

## DO NICE GUYS -- AND GALS -- REALLY FINISH LAST? THE JOINT EFFECTS OF SEX AND AGREEABLENESS ON INCOME

### Key Findings

- The pay gap between agreeable and disagreeable males is significantly larger than the gap between agreeable and disagreeable females. That is, there is a “benefit” of being (moderately) disagreeable as a male, but this “benefit” is minimal for females
- Employees are subject to gender stereotypes in the workplace. Males are expected to exhibit masculine qualities, including disagreeableness. Females are expected to exhibit feminine qualities, including agreeableness. When one gender defies such stereotypes, the employee can be perceived as deviant
- Males who are agreeable are disadvantaged (vs. disagreeable males) for two reasons: first, agreeableness is negatively correlated with income; secondly, they defy the male stereotype of being assertive and disagreeable



## Topic

### Does it Pay More to Create Harmony or to Rock the Boat?

Although developed nations celebrate the progress of females in the workplace, sobering studies show that gender inequality continues even today (Weinberger & Kuhn, 2010). While it is common knowledge that women tend to earn less than their male counterparts, the effect of agreeableness on income is reported on less frequently.

Agreeableness is often defined as the level to which a person displays trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Research has repeatedly found that workers displaying higher levels of agreeableness earn less than their colleagues displaying lower levels of agreeableness (Ng et al., 2005; Mueller & Plug, 2006; Nyhus & Pons, 2005; & Rode et. Al., 2008). In other words, being less agreeable pays—literally. It is important to understand that low levels of agreeableness, as well as high levels of disagreeableness, do not imply hostility; they instead refer to one’s tendency to be assertive upon disagreement.

This study examines the extent to which gender roles and agreeableness interact to determine wage. A main focus of this study was to see how expected gender roles influence the level to which agreeableness affects wage. For example, because women are expected to be high in agreeableness, will displaying disagreeableness in the workplace result in backlash for not conforming to their gender stereotype (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), or will the positive wage effects of being low in agreeableness lead to higher earnings? This article covers four separate studies examining the dynamic between gender and agreeableness within the workplace.

## Study Questions

- Do agreeable workers earn less than disagreeable workers?
- Does the level of agreeableness or disagreeableness a worker shows affect wage differently based on the gender of the worker?
- When the traditional gender roles of agreeableness are met, (i.e. men are less agreeable and women are more agreeable) do wages increase?
- Is the difference in wages between agreeable and disagreeable workers wider for men or for women?

Gender	High Agreeableness	Low Agreeableness*
Women	Conforms†	Does not Conform
Men‡	Does not Conform	Conforms†

*It is expected that men‡, less agreeable workers\*, and those who conform to gender stereotypes† earn more; therefore, men who are low in agreeableness (their expected gender norm) should earn the most.*

## Results

- Even after considering job responsibility and occupational status, agreeableness has a much stronger negative effect on earnings for men than for women. Being agreeable is associated with a lower income, but men who are agreeable incur an additional disadvantage: they are perceived as deviants, since they are not conforming to their assumed gender role of being disagreeable.
- The effect of agreeableness on men's income is more drastic than for women's income. Meaning, the wage differences between agreeable and disagreeable workers is larger for men than for women.
- Men who are less agreeable not only earn more, but increase their salaries at a faster rate. Additionally, regardless of gender, agreeable candidates are less likely to be recommended for advancement
- Disagreeableness exacerbates the gender wage gap; although agreeable men earn more than agreeable women, this gap almost doubles for disagreeable men and women. So, the wage gap between men and women decrease as men display more agreeableness.

## Agreeableness Affects Males More Than Females

This research was conducted through a series of four, smaller studies. The first three studies examined the effects of agreeableness on the wages of men and women. In all three studies disagreeable women earned more than agreeable women (Fig. 1 -3), but only in study 2 was this significant. This suggests that the level of agreeableness displayed by women has less of an effect on income.

Conversely, men who were lower in agreeableness earned significantly more than men higher in agreeableness in all three studies, even after job responsibility and occupational status are taken into account. Overall agreeableness has a greater impact on the wages of men than women.

Although, compared to their female counterparts, men receive a much larger benefit from being disagreeable; they also face far more negative outcomes from being agreeable. The research suggests the negative outcomes associated with agreeableness in men are a result of agreeableness being viewed as counter-stereotypical trait in men, causing backlash.

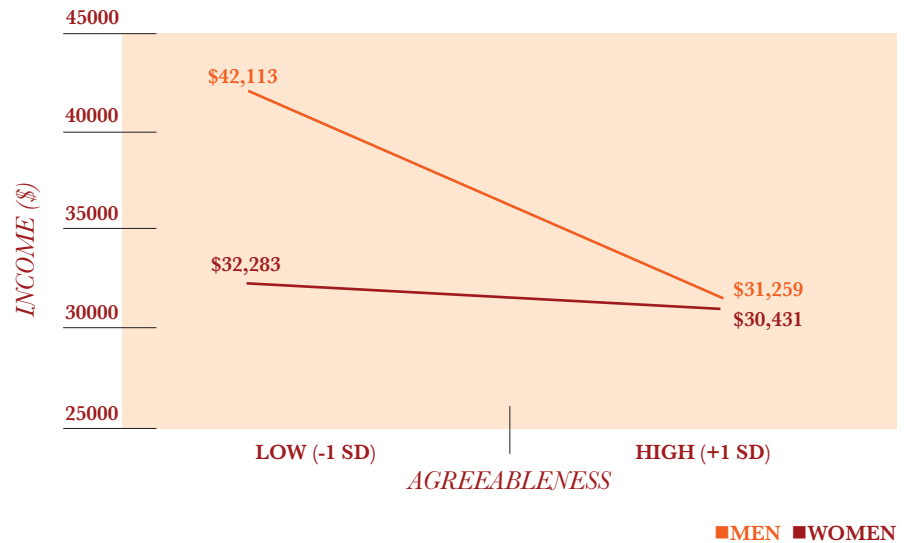
Besides having an effect on wage, agreeableness was also associated with the rate of career advancement. In study 4, agreeable candidates were less likely to be recommended for advancement (Fig. 4). Women were also less likely to be recommended for advancement than men, but this connection was not as significant as the association between agreeableness and advancement.

One reason agreeableness has less of an impact on women's wages may be due to how the agreeableness scores given to women are not translating into their actions. There is evidence that if women fear a possible backlash for acting counter to their gender stereotype, they will change their behavior to be more similar to what is expected of them (Rudman &

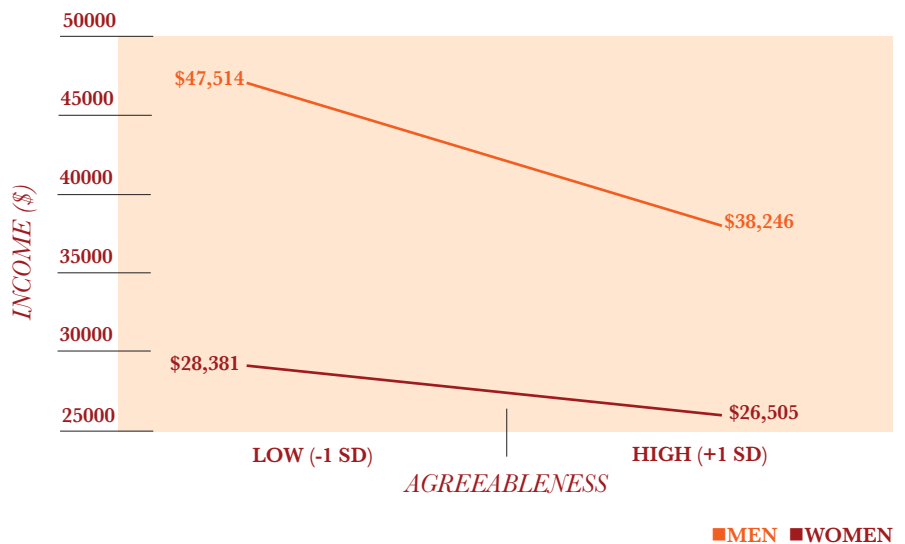
Fairchild, 2004; Moss-Rascusin & Rudman, 2010). In the workplace this would translate into disagreeable women making more of an effort to get along with others. By “toning done” the actions that disagreeable men still display—such as being more demanding in salary negotiations or imparting disapproval on others—these women may be eliminating the actions which bring about the wage outcomes associated with disagreeableness.

This research helps employers re-examine the way they perceive their employees’ performance levels based on agreeableness. Agreeableness is a positive trait, but it is not being rewarded in the workplace. Agreeable individuals are more cooperative and helpful (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) and are better liked by others (Jensen-Campbell, Adams, Perry, Workman, Furdella, & Egan, 2002). Although reexamining the way compensation is allotted based on agreeableness will not fix the still-present gender disparity in wages, it will help focus organizations on what traits they wish to encourage in their employees, regardless of gender.

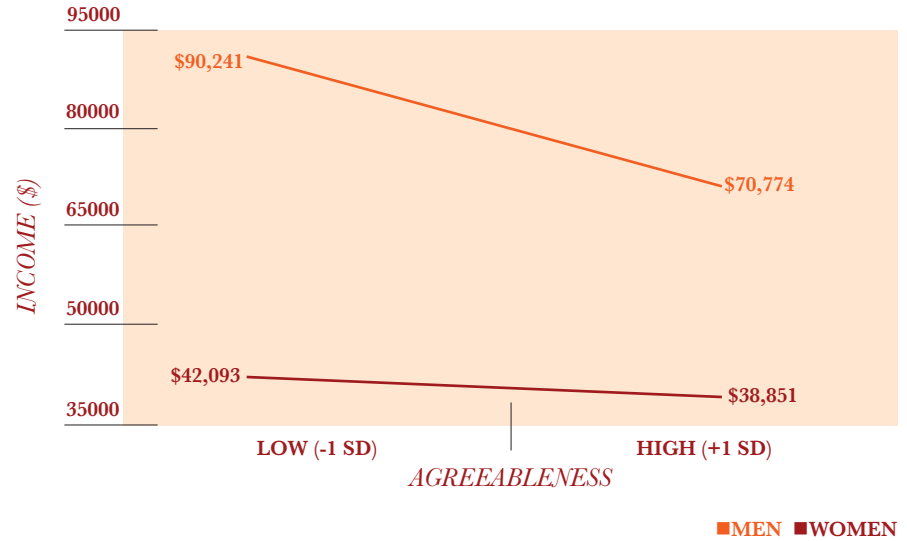
**Figure 1: Study 1 Results**



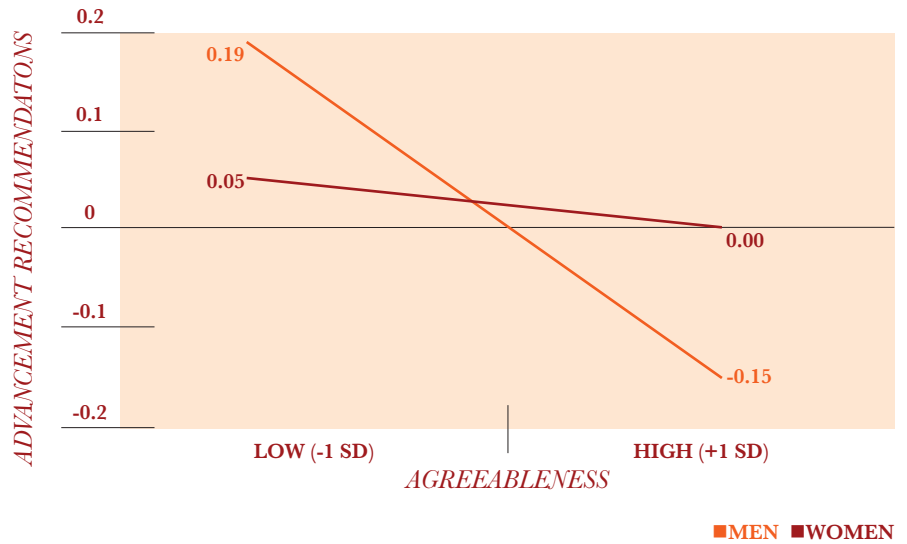
**Figure 2: Study 2 Results**



**Figure 3: Study 3 Results**



**Figure 4: Study 4 Results**



## Data Source

**Study 1:**

- o Individuals enrolled in the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (NLSY97), which lasted from 1997 – 2008. Participants were between 12-16 years old when they enrolled in 1997. Survey participants were required to be working outside of their homes, not enrolled in college full-time, and be working a minimum of 1,000 hours per year to participate at each time point when data was collected. 560 individuals took part in the surveys.

#### Study 2:

- o Individuals who worked full-time outside of the home and were enrolled in the National Survey or Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) were randomly selected to complete a phone interview and two mail surveys. 1,681 individuals took part from 1995 – 1996. Participants were all non-institutionalized, English-speaking adults, age 25-75, living in the United States.

#### Study 3:

- o Individuals who took place in the 1992 – 1993 interview as a part of the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS) who were employed full-time and earned a positive income for the year. The sample included 1,691 individuals. Participants answered questions on how much they valued pay and relationships.

#### Study 4:

- o 460 undergraduates in a business management class at a Southeastern University were asked to read assessments of eight entry-level candidates for a job opening and determine the candidates' potential for growth in the position. The eight candidates varied in the level of agreeableness and were either all male or all female.

## Takeaways

- Low levels of agreeableness at work are associated with better job-related outcomes. Managers should keep this in mind when deciding what types of behaviors their compensation and promotion structures could unwittingly be encouraging in their employees.
- Agreeableness affects the wages of male workers more than female workers. This may be due to agreeableness being counter-stereotypical to gender expectations for males.

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