totally dissatisfied*) to 10 (*totally satisfied*). These annual self-ratings were averaged ( $\alpha = .76$ ), which resulted in a variable reflecting job satisfaction over the course of 4 years ( $M = 7.78$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ).

Our indices of extrinsic (i.e., objective) occupational success were income and job promotion. Participants reported their total weekly gross wages at Waves 2 through 5. These reported wages were averaged ( $\alpha = .92$ ), which resulted in a variable indicating weekly income in Australian dollars over the course of 4 years ( $M = 813.62$ ,  $SD = 750.36$ ). Job promotion was assessed at Waves 2 through 5 by asking participants to indicate whether they had received a job promotion during the preceding 12 months. Over the 4-year period, 18.8% of participants ( $n = 853$ ) were promoted at least once (coded as 1; all other participants were coded as 0).

**Covariates.** Relationship duration was assessed by asking participants how long they had been married ( $M = 17.25$  years,  $SD = 12.04$ ). Sex was coded as 0 for male (51.9%) and 1 for female (48.1%). Number of marriages was an ordinal variable, and the current marriage was included in this tally (83.9% had been married once, 13.2% twice, 1.2% three times, and 0.1% four or more times; data were missing for 1.6%). Resident children was a dummy variable indicating whether a participant currently had children living at home. Having no resident children was coded as 0 (31.5%), and having resident children was coded as 1 (66.9%); data were missing for 1.6% of the participants. Education was an ordinal variable indicating the highest level of education a participant had achieved, on a 9-point scale (1 = *Year 11 and below*, 9 = *postgrad—master's or doctorate*); the mean of 4.51 ( $SD = 2.66$ ) indicated that, on average, the participants had completed Year 12 (high-school equivalent) plus additional education but had not received an advanced degree. Education data were missing for 1.6% of participants.

**Mediators.** Actor-reported outsourcing was assessed only at Wave 1, with four dichotomous questions. Participants were asked whether they (rather than their spouses) usually managed each of the following household chores: doing the dishes, preparing meals, running errands, and doing repairs in and around the house. Each of the dichotomous variables was coded as 1 if the actor usually did the chore and 0 if the partner usually did the chore. We summed these scores and then reversed the direction of the sign for this variable so that a higher score indicated greater actor-reported outsourcing (i.e., the participant managed household chores to a smaller degree;  $M = 1.49$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). Because spouses might have different perceptions of who does the housework, we also used the same variables to calculate partner-reported outsourcing, which reflected whether the partner indicated that the actor usually managed the same household chores. We reversed the direction of the sign for this variable as well (i.e., partner-reported outsourcing;  $M = 1.07$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). The correlation between actor-reported and partner-reported outsourcing was .61.

We used a measure of shared lifestyle as a proxy for emulation. We assumed that partners who made more joint decisions about their free time tended to spend more of that time together and were therefore more likely to adopt one another's traits. At Waves 2 through 5, respondents were asked, "Who makes the decisions about social life and leisure activities in your household?" They responded by choosing from among the following options: 1 = *always me*, 2 = *usually me*, 3 = *shared equally between my partner and myself*, 4 = *usually my partner*, 5 = *always my partner*, 6 = *always or usually other*

person(s) in the house, 7 = shared equally among all household members, and 8 = always or usually someone not living in the house. We recoded these responses as 1 for equal sharing (i.e., a response of “3”) and 0 for all other responses. To reflect the joint perception of shared decision making, we calculated the emulation variable by summing each person’s scores across waves and then averaging within couples.

Finally, relationship satisfaction was assessed with a single item at Waves 2 through 5. Participants indicated their satisfaction with their romantic partners using a scale from 0 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 10 (*completely satisfied*). The annual measurements were averaged ( $\alpha = .86$ ) to create a variable reflecting relationship satisfaction over the course of 4 years ( $M = 8.11$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ).

## Analyses

Using the lme4 package in R (Version 3.1.0; R Development Core Team, 2014), we constructed multilevel models to estimate the actor-partner interdependence model (Kenny, 1996). This model treats the participant (i.e., actor) as the Level 1 unit and the couple as the Level 2 unit. With this approach, the dependence between the members of a couple is appropriately accounted for (Spain, Jackson, & Edmonds, 2012). We used multilevel mixed-effects linear regression to test whether the partner’s personality traits predicted the actor’s future job satisfaction and income, and we used multilevel mixed-effects logistic regression to test whether the partner’s personality

traits predicted the actor’s likelihood of job promotion. We used multilevel bootstrapped mediation models to test outsourcing, emulation, and relationship satisfaction as mediators of the association between the partner’s personality traits and the actor’s occupational success. All degrees of freedom are greater than 1751.

In our analyses, all continuous variables were standardized to ease interpretation of effect sizes. We also calculated odds ratios to facilitate interpretation of the multilevel logit effects. We controlled for a variety of demographic variables in each of our analyses. Because age and relationship duration were highly correlated ( $r = .80$ ), and because relationship duration is a more relevant feature of relationships and partner influence, we controlled for duration (rather than age) in the reported results. However, we obtained similar results when we controlled for age instead of duration. All models except for the mediation models controlled for all Big Five traits. Summary statistics for the primary study variables and sex differences in mean levels of those variables are provided in Table S1 in the Supplemental Material available online (for zero-order correlations, see Table S2 in the Supplemental Material).

## Results

First, we replicated previous research by establishing that participants’ personality traits predicted their future job satisfaction (Table 1), income (Table 2), and job promotion (Table 3). In short, higher levels of self-reported

**Table 1.** Results for the Models Predicting Job Satisfaction

Predictor	Model 1 ( $n = 3,777$ )			Model 2 ( $n = 3,536$ )		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ( <i>b</i> )	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ( <i>b</i> )	<i>t</i>
Actor extraversion	0.06*	0.02	3.63	0.06*	0.02	3.52
Actor agreeableness	0.06*	0.02	3.35	0.07*	0.02	3.34
Actor conscientiousness	0.06*	0.02	3.32	0.07*	0.02	3.77
Actor neuroticism	-0.06*	0.02	-3.40	-0.05*	0.02	-2.81
Actor openness	-0.02	0.02	-1.20	-0.02	0.02	-1.28
Partner extraversion	—	—	—	0.03	0.02	1.89
Partner agreeableness	—	—	—	0.01	0.02	0.44
Partner conscientiousness	—	—	—	0.05*	0.02	2.85
Partner neuroticism	—	—	—	0.00	0.02	-0.13
Partner openness	—	—	—	0.01	0.02	0.48
Sex	0.14*	0.03	4.45	0.16*	0.03	4.59
Income	0.04*	0.02	2.30	0.04*	0.02	2.47
Relationship satisfaction	0.17*	0.02	10.31	0.16*	0.02	9.29
Relationship duration	0.15*	0.02	6.66	0.15*	0.02	6.27
Education	-0.04*	0.02	-2.71	-0.05*	0.02	-3.02
Resident children	-0.10*	0.03	-2.96	-0.10*	0.04	-2.68
Marriages	0.09*	0.04	2.39	0.09*	0.04	2.38

Note: Values in parentheses are standard errors.

\* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

**Table 2.** Results for the Models Predicting Income

Predictor	Model 1 ( <i>n</i> = 3,895)			Model 2 ( <i>n</i> = 3,648)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ( <i>b</i> )	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ( <i>b</i> )	<i>t</i>
Actor extraversion	0.01	0.02	0.81	0.01	0.02	0.86
Actor agreeableness	-0.05*	0.02	-2.94	-0.06*	0.02	-3.08
Actor conscientiousness	0.08*	0.02	5.10	0.08*	0.02	4.86
Actor neuroticism	-0.03	0.02	-1.87	-0.04*	0.02	-1.98
Actor openness	-0.02	0.02	-1.43	-0.02	0.02	-1.40
Partner extraversion	—	—	—	0.03	0.02	1.63
Partner agreeableness	—	—	—	0.00	0.02	0.00
Partner conscientiousness	—	—	—	0.04*	0.02	2.19
Partner neuroticism	—	—	—	0.03	0.02	1.52
Partner openness	—	—	—	-0.01	0.02	-0.49
Sex	-0.57*	0.03	-18.69	-0.56*	0.03	-16.47
Relationship duration	-0.18*	0.02	-8.24	-0.18*	0.02	-7.94
Relationship satisfaction	-0.02	0.02	-1.45	-0.01	0.02	-0.83
Education	0.27*	0.02	17.17	0.27*	0.02	16.38
Resident children	0.16*	0.03	4.84	0.17*	0.03	4.76
Marriages	-0.08*	0.04	-2.05	-0.08*	0.04	-1.96

Note: Values in parentheses are standard errors.

\**p* < .05 (two-tailed).

extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were associated with higher levels of future job satisfaction, whereas higher levels of neuroticism were associated with lower levels of future job satisfaction (Table 1, Model

1). We also found that higher levels of conscientiousness predicted higher income, whereas higher levels of agreeableness predicted lower income (Table 2, Model 1). Finally, higher levels of extraversion and neuroticism

**Table 3.** Results for the Models Predicting Job Promotion

Predictor	Model 1 ( <i>n</i> = 3,916)				Model 2 ( <i>n</i> = 3,665)			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ( <i>b</i> )	<i>z</i>	Odds ratio	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i> ( <i>b</i> )	<i>z</i>	Odds ratio
Actor extraversion	0.17*	0.05	3.36	1.19*	0.18*	0.05	3.32	1.19*
Actor agreeableness	-0.13*	0.06	-2.18	0.88*	-0.11	0.06	-1.80	0.90
Actor conscientiousness	0.10	0.05	1.94	1.11	0.11*	0.05	2.03	1.12*
Actor neuroticism	0.12*	0.06	2.02	1.12*	0.12*	0.06	2.07	1.13*
Actor openness	0.04	0.05	0.69	1.04	0.02	0.05	0.39	1.02
Partner extraversion	—	—	—	—	0.01	0.05	0.10	1.01
Partner agreeableness	—	—	—	—	0.00	0.06	-0.07	1.00
Partner conscientiousness	—	—	—	—	0.11*	0.05	1.99	1.11*
Partner neuroticism	—	—	—	—	0.03	0.06	0.57	1.03
Partner openness	—	—	—	—	-0.01	0.05	-0.20	0.99
Sex	-0.19	0.10	-1.94	0.82	-0.20	0.11	-1.82	0.82
Relationship duration	-0.72*	0.08	-9.27	0.49*	-0.75*	0.08	-9.21	0.47*
Relationship satisfaction	-0.07	0.05	-1.43	0.93	-0.04	0.05	-0.80	0.96
Education	0.29*	0.05	5.54	1.33*	0.31*	0.05	5.77	1.37*
Resident children	0.06	0.11	0.58	1.06	0.07	0.11	0.66	1.08
Marriages	-0.30*	0.12	-2.41	0.74*	-0.31*	0.13	-2.47	0.73*

Note: Values in parentheses are standard errors.

\**p* < .05 (two-tailed).

were associated with a greater likelihood of job promotion, whereas agreeableness negatively predicted job promotion (Table 3, Model 1).

### ***Did partners' personality traits predict actors' future levels of occupational success?***

We found that participants' personality predicted their future occupational success (i.e., actor effects), but to what extent did their spouses' personality influence such outcomes (i.e., partner effects)? We first examined the extent to which partners' personality traits predicted actors' job satisfaction, above and beyond the actor effects. We found that having a more conscientious partner was associated with higher levels of job satisfaction,  $b = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 2.85$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% confidence interval (CI) = [0.02, 0.08] (Table 1, Model 2). The effect of having an extraverted partner neared but did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance,  $b = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 1.89$ ,  $p > .05$ , 95% CI = [.00, .06].

Partner personality also predicted income and likelihood of job promotion across the study period. Having a more conscientious spouse was associated with a higher level of income,  $b = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI = [.00, .07] (Table 2, Model 2) and a greater likelihood of job promotion,  $b = 0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = 1.99$ , odds ratio = 1.11,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI = [.00, .21] (Table 3, Model 2).

### ***Moderators of the influence of partner personality***

We also examined the effects of spouses' personality on occupational success separately for participants in single-income and dual-income households. The results generally did not differ between these groups, which demonstrates that the influence of spouses' personality does not vary with their employment status. Despite the overall similarity, one interesting interaction emerged: The effect of partner conscientiousness on income was stronger for participants in single-income households,  $b = 0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $t = 3.07$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI = [.04, .18], than for participants in dual-income households,  $b = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 1.00$ ,  $p > .05$ , 95% CI = [-.02, .06].

Next, we tested whether the sex of the partner influenced the associations between partner personality and occupational success. No significant interactions between partner traits and sex emerged, which indicates that both men and women benefit from conscientious partners (see Tables S3.1, S3.2, and S3.3 in the Supplemental Material).

Finally, we also considered the possibility that the influence of partner personality depends on the relative

levels of the actor's personality. We conducted 15 exploratory tests of interactions between actor and partner traits, as well as 15 exploratory tests of effects of similarity between spouses (using difference scores to index similarity). No significant findings emerged from these analyses. These results suggest that regardless of one's own levels of personality traits, having a highly conscientious partner is beneficial to one's occupational success.

### ***Did outsourcing, emulation, or relationship satisfaction explain the positive effects of partners' personality on occupational success?***

Before testing the three mediators, we examined whether they predicted job satisfaction, income, and job promotion. Both actor- and partner-reported outsourcing were negatively associated with job satisfaction,  $b = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = -2.33$ , and  $b = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = -3.29$ , respectively,  $ps < .05$ . Both were also positively associated with income,  $b = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 3.94$ , and  $b = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $t = 4.50$ , respectively,  $ps < .05$ . However, outsourcing was not associated with job promotion,  $b = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = -0.57$ ,  $p > .05$ , for actor-reported outsourcing, and  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = -0.06$ ,  $p > .05$ , for partner-reported outsourcing. That is, the more tasks (e.g., housework and errands) one outsources to one's spouse, the less satisfied one will be at work but the more money one will make. Emulation was positively associated with job satisfaction,  $b = 0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 4.43$ ,  $p < .05$ , and promotion,  $b = 0.28$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = 5.45$ ,  $p < .05$ , but was not associated with income,  $b = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 0.41$ ,  $p > .05$ . We also found a positive association between relationship satisfaction and job satisfaction,  $b = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 12.68$ ,  $p < .05$ , but not between relationship satisfaction and income,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = -0.51$ ,  $p > .05$ , or between relationship satisfaction and promotion,  $b = -0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $z = -1.80$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Next, we found that partner personality predicted these three mediators. Specifically, partner conscientiousness was positively associated with outsourcing, as measured by both actor report,  $b = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $t = 1.91$ ,  $p = .06$ , and partner report,  $b = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 3.04$ ,  $p < .05$ . Partner conscientiousness was also positively associated with emulation,  $b = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $t = 2.40$ ,  $p < .05$ , and with relationship satisfaction,  $b = 0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 4.87$ ,  $p < .05$ .

On the basis of the positive associations that emerged, we tested whether partner personality indirectly affected occupational success through these three pathways.<sup>1</sup> Partner conscientiousness had positive indirect effects on income via outsourcing, point estimate = 0.002, 95% CI = [0.000, 0.003], for actor reports and 0.004, 95% CI = [0.002,

**Table 4.** Direct and Indirect Effects of Partner Conscientiousness on Measures of Occupational Success

Mediator included in the model	Occupational outcome	Direct effect		Indirect effect		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Outsourcing (actor report)	Income	0.032	0.010	0.002	0.001	[0.000, 0.003]
Outsourcing (partner report)	Income	0.030	0.009	0.004	0.001	[0.002, 0.006]
Emulation	Job satisfaction	0.112	0.012	0.004	0.001	[0.002, 0.006]
Emulation	Job promotion	0.033	0.025	0.004	0.002	[0.000, 0.008]
Relationship satisfaction	Job satisfaction	0.068	0.010	0.014	0.002	[0.011, 0.017]

Note: All indirect effects are statistically significant, as indicated by the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals (CIs), which are based on 500 replications.

0.006], for partner reports. Higher partner conscientiousness was associated with more outsourcing (as measured by both actor and partner reports), and more outsourcing was associated with higher income (Table 4). That is, having an especially conscientious spouse is beneficial for people's income, in part because it means that tasks can be outsourced to the spouse, which can leave people with more time and energy to spend on their own work—or time simply to recharge. Emulation explained the effect of partner conscientiousness on both job satisfaction, indirect effect = 0.004, 95% CI = [0.002, 0.006], and on job promotion, indirect effect = 0.004, 95% CI = [0.000, 0.008] (Table 4). These results suggest that people with conscientious spouses tend to emulate certain characteristics of their spouses (via their joint lifestyle), and that these characteristics, in turn, are positively associated with satisfaction at work and likelihood of being promoted. Finally, we examined spillover of relationship satisfaction, and again we found that partner conscientiousness had a positive indirect effect on job satisfaction, point estimate = 0.014, 95% CI = [0.011, 0.017] (Table 4). In other words, higher partner conscientiousness is associated with greater satisfaction in the relationship, which spills over into greater satisfaction at work as well.<sup>2</sup>

## Discussion

The saying “Behind every great man there's a great woman” indicates that one's chances of success increase if one has a good partner. Dismantling the antiquated gender imbalance, we found that the reach of one's spouse extends beyond the immediate relationship and into the workplace, for both women and men. But who is that “great” spouse in the background, and what makes him or her so great? Our findings indicate that highly conscientious partners help improve their spouses' occupational success, as measured by job satisfaction, income, and promotion. This benefit does not arise from partners doing their spouses' work; rather, it is due to partners creating conditions that allow their spouses to work more

effectively. These effects emerge when partners manage more household responsibilities, enabling their spouses to preserve time and energy for work (outsourcing), when spouses adopt their partners' pragmatic behaviors (emulation), and when spouses are able to focus on work because fewer relationship problems drain their personal resources (relationship satisfaction). The similarity or disparity in personality within a couple is unrelated to the occupational success of the members of the couple; it is almost always beneficial to have a conscientious spouse.

Previous research showed that married men earned more than single men (the *marriage premium*; Korenman & Neumark, 1991) because husbands could depend on their wives to perform chores at home while they focused on work—ultimately achieving occupational success. Our findings suggest a more contemporary marriage premium: People can benefit at work not simply because they are married, but, at least in part, because they are married to a person with particular personality characteristics. Moreover, both men and women experience these benefits, which suggests that the underlying pathways are similar. Personality played a larger role in predicting income of the spouses with stay-at-home partners (i.e., single-income families) than in predicting income of spouses with working partners (i.e., dual-income families). Again, this finding supports the notion that specialization underlies the marriage premium; workers with unemployed spouses can outsource more because their spouses have more free time. However, people still benefit from having conscientious working spouses in domains beyond income. Despite being less available for outsourcing, such spouses may manage household affairs, albeit perhaps more indirectly (e.g., by managing a nanny or maid or hiring an accountant) than their unemployed counterparts.

From the perspective of someone on the dating market, these results highlight a personality trait that is potentially valuable in mate selection. People tend to desire romantic partners who are high in agreeableness and low in neuroticism (Figueredo, Sefcek, & Jones, 2006).

Although these characteristics are beneficial for the relationship (e.g., Solomon & Jackson, 2014; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), choosing an especially conscientious spouse may be advantageous not only in the home but also at work. Marrying a conscientious partner could at first sound like a recipe for a rigid and lackluster lifestyle; however, in reality, having such a partner is likely to yield personal and professional prosperity.

Taken together, our findings emphasize the importance of one's spouse for one's success both personally and, perhaps more surprisingly, professionally. Indeed, spouses' personality matters for marital functioning (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Solomon & Jackson, 2014), but the current study also highlights a way in which spouses exert their influence less conspicuously—reaching intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes all the way inside the workplace. Although employees' own ability to balance work and home life is positively associated with evaluations of their job performance (Carlson, Witt, Zivnuska, Kacmar, & Grzywacz, 2008), our findings suggest that, via the mechanisms examined in this study, spouses can facilitate employees' ability to maintain this equilibrium. Promoting healthy marital relationships (e.g., through flextime or telecommuting) is not necessarily an explicit mission for most employers, but doing so may be advantageous for their employees' occupational success.

## Strengths, Limitations, and Conclusion

This study offers numerous strengths compared with previous research. This is the first study to use both spouses' reports of each Big Five personality trait to examine the effect of a spouse's personality on a person's occupational success and the pathways linking the two. In addition, given our longitudinal design, the results show that the influence of spouses' personality is not limited to concurrent outcomes, but is also important for future success. Finally, the large, representative sample provided adequate power to test our hypotheses and make substantive inferences about couples with diverse backgrounds and careers.

Nonetheless, several aspects of our study could be improved. First, the use of a longer time frame could provide stronger support for the directionality of partner effects on occupational success. Because self-reports may be flawed and couples may disagree about each other's personality traits, assessing each spouse's reports of the other's personality could yield different findings regarding the effect of spousal personality on work life. In addition, more specific measures of each hypothesized mechanism are needed. For instance, outsourcing could involve not only the tangible tasks included in our operationalization of this variable but also abstract tasks (e.g., remembering appointments, planning activities).

Similarly, for emulation, future studies could measure increases in one partner's industrious behaviors in relation to his or her spouse's behaviors.

Overall, the current findings highlight the importance of one's romantic partner in the workplace. Although Sandberg (2013) encouraged women to "lean in" by taking charge of their careers to get ahead, our study illustrates how spouses' personality can play a key role in facilitating such leaning in for both women and men. Specifically, above and beyond the tendency to put one's best foot forward in the office, obtaining a conscientious spouse to lean *on* may help promote engagement in the workplace and occupational success.

## Author Contributions

B. C. Solomon and J. J. Jackson developed the study concept, research questions, and study design. B. C. Solomon performed the data analysis and interpretation under the supervision of J. J. Jackson. B. C. Solomon and J. J. Jackson cowrote the manuscript.

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## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

## Supplemental Material

Additional supporting information can be found at <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/by/supplemental-data>

## Notes

1. We also conducted similar mediation analyses for actors, because to our knowledge, no study has examined causal pathways between a person's own personality and occupational success. Results are available from the corresponding author.
2. To understand the potential effects of partner relationship satisfaction (rather than actor relationship satisfaction) on occupational success, we first examined the association between partner relationship satisfaction and each measure of occupational success and found the same effects as for actor relationship satisfaction (actor and partner levels of satisfaction were moderately to strongly correlated;  $r = .60$ ). We then thought about including both predictors in the model simultaneously. However, doing so would have led to a different interpretation of the results for the mediator: They would have reflected



effects only when the partners disagreed about relationship satisfaction, given the high levels of correspondence between actors and partners. Indeed, we did not find significant indirect effects of partner relationship satisfaction, yet actor relationship satisfaction still emerged as a significant predictor.

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