When She Brings Home the Job Status: Wives’ Job Status, Status Leakage, and Marital Instability

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Abstract. Women are increasingly represented in high status organizational positions. While the advancement of women into high status roles offers them many organizational benefits, the spillover and crossover effects of these high status positions on their marital relationships remain under explored. In this study, we focus on potential costs to the marital relationship when women in high status positions hold higher job status roles than their husbands. First, we examine the spillover effects of wives’ job status relative to their husbands’ on marital instability. We suggest that this relationship is indirect and mediated by negative thoughts and feelings toward their partners’ lower job status (which we refer to as “wives’ status leakage”) and decreased relationship satisfaction. Second, we investigate plausible crossover effects on husbands’ marital instability when wives have higher job status and suggest that husbands’ spousal support can moderate the indirect relationship between wives’ job status and wives’ marital instability. We explored these questions on 209 women in positions of high job status, a sample of 53 matched husband-wife dyads, and 92 of the wives who also completed questionnaires three years later. Full cross-sectional and longitudinal support emerged for the indirect spillover effects of wives’ job status on marital instability of wives, and direct crossover effects on husbands’ marital instability. In addition, the indirect relationship between wives’ job status on marital instability of wives was moderated by instrumental support. Theoretical contributions, practical implications, and future research suggestions are discussed.

Key Words: job status, status leakage, gender, spillover, crossover, marital instability, work and family

Introduction

In 2009, Sandra Bullock starred in the movie The Blind Side, which soon propelled her into the highest female status position in Hollywood: she received a People’s Choice Award, a Golden Globe, a Screen Actors’ Guild Award, and the ultimate honor in the screen actor’s world, an Academy Award for Best Actress. She was subsequently appointed People magazine’s “Person of the Year 2010” and recognized as the highest-earning actress in the year 2010 (Guinness World Records 2012). Yet during that same time period, she was also filing for divorce from Jesse James, her husband of five years.1

Though Bullock’s occupational success and marital dissolution may seem unrelated, Bullock’s life changes may not be uncommon. Academy Award for Best Actress winners are 1.68 times more likely to file for divorce after they win the Academy Award than their nominated counterparts (Stuart et al. 2011). However, this effect emerges only in the Best Actress category; Best Actor winners experience no increases in marital dissolution relative to their nominated counterparts. Labeled the “Oscar curse” (Serjeant 2010), this suggests that women cannot enjoy both high occupational status and successful marriages. Interest in the intersection between women’s job status and spousal choice is growing in importance given changes in the role of women in the workplace. Whereas being female was once a disadvantageous organizational status characteristic (Ridgeway 1991), women now account for approximately 47% of the labor force in Canada and the United States (Catalyst 2016a). Despite gender gaps at the highest status levels in organizations (Catalyst 2016b), the positions women have come to occupy are notable: currently, women hold at least 50% of management and professional positions in the United States and outnumber men in roles such as financial managers, accountants, and medical and health services managers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). These increases in women’s occupational status have impacted economic patterns in marriages. In 1987, for example, wives were the primary household breadwinners (i.e., earning 55% or more of the household income) in only 18% of couples in the United States; by 2013, wives were the primary household breadwinners in 29% of dual-income households (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014).

From a feminist and organizational perspective, the advancement of women in the workplace reflects important progress. Presumably, women who attain

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high status organizational positions should enjoy the same benefits within their marital relationships as do higher status men, yet research suggests they may not. Wives who are the primary breadwinners do not necessarily benefit in terms of the allocation of household roles and responsibilities (e.g., Cooke 2006), and their husbands may experience negative outcomes due to threats to masculinity (e.g., Pierce et al. 2013). However, few studies have focused on the possible spillover and crossover effects on marital instability of both partners when wives enjoy both high job status and higher job status than their husbands, despite the fact that these outcomes may help explain any marital instability characteristic of the Oscar curse.

Mundy (2012) highlights what these relationships might be through numerous anecdotes of women being embarrassed, ashamed, frustrated with, or lacking respect for their male partners when they occupy lower job status roles than themselves. As explained by one woman in a senior corporate position who was the higher job status partner and subsequently divorced her husband, “I found myself respecting him less as a man… I learned that despite all the feminist drive that I’d had through the years, I thought a man should also… carry his weight with the couple” (Mundy 2012, p. 136).

Despite this, there is little empirical management research examining potential mechanisms that explain any marital costs for wives who achieve high job status positions. This is a critical omission: Given the dearth of women in senior organizational status positions (Catalyst 2016b), the possibility that achieving high status might result in marital instability has serious organizational and societal implications. First, research needs to go beyond interrole conflict to understand how aspects of work and family can impact women’s upward career mobility (Allen 2012). Understanding the impact of job status on marital quality is particularly important given that marital instability is associated with lower work engagement (Rogers and May 2003), work role impairment (Whisman and Uebelacker 2006), and lower levels of well-being (Sandberg et al. 2013). Second, consistent with gender role theory, when women prefer partners who are more successful than themselves (i.e., in intelligence), they are more likely to underperform in areas that are construed as masculine (i.e., mathematics), particularly when romantic goals are activated (Park et al. 2016), and these preferences can prohibit women from achieving their full potential (Tinsley et al. 2015). Third, when husbands’ and wives’ professional status conflict with traditional gender norms, outsiders dislike wives who hold higher status jobs, give them less sympathy, and perceive them as “ultramacho” (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005, Hettinger et al. 2014), and these gendered ideological perceptions may carry over into the workplace (Desai et al. 2014). Given that organizations and society are calling for women to “lean in” (Sandberg 2013) and the organizational benefits of having more women in senior leadership roles have been established (Hoobler et al. 2016), a comprehensive understanding of the full range of positive and negative consequences that may ensue for women’s achievement of high status positions is needed.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the Oscar curse generalizes to women in high status careers outside of Hollywood, and to understand why and under what conditions it might emerge. We suggest that the Oscar curse can be explained by spillover and crossover relationships between wives’ job status and marital instability of both partners. Spillover refers to the within-person stress experienced in one domain of life that spills over to stress in another domain (Westman 2001), whereas crossover reflects the interpersonal process when stress experienced by one person affects the strain in another person (Westman et al. 2004). We suggest that wives’ job status relative to their husbands’ will have both spillover and crossover consequences on both partners’ marital quality. Our first goal is to examine the spillover effects of wives’ job status on their own marital instability. We suggest that being married to husbands with lower status than themselves acts as a form of status loss for high job status wives, in turn predicting marital instability, and that this process occurs through the emotional and psychological reactions that these status differences trigger. We introduce the construct of “wives’ status leakage,” which reflects the negative thoughts and feelings toward spouses from wives with higher job status than their lower status husbands such that they perceive their husbands’ lower status as detracting from their own. We posit that wives’ status leakage will lead to marital dissatisfaction and higher marital instability. We investigate this in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses.

Our second goal is to understand and explore the crossover effects of wives’ job status onto husbands’ marital instability. We suggest that wives’ job status has direct and indirect crossover effects on their spouses’ marital quality via wives’ status leakage, and that both effects will result in increased rates of marital instability for husbands. We also examine whether husbands’ social support moderates the spillover effects of wives’ status leakage on their own relationship satisfaction, thereby buffering the indirect effects of wives’ job status on marital instability.

**Spillover Processes**

**Wives’ Job Status Predicts Marital Instability**

Traditionally, the marital economic theory of specialization suggested that marriages are most stable and
enduring when one spouse is engaged in paid market work and the other in domestic responsibilities. Inherent in this assumption was the traditional gender exchange relationship, with husbands assuming the role of the economic breadwinner and wives expected to contribute to household production (Becker 1976). While this theory was rooted in anachronistic gender ideologies (Wilcox and Nock 2006), empirical evidence favors the theory of specialization for marital stability. For example, wives' well-being is compromised when they earn the same or more than their husbands (e.g., Pierce et al. 2013), and their marital dissatisfaction (Hornung and McCullough 1981) aggression (Atkinson et al. 2005) and risk for divorce (e.g., Bertrand et al. 2015) increase. Even where egalitarian views are normative (e.g., in the Scandinavian countries), wives who earn more than their husbands are more likely to file for divorce (Liu and Vikat 2007).

While relative earnings may be important for determining marital stability, how wives perceive their status relative to their husbands may be more important in understanding any effects on marital instability. As status is a socially determined ordering based on salient markers that define people's social worth relative to others (Washington and Zajac 2005), having a higher salary might not be sufficient to determine relative job status differences. For example, people may receive higher salaries due to overtime pay or commissions, but still not enjoy the same status as, for example, lower paid CEOs of not-for-profit organizations. Thus, it might be perceptions of subjective status relative to others that affects marital instability. Subjective status reflects people's awareness of their own position in a referent status hierarchy (Jackman and Jackman 1973) and exerts stronger effects on outcomes such as health (Singh-Manoux et al. 2003), mortality (Singh-Manoux et al. 2006), and subjective well-being (Anderson et al. 2012) than do objective status differences determined by monetary differences. In addition, it is individuals' self-definition of status that shapes how they feel and behave, regardless of objective evaluations (Neeley 2013). We predict that perceiving that their subjective status is higher than their husbands' will negatively influence high status wives' perceptions of and feelings about their spouses' lower status position, which in turn will affect their overall marital quality.

Societal norms and social role theory suggest that in heterosexual marriages, husbands should hold higher job status relative to their wives (Eagly et al. 2009, Eastwick et al. 2006). In marriages where the reverse occurs, established marital social norms are violated and women are disparagingly referred to as having “married down” (Schwartz 2013). In contrast, men who marry someone of lower status (e.g., educational, occupational, income) are not similarly disparaged. Wives who hold higher job status violate powerful norms and stereotypes that value males for their provider roles and women for their family devotion (Eagly et al. 2000). Wives who counter these stereotypes are more likely to be seen as status incongruent (Rudman et al. 2012), socially deficient, and unlikeable (Rudman and Phelan 2008), and experience gendered backlash (Rudman 1998). The consequences of these norm violations can be particularly painful for both individuals involved (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005, Okimoto and Hellman 2012), with the couple stigmatized (Dunn et al. 2013) and higher status wives straining to establish their gender identity (Meisenbach 2010).

These norms violations also reflect an inconsistency regarding the value of work and home—wives may enjoy high job status, but be seen as violating traditional marital status norms (Hettinger et al. 2014). Such inconsistencies can result in strain across both domains when those involved seek consistency between these roles (Edwards and Rothbard 2000), and may be particularly relevant when the inconsistency reflects status differences, given the fundamental motivating power of status (Anderson et al. 2015). This strain across domains would be heightened the more wives feel a subjective loss of status when their status is higher than their husbands, such that their self-defined status position has been diminished (Neeley 2013) via their marital affiliation. Perceiving that sense of loss would be sufficient to affect their emotions and responses, and we suggest that these emotions and responses will mediate the effects of wives' perceptions of their job status relative to their husbands on marital instability.

Wives' Status Leakage
One way that people strive to secure or maintain status is through social relationships in which lower status individuals increase their status by associating with higher status others. Status can be transferred, built, and maintained such that individuals, groups, or organizations accumulate ties to higher status others (Blau 1989). As Podolny (2005, p. 7) writes, “one of the most distinctive features of status is that it 'leaks' whereby an actor's status is affected by the status of those with whom the actor associates,” and that high status actors can increase the status of others via affiliation known as “status leakage” (p. 13), a process that benefits lower status individuals own status and economic and organizational outcomes (e.g., Gulati and Higgins 2003, Hsu 2004).

The benefits of affiliation with high status others are well documented; the corollary is that high status actors with links to lower status others may compromise their higher status (Faulkner 1983). In associating with lower status others, higher status individuals may view these affiliations as negative and damaging to their own status (Podolny 2005). Jensen (2006) describes the feelings and behaviors associated with
these unbalanced relationships as “status anxiety,” whereby actors feel being devalued if others question the quality of their partners, which might be sufficient for those with high status to disassociate themselves from their lower status affiliates. Losing status can hurt future performance (Marr and Thau 2014) and drive behavioral, emotional, and physiological responses (Neeley 2013, Scheepers et al. 2009). As a result, individuals expend significant resources to avoid losing status (Pettit et al. 2010).

This process may be particularly fraught when it occurs between spouses, specifically for women who enjoy higher organizational and job status than their husbands. Wives may feel embarrassed by or resentful of their spouses’ lower job status, believe that their own hard-earned status is threatened or diminished by their husbands’ lower job status, and wish that their partners’ status positions supported rather than detracted from their own. Drawing from status leakage (Podolny 2005), status loss (Neeley 2013), and the affective nature of losing status, we suggest that these thoughts and feelings constitute “wives’ status leakage,” the thoughts and feelings that emerge when high job status wives holding higher job status than their husbands respond negatively to their husbands’ lower job status.

While many constructs are associated with balancing work and family responsibilities, “wives’ status leakage” is unique, going beyond the scope of a work, family, or the work–family conflict construct. Wives’ status leakage reflects a form of status loss perceived by wives who hold higher job status in relation to their husbands. Work–family conflict emphasizes a competition between work and family in terms of time, physical energy, and psychological resources (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985), but ignores the impact of partners’ job status relative to the other, and its resulting thoughts and feelings. Constructs such as affect in marriage (Fincham and Linfield 1997), contempt in marriage (Gottman et al. 1998), and respect in marriage (Hendrick and Hendrick 2006) reflect possible emotional outcomes that spouses feel within a marriage as a result of wives’ status leakage. Last, perfectionism in intimate relationships looks at the discrepancies in expectations that spouses have for each other (Shea et al. 2006). While this construct accounts for partners not achieving their full potential, wives’ status leakage explains how nontraditional status differences in marriages might indirectly spill over to marital quality and marital instability.

Relationship Satisfaction
One of the most widespread benefits of marriage is relationship satisfaction (e.g., Proulx et al. 2007), and wives’ status leakage might be implicated in marital dissatisfaction. Feeling contemptuous toward a lower status spouse, expressed through disapproval and behaviors that communicate relative superiority over another (Meunier and Baker 2012), erode respect and equality in a relationship (Johnson 2002) and lead to relationship dissatisfaction. Similarly, lower levels of fairness in the relationship decrease relationship quality (Mackey et al. 2000), and low-intensity negative affect from wives toward their husbands predicts relationship dissatisfaction (Fincham and Beach 1999). In contrast, feelings of mutual admiration (Gottman 2007), appreciation (Sharlin 1996), and reciprocal positivity (Fincham and Beach 1999) predict marital satisfaction. Given that wives’ status leakage implicitly expresses disapproval with a partner’s job and is tainted with feelings of superiority and inequality, resentment, and embarrassment, we suggest that wives’ status leakage will be associated with lower relationship satisfaction and greater marital instability.

Marital Instability
Scholars have long used the social exchange theory of marriage to understand why and when relationships form, continue, and become unstable (Levinger 1976, Previti and Amato 2003). The social exchange theory of marriage emphasizes the role of three components: attractions, barriers, and alternatives. Attraction to the relationship is based on the proportion of rewards received minus the costs involved in the relationship. When the costs outweigh the rewards, relationship dissatisfaction results, and people are more likely to think about ending the relationship (Levinger 1976). However, whether they do so or not depends on the barriers to leaving (e.g., financial dependence, feelings of moral/religious obligation), and the availability of attractive alternatives (e.g., valuing another relationship or independence versus staying in the relationship). While the three components of the social exchange theory predict marital instability, the attractiveness of the relationship remains the primary predictor of marital instability (Gottman 2014, Previti and Amato 2003), and this may be particularly true for women in high status positions.

In relationships where wives enjoy high job status roles, they are less vulnerable to one primary barrier of marital dissolution, namely, financial dependence (Sayer et al. 2011). Similarly, they would likely have attractive alternatives, given that their increased levels of social capital, admiration, and respect as a result of their positions (Magee and Galinsky 2008) provide opportunities to meet others who would be considered their equal (South et al. 2001), or they might see a life of independence as equally gratifying (Raymo 2003, Wu and Schimmelpfennig 2005). Taken together we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Wives’ job status relative to husbands’ will have a positive and indirect relationship with marital instability, transmitted through wives’ status leakage and relationship satisfaction.
Crossover Processes

While we position the Oscar curse as a within-person (wives) phenomenon and frame our discussion in terms of spillover within roles, marriages are, of course, a dyadic experience, and how husbands experience and respond to their wives' job status is equally important. While some men might feel their masculinity is threatened when their wives' job status exceeds their own (e.g., Pierce et al. 2013), others could be proud of their wives' higher career success, perceiving it within the context of a partnership rather than a status competition (Reid 2012). Some studies suggest that men in dual-income relationships are moving toward more egalitarian perspectives (Zuo and Tang 2000), although men still expect to be the primary breadwinner in their relationships (Tinsley et al. 2015), complicating any effects of the crossover between wives' job status and husbands' marital experiences. To understand this crossover process, we introduce two hypotheses that suggest wives' job status has indirect and negative effects on husbands' marital quality and two hypotheses specifying how husbands' supportive behaviors mitigate any negative effects of wives' higher job status on wives' marital quality.

Crossover from Wives' Higher Job Status to Husbands' Marital Instability

Psychological strain experienced by one marital partner crosses over to affect the other (Westman et al. 2004) in several ways: a direct crossover as a result of emotional contagion, an indirect crossover in which strain is a result of interactions between partners, and common stressors that lead to mutual strain (Westman and Vinokur 1998, Westman et al. 2004). We suggest that when wives are in high status jobs and have higher job status than their husbands, there will be both direct and indirect crossover effects onto husbands' marital quality.

Crossover Processes

We also suggest that indirect crossover effects explain why wives' perceptions of higher job status impact husbands' marital quality, and that crossover occurs through social undermining (Westman 2001), for example, behaviors toward a target person that display negative affect and disrespect in terms of their attributes, actions, and efforts (Vinokur and van Ryn 1993). Crossover studies have demonstrated that experiencing burnout, stress, financial hardship, or distress can result in social undermining of a spouse and exert crossover effects onto family dynamics (e.g., Repetti et al. 2009). We suggest that higher status wives experiencing wives' status leakage are likely to engage in social undermining toward their husbands, communicating their displeasure with husbands' lower status position, and displaying negative affective about their husbands' job status position. In turn, this will negatively impact husbands’ relationship satisfaction, as being the target of negative affect and demonstrations of inferiority will negatively impact how husbands feel about the relationship (Fincham and Beach 1999, Meunier and Baker 2012). Thus, we predict the following:

**Hypothesis 3.** Wives' job status relative to husbands' will have a positive and indirect effect on husbands' marital instability via an indirect crossover relationship from wives' status leakage onto husbands' relationship satisfaction.

Husbands' Moderating Role—Spousal Support

Consistent with the dyadic nature of the crossover effect, husbands' supportive behaviors (Vilimäki et al. 2009) might influence the effects of wives' status leakage on wives' marital functioning. Instrumental and emotional social support from one's spouse may be most important. Instrumental support reflects the tangible help aimed at facilitating daily functioning (King et al. 1995), and receiving such support enables spouses to devote more time and energy to work demands (Wayne et al. 2006). Emotional support reflects the degree to which spouses provide encouragement, understanding, attention, and positive regard (King et al. 1995), and receiving emotional support predicts psychological well-being (Aycan and Eskin 2005), family—work enrichment (Grzywacz and Marks 2000), and diminished employee stress (Noor 2002). Importantly, it is the amount of perceived support, rather than actual support received, that is responsible for positive outcomes (Helgeson 1993). Thus, we suggest that the relationship between wives' relative job status and their marital instability will be moderated by wives' perceptions of their husbands' provision of instrumental and emotional support.

Instrumental Support. We propose that perceived instrumental support from husbands will moderate any indirect effects of wives' job status on marital instability, because husbands who provide instrumental
assistance allow wives to achieve and maintain higher job status positions (Valimäki et al. 2009). Women in high status roles may especially value instrumental support because even when their careers are primary, they continue to be tasked with the majority of domestic duties (Bertrand et al. 2015). In marriages where this is not the case, husbands’ instrumental support signals to wives that their careers are valued and that they are supported in pursuing their goals, thus mitigating the effects of wives’ status leakage on relationship satisfaction, thereby moderating the indirect effects of wives’ job status on marital instability.

**Hypothesis 4A.** The indirect effect of wives’ job status relative to husbands’ on marital instability will be moderated by instrumental support.

**Emotional Support.** A similar moderating effect will emerge for husbands’ emotional support, which conveys to wives that their needs are understood and they are cared for (King et al. 1995). Given the equity and reciprocity that characterize high quality marital relationships (DeMaris 2010), feeling that one’s lower-status spouse is emotionally supportive should mitigate negative outcomes on relationship quality associated with wives’ status leakage, moderating the indirect effect of wives’ job status on marital instability. This is important, because when women enact gender-inconsistent behaviors, they typically receive lower levels of spousal emotional support (Livingston 2014), potentially exacerbating the negative effects of wives’ higher job status and marital instability.

**Hypothesis 4B.** The indirect effect of wives’ job status relative to husbands’ on marital instability will be moderated by emotional support.

All hypothesized relationships are presented in Figure 1.

**Methods**

**Recruitment and Participants**

Participants were recruited from two different sources. The first source was a Canadian women’s executive leadership network dedicated to the advancement of women in leadership with over 16,000 female members. The network briefly described the study in two monthly newsletters, asking for voluntary participation from women currently in heterosexual marital or common-law relationships, resulting in 107 participants. We also recruited from an executive education program of a Canadian university’s business school. Emails were sent to approximately 485 females who had attended an executive program within the last 4 years. This effort yielded 102 total participants, for a total sample of 209 participants.

To examine crossover effects, we asked participants to provide us with their husbands’ email addresses to invite their voluntary participation in a separate survey, and 95 did so. Sixty husbands responded (53 fully completed responses), providing a sample of 53 husband–wife dyads.

Women in this total sample were 43.36 (SD = 8.23) years old, and worked at least 30 hours per week (Mean = 46.53 hours, SD = 13.69). Considering the highest level of education achieved, 51% of the women surveyed had a university degree, 28% a masters degree, and 7% of women held a doctoral degree; the remaining 14% had some university education, a college degree, or a high school diploma. More than 80% of these women earned over CDN 95,000 a year.

**Figure 1. Spillover and Crossover Model Linking Wives’ Job Status with Marital Instability**
(Mean income = CDN 157,487, SD = CDN 69,682). Husbands who responded to this survey were older (46 years of age), only 31% held a university degree, and 44% earned less than CDN 95,000 a year (Mean income = CDN 129,037, SD = CDN 83,491).

Measures

Wives' Job Status. We asked wives to compare their current job status level relative to that of their husbands on a five-point scale, with 1, indicating "my job status is much lower than my spouse's," to 5, indicating "my job status is much higher than my spouse's" (Mean = 3.93, SD = 1.09).

Wives' Status Leakage. A measure of wives' status leakage was developed for this study and was developed in three separate stages. First, items were created based on the theoretical nature of the construct as reflecting feelings of embarrassment, resentment, shame, or lack of respect that women may have if they believe that their husbands' job status detracts from their own. Second, these items were reviewed by four volunteer graduate students to ensure they reflected the meaning of the construct. Finally, the first author met with two women in senior executive roles whose job status was substantially higher than their husbands' to review the meaning of the construct and the items developed. A total of 17 items resulted (see Table 1).

We evaluated the factor structure of the items with 180 female participants recruited from ClearVoice. Participants were prescreened to ensure they were all North American women, employed full time, and in a heterosexual marital relationship for at least one year. Participants (Mean age = 45.60 years, SD = 14.33 years; Mean length of marriage = 18 years, SD = 11.9) rated each item in the wives' status leakage scale on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores reflected greater levels of wives' status leakage.

An exploratory factor analysis of the 17 items using maximum likelihood varimax rotation revealed a 3-factor structure, capturing 64.77% of the variance. After reviewing the three factors, we concluded that the items that loaded most heavily on the second factor best reflected the construct (see Table 1). We refined the scale to reflect those seven items and added an additional three items to enhance the comprehensiveness of the scale.

To confirm that the revised, 10 item wives' status leakage scale was reflected by a single factor, we recruited a second sample of participants (N = 199) through a Qualtrics panel. Participants were prescreened on the basis of the same criteria as above. Participants (Mean age = 42.3 years, SD = 14.54; Mean length of marriage = 14.6 years, SD = 14.34) responded to the 10-item measure of wives' status leakage.

Using Amos 20 and allowing for correlated errors, we computed a confirmatory factor analysis in which all 10 items were predicted to load on the latent variable of wives' status leakage. The proposed model provided a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(35, N = 201) = 39.49$, nonsignificant $p$ value; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.97; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05). In examining the loadings of the factor structure, one item "I would be happier if my children chose a career path similar to mine rather than that of my spouse" loaded at a much lower level (0.37) than the other items (see item loadings in Table 2). We recomputed the confirmatory factor analysis excluding this one item; the remaining nine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel proud of my husband's job</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleagues respect the type of work my husband does</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I admire my husband's work</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my close friends respect my husband's career</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband's job has a great deal of personal meaning to me</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud when my husband accompanies me to work events</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish my husband had picked a job that gets more respect</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my husband should find a more respectable job</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband's work makes me look bad</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am embarrassed by my husband's job</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband's job impedes my future career success</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband is not proud of his job status</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be happier if my children chose a career path similar to mine</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>rather than that of my spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My husband's job brings me status</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband's job makes me look good at work</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others are impressed with my husband's career choice</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider my husband and I as a &quot;power couple&quot;</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.47</td>
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Table 2. Item Loadings—Single-Factor Scale (N = 199)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
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<tr>
<td>I am embarrassed by my spouse's job</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's job impedes my future career success</td>
<td>0.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>I wish my spouse had picked a job that gets more respect</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am embarrassed when my spouse accompanies me to work events</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my spouse should find a more respectable job</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's job takes away from my own job status</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse is not proud of his job status</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's work makes me look bad</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's job does not bring me status</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be happier if my children chose a career path similar to mine rather than that of my spouse</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Item omitted from final scale.

items produced a better fit to the data ($\chi^2(17, N = 201) = 24.91$, nonsignificant $p$ value; $\text{CFI} = 0.99$; $\text{NFI} = 0.98$; $\text{RMSEA} = 0.04$).

Having established the unidimensional nature of the nine items, we tested the discriminant validity of the scale. We expected that wives' status leakage would be negatively correlated with husbands' job status and positively correlated with gender ideology, and, with respect to divergent validity, wives' status leakage would not be associated with their general health. To assess discriminant validity, participants answered a single item regarding their husband's job status using the subjective social status ladder, with participants ranking their husband's job status relative to others on a nine-rung scale, with those at the top having the highest status (Singh-Manoux et al. 2003). Participants also completed the 6-item gender ideology scale (European Values Study Foundation and World Values Surveys Association 2006; e.g., “If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems”; $1 = \text{strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree}$) and completed the 12-item general health questionnaire (Banks et al. 1980; e.g., “Have you recently been able to face up to your problems?”; $1 = \text{much worse than usual to 5 = better than usual}$). As predicted, wives' status leakage was negatively and significantly correlated with husband's job status ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$), positively correlated with gender ideology ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$), and not correlated with general health ($r = 0.02$, n.s.).

To fully establish the construct validity of the wives' status leakage measure, we tested its relationship with measures in the work-family, marital, and affective domains. We collected data on a separate sample of 208 married women who identified as having higher job status than their husbands. Participants were recruited through a Qualtrics panel and asked to respond to our 9-item measure of wives' status leakage, a six-item measure of work family conflict (Matthews et al. 2010; e.g., “Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work”;

1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), a six-item measure on affect in marriage (Fincham and Linfield 1997; e.g., “Considering only the positive qualities of your spouse, and ignoring the negative ones, evaluate how positive these qualities are”; $0 = \text{not at all to 10 = extremely}$), a four-item measure of contempt in marriage (Busby et al. 2001; e.g., “I have no respect for my partner when we are discussing an issue”; $1 = \text{never to 5 = very often}$), a six-item measure of respect in close relationships (Hendrick and Hendrick 2006; e.g., “I respect my partner”; $1 = \text{strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree}$), a 16-item measure of discrepancy in perceptions of perfectionism in relationships (Shea et al. 2006; e.g., “I am rarely satisfied with my partner's accomplishments”; $1 = \text{strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree}$), and a 20-item measure of affect (Watson et al. 1998; “Right now, I feel upset”; $1 = \text{very slightly or not at all to 5 = extremely}$). As predicted, wives' status leakage correlated significantly with all of the specified variables, with correlations ranging between $r = 0.17$ and $r = 0.46$ (all $p < 0.05$), demonstrating that it is a related but empirically distinct construct. (See Table 3 in the online appendix for descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations for all construct validity variables.)

Relationship Satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was assessed with the 16-item couples' satisfaction index (Funk and Rogge 2007). The items (e.g., “How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?”; $1 = \text{not at all, 6 = completely}$) ask participants about different aspects of their relationship. Scores are summed, and higher scores denote relationship satisfaction.

Marital Instability. Marital instability was measured using the Booth et al. (1983) 21-item marital instability scale. Items (e.g., “I have thought about living apart from my spouse”) are measured on a four-point scale: 1 = never, 2 = ever, 3 = within the last three years, 4 = now. Items are summed, and higher scores signal marital instability.

Spousal Support. Instrumental (e.g., “My spouse burdens me with things that he should be able to handle on his own”; reverse coded) and emotional (e.g., “When I have a tough day at work, my spouse tries to cheer me up”) support were measured with the relevant seven-item subscales from the King et al. (1995) spousal support scale ($1 = \text{strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree}$).

Control Variables. We included a number of statistical controls to enhance the validity of any findings. First, wives' reported their individual salaries and the total household income to control for objective financial differences between spouses and to maintain the primary focus on wives' subjective appraisals of their status differences. From this, we created an index of wives'
salaries relative to the household salaries, where 1 = individual earnings of less than 20% of total household salary, 2 = individual earnings between 21% and 40% of total household salary, 3 = individual earnings between 41% and 60% of total household salary, 4 = individual earnings between 61% and 80% of total household salary, and 5 = individual earnings greater than 81% of total household salary (Mean = 3.78, SD = 0.95). Second, given that age and number of children are negatively correlated with marital instability (Booth et al. 1986), we asked participants to report their age in number of years and whether they had children. Third, as threats to gender identity might compromise marital stability (Bertrand et al. 2015, Tichenor 1999), we included a seven-item measure of gender ideology (Baber and Tucker 2006; e.g., “For many important jobs, it is better to choose men instead of women”; 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Finally, to ensure that our study measured participants’ current relative status levels and not the change in relative status levels over the course of their relationship, we asked participants to report on their levels of job status when they first met their partner, where 1 = “My job status was significantly lower than that of my spouse” and 5 = “My job status was significantly higher than that of my spouse.”

Husbands’ Survey. Husbands completed relationship satisfaction and marital instability questionnaires and provided information on their gender ideology, age, and initial status impressions using the same measures as their wives.

Test of Sample Differences
We first tested whether there were differences between women recruited from the women’s executive network and women recruited from the executive education sample. Using Bonferroni post hoc analyses to correct for familywise error, no significant differences existed between the two samples. We also tested for differences between the responses of wives whose husbands responded to the survey and those of wives whose husbands did not respond. Again using the Bonferroni correction factor, only two significant differences emerged between the two samples: Those whose husbands responded scored higher on relationship satisfaction and marital instability.

Measurement Model
We assessed the underlying structure of the measures used in our study on a separate sample through a confirmatory factor analysis of 208 female participants, prescreened to ensure they were in heterosexual married or common-law relationships and identified as having higher job status than their husbands (recruited through Qualtrics). We contrasted our five-factor model reflecting the key latent vari-
ables in our hypothesized relationships (wives’ status leakage, relationship satisfaction, marital instability, and instrumental and emotional support) with a single-factor unidimensional model and a three-factor model reflecting wives’ status leakage, a spousal support factor (i.e., all items from instrumental and emotional support), and a marital quality factor (i.e., all items from relationship satisfaction and marital instability). Analyses were estimated with maximum likelihood estimation as implemented in MPlus version 7. The five-factor model provided the best fit to the data ($\chi^2(1,700, N = 208) = 4246.99, p < 0.01, CFI = 0.77, NFI = 0.76, RMSEA = 0.08$) relative to the unidimensional ($\chi^2(1,710, N = 208) = 6,583.40, p < 0.01, CFI = 0.53, NFI = 0.51, RMSEA = 0.12$) and three-factor model ($\chi^2(1,707, N = 208) = 5,588.45, p < 0.01, CFI = 0.64, NFI = 0.63, RMSEA = 0.10$) and meets acceptable thresholds (i.e., RMSEA between 0.08 and 1.0; MacCallum et al. 1996).

Results
All analyses were conducted using Hayes’ (2013, 2015) PROCESS macros. To avoid problems associated with nonnormal distributions, we used 5,000 bootstrapping, a resampling method used to produce precise confidence intervals (CIs; Hayes 2013). In tests of conditional process models, results are significant if the $95\%$ bias-corrected confidence intervals for the effects do not include zero. All coefficients are reported in unstandardized form (Hayes 2013).

Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and reliabilities for all variables appear in Table 4 (wives’ sample) and Table 5 (paired husband–wife data) in the online appendix.

Hypothesis 1 suggests an indirect effects model, whereby the relationship between wives’ job status and marital instability is mediated by wives’ status leakage and relationship satisfaction. We computed serial mediation to test for indirect effects. Wives’ job status was positively related to wives’ status leakage ($b = 0.16, CI[0.06, 0.27]$); wives’ status leakage was significantly and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ($b = -9.79, CI[-13.20, -6.39]$); and wives’ relationship satisfaction predicted marital instability ($b = -0.40, CI[-0.47, -0.33]$). The indirect effect was significant (conditional indirect effect: $b = 0.65, CI[0.24, 1.38]$), supporting Hypothesis 1. See Table 6 for complete results in the online appendix.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 suggest crossover effects where wives’ job status has indirect effects on husbands’ marital instability. Given the sample size of 53 couples in this step, we only included control variables that were significantly correlated with husbands’ marital instability (Becker et al. 2016); in addition, relevant variables were included to control for partner effects. Hypothesis 2 was supported: the crossover
effect of wives' job status on husbands' marital instability via wives' status leakage, wives' relationship satisfaction and husbands' relationship satisfaction was significant (conditional indirect effect: $b = 0.13$, CI$[0.02, 0.45]$). Hypothesis 3 was not supported: the indirect crossover effect of wives' job status on husbands' marital instability via wives' status leakage, and husbands' relationship satisfaction was nonsignificant (conditional indirect effect: $b = -0.08$, CI$[-0.39, 0.07]$). Full results for both hypotheses are found in Table 7 in the online appendix.

Hypotheses 4A and 4B posit that emotional support and instrumental support moderate the indirect effect of wives' job status on marital instability, by moderating the path between wives' status leakage and relationship satisfaction. We again computed tests of serial mediation and included two interaction terms, namely, wives' status leakage $\times$ instrumental support, and wives' status leakage $\times$ emotional support. Supporting Hypothesis 4A, instrumental support moderated the relationship between wives' status leakage and relationship satisfaction ($b = 3.26$, CI$[0.30, 6.21]$). When instrumental support was high (Mean $+ 1$ SD = 4.72), the indirect effect of wives' job status on marital instability was not significant. When instrumental support was at the mean (Mean = 3.75) or low (Mean $- 1$ SD = 2.79), the indirect effects of wives' job status on marital instability remained significant, supporting Hypothesis 4A. In contrast, no support was found for Hypothesis 4B, as emotional support did not moderate the relationship between wives' status leakage and relationship satisfaction ($b = 0.59$, CI$[-4.85, 2.86]$).

Supplemental Analyses

Two questions remain unresolved. First, are there long-term consequences of wives' status leakage? Second, might the relationship between wives' status relative to their husbands be nonlinear, such that wives' status leakage only emerges and negatively impacts marital quality when wives perceive they have increasingly higher status than their husbands?

To address the first question, we followed-up with a subset of the original sample of female participants three years after they completed the original surveys. We emailed surveys to 180 of the original sample of participants for whom we had email contact information, asking them about their current marital status and their current levels of marital instability, again using the Booth et al. (1983) measure of marital instability. We received 92 completed responses (14 email addresses were no longer active, 3 participants indicated they were on long-term leave), for an effective response rate of 56%. Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and reliabilities for all study variables of the wives' follow-up sample appear in Table 8 in the online appendix. Applying the Bonferroni correction factor to correct for familywise error, there were no significant differences between participants who did and did not respond to the follow-up surveys.

Of the participants who responded to the surveys at Time 2, eight indicated that they were no longer with the same partner that they were at Time 1 (four were divorced, two separated, and two indicated "other"). We conducted logistic regression to determine whether wives' job status at Time 1 predicted their marital status at Time 2 via wives' status leakage, relationship satisfaction, and marital instability at Time 1. There were no significant indirect effects of wives' job status at Time 1 on marital status at Time 2 (conditional indirect effect: $b = 0.18$, CI$[-1.12, 1.14]$). We then computed serial mediation on the wives who were still married ($N = 84$) to determine whether wives' job status at Time 1 indirectly affected marital instability at Time 2. The indirect effects of wives' job status at Time 1 on marital instability at Time 2, as mediated through wives' status leakage, relationship satisfaction, and marital instability at Time 1, was significant (conditional indirect effect: $b = 0.77$, CI$[0.18, 1.26]$). Full results appear in Tables 9 and 10 in the online appendix.

Our second question asks whether wives' status relative to their husbands affects only wives' status leakage when wives perceive that they have increasingly higher levels of job status than their husbands. Using regression analyses on the original sample of 209 wives, we included the primary control variables (i.e., age, children, wives' initial relative status, salary, and gender ideology) on Step 1, the main effects of wives' job status on Step 2, and the quadratic term of wives' job status on Step 3 to test the nonlinear effects on wives' status leakage. Entering the quadratic term of wives' job status was significant and resulted in a significant increase in variance explained in wives' status leakage ($b = 0.08, p < 0.05, \Delta R^2 = 0.02$). We implemented Hayes and Preacher's (2010) MEDCURVE macro, which allows for the specification of nonlinear paths in mediated models, and included a nonlinear relationship between wives' job status and wives' status leakage in our original model (Hypothesis 1). These results revealed that at one standard deviation below the mean of how wives perceived their job status relative to their husbands' (Mean = 2.83), there were no significant indirect effects on wives relationship quality through wives' status leakage ($b = -0.58$, CI$[-1.92, 0.31]$). However, this effect was significant at the mean (Mean = 3.92; conditional indirect effect: $b = 2.10$, CI$[-4.20, -0.64]$) and at one standard deviation above the mean (Mean = 5.02; conditional indirect effect: $b = -3.63$, CI$[-7.38, -0.90]$), suggesting that wives must perceive at least a moderate gap between their job status and that of their husbands for wives' status leakage to impact relationship quality.
Discussion

While the Oscar curse suggests marriages in which actresses who have higher job status than their husbands are more prone to dissolution, our study investigates whether and how this phenomenon generalizes to women in high status careers outside of Hollywood. To do so, we examined the links connecting wives’ higher job status as a source of spillover and crossovers onto couples’ marital instability. The findings of this study replicate the Oscar curse for wives in high status positions with higher job status than their husbands: wives’ job status relative to their husbands’ is directly spliced onto wives’ marital instability, an effect that was mediated by wives’ status leakage and relationship satisfaction. We extended these findings, showing that this effect held over a three-year period, and that a moderate gap between wives’ job status relative to their husbands’ must exist for these effects to spill over to wives’ marital quality. However, any effects of wives’ job status on their own marital quality were buffered by the provision of instrumental support from their husbands. Crossover effects were also found, such that wives’ relative job status indirectly affected husbands’ marital instability via wives’ and husbands’ relationship dissatisfaction.

Theoretical Contributions

This study offers several contributions to our understanding of status and its intersection with work and family, particularly in terms of its spillover and crossovers effects. First, we introduce wives’ status leakage as a construct of interest in the study of status and work and family. The development of this construct was motivated by the need to understand why marriages where wives have higher status than their husbands result in poorer marital quality for both partners. Wives’ status leakage explains why wives feel a sense of status loss when their partners hold a lower status position. Wives’ status leakage provides an important extension to the status loss literature, showing that affiliations with nonmarket partners (in this case husbands) can result in self-perceived subjective status loss and exert counterintuitive effects on marital instability. Wives’ status leakage also provides an important extension to the work and family domain, developing a construct that goes beyond interrole conflict (Allen 2012) and highlighting its spillover and crossovers effects onto both partners’ marital quality.

This study also contributes to the understanding of job status and work and family by isolating and studying experiences of a unique sample, namely, wives in high status jobs who have higher status than their husbands, which remains a nonnormative marital arrangement. Our findings reiterate that there are negative consequences for both partners’ marital quality in such nonnormative marital relationships. As our supplemental analyses demonstrated, only wives who perceive their husbands’ job status to be lower than theirs are likely to experience spillover effects onto their marital quality; similar effects do not emerge if wives perceive their husbands’ job status to be equal or higher than their own. That this study examined a small segment of the population does not undermine its importance—rather, it underscores the value of investigating phenomena that impact certain segments of the population. Isolating the experiences of women in high status roles with higher job status than their husbands is critical to understanding how gender roles among those highest in status impact aspects of their work and family. This is particularly important when examining crossover findings, given that most crossover studies have found a unidirectional crossover from husbands to wives (Westman et al. 2009), invariably within traditional marital relationships (Westman et al. 2004). Our results suggest that wives’ perceptions and emotions toward their partner’s lower status positions drive both their own marital quality and crossover to impact their husbands. Given this, understanding unique samples broadens our overall understanding of the work–family interface.

Finally, this study achieves greater importance because the primary model was replicated over a three-year time span. These longitudinal findings point to the long-term process initiated when wives’ subjective job status exceeds that of their husbands on marital instability.

Limitations

Despite the theoretical strengths of this study, some limitations remain inevitable. First, we used same-source data in testing Hypothesis 1, and concerns regarding common-method variance cannot be excluded. However, we followed recommendations for reducing common method bias (e.g., ensuring anonymity for respondents and varying the number of scale points, types, and anchor labels; Podsakoff et al. 2003, 2012). In addition, the low correlations between some of the study variables, along with the presence of significant crossover effects, further minimize the likelihood that this is a meaningful threat (Aiken and West 1991, Lindell and Whitney 2001). Second, the data used for testing Hypotheses 1, 4A, and 4B were all cross-sectional. As a result, we cannot exclude the possibility that wives’ status leakage may be a result of the instability that couples are experiencing, such that how wives’ feel about their marriage overall can impact the degree to which they feel their husbands’ status reflects poorly on them. However, the extension of our serial mediation results over a three-year period with a subset of our larger sample, as well as the use of between-partner data for crossover effects, reduces
some of these concerns. Nonetheless, causal inferences remain premature. Third, given the difficulty in obtaining data from couples in nontraditional job status marriages, the sample size for the husband–wife dyadic data was low, limiting statistical power and the ability to generalize the crossover findings. Fourth, our recruitment methods specifically targeted women in high status jobs, which are well paid, complex, and command high status within organizations and society. The extent to which our findings generalize to couples where wives have higher job status relative to their husbands but are not in “high status jobs” requires replication.

Future Research Directions
This study prompts several ideas for future research, one of which is to further understand the consequences of wives’ status leakage. For example, future research should examine whether wives’ status leakage results in specific behaviors toward husbands, such as ridicule, contempt, resentment, and embarrassment. Alternatively, the possibility that wives’ emotional self-regulation buffers any crossover effects of wives’ job status onto husbands’ marital experiences could be investigated.

Our study identified family-related consequences of wives’ status leakage, and research should now examine whether and how this construct impacts women in the workplace. When people behave in ways that are inconsistent with gender roles, there are organizational costs (e.g., Brescoll 2011, Rudman and Phelan 2008). Given that men and women are more likely to penalize successful women (Parks-Stamm et al. 2008), additional gender role violations such as wives holding higher job status relative to their husbands’ may further exacerbate workplace penalties for high status women.

The impact of culture on the relationship between wives’ status leakage and marital instability should also be studied. We examined wives in high job status positions in North America. Cultural factors might influence the prevalence of marriages in which wives hold higher job status, how wives experience wives’ status leakage, and its effects on both partners (Omar and Davidson 2001). Wives’ status leakage may be a phenomenon unique to more progressive societies, and replicating this model across different cross-cultural settings is a necessary step for future research.

This study was limited to women in high job status positions in heterosexual relationships. Having established the indirect effects of wives’ job status on marital quality in heterosexual relationships over time, future research should examine whether similar effects emerge in other types of marriages (e.g., same-sex marriages or marriages where husbands have higher levels of job status than wives). Presumably, it is the violation of gender norms that makes it particularly difficult for wives with higher levels of job status than their husbands; therefore, status leakage between partners may not be relevant within other types of marriages.

Practical Implications
This research suggests a major shift in examining the roles of gender and high status positions, such that immediate organizational benefits associated with high status jobs could be nullified within the home domain. We emphasize that such findings should not be used to dissuade women from seeking high status roles. Instead, these results challenge us to consider how people and organizations can ensure that gains made by women in the workplace are not sacrificed at home.

The results of our findings have important implications for the search for organizational talent, particularly for highly educated and ambitious women. One possibility is that high status women might question whether their career pursuits are worth the potential relationship costs. Other high status women may find themselves not marrying at all: in China, for example, highly educated single women over 27 years of age are referred to as “sheng nu,” in other words “leftover women”—women who are excluded from the marriage market in a society where women are expected to marry men who are higher in status (Subramanian and Jian Lee 2011). Women who desire both a successful career and family life may find it challenging to achieve both, and some may choose to exit their high status careers as an attempt to find happiness at home. Alternatively, women who prefer their partners to be more successful than themselves might underplay their talents (Park et al. 2016), all of which would be an important loss of talent to organizations. Given the shortage of women at the highest levels of organizations (Catalyst 2016b), much work is still needed to change institutionalized gender roles to meet organizational needs.

One possible way to help facilitate such change derives from our findings highlighting the importance of males as supportive partners of their wives. In couples where husbands provide instrumental support for their wives’ careers, the indirect relationship between wives’ job status and marital instability was not significant. Yet, society and organizations continue to stigmatize and penalize couples where wives’ careers are primary (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005, Rochlen et al. 2010) and where husbands take on more domestic roles (Humberd et al. 2015). Much remains to be achieved at the societal, organizational, and family levels to reduce the social stigma attached to husbands who actively share responsibility for domestic duties. Organizations can assist by providing family-friendly policies to all employees and encouraging males to use them.

In addition, women who aspire to high status positions should be aware that not all aspects of high
status jobs are positive, but that with a supportive partner, potential costs to one’s personal life can be prevented. Given the findings of this study, we suggest that in addition to any career discussions, family choices and priorities should also be considered explicitly and early in women’s careers, for example, during training opportunities for women in programs geared toward high status occupations (e.g., MBA programs, medical and law school) and leadership development workshops. In the sense that “forewarned is forarmed,” such information can help women actively take preventive steps to avoid unintended negative effects.

Nonetheless, we would be remiss if we did not reiterate that this is not a “women’s issue”—our findings reiterate that men who are married to women in higher job status positions are equally impacted, such that they too experience the effects of marital instability. Open and honest discussions about the changing nature of women in the workforce and how this can impact marital relationships in general are important for both partners in the marriage.

Conclusion

This study replicates and extends the “Oscar curse” phenomenon and introduces the construct of wives’ status leakage to explain how being a high job status wife holding more status than your husband indirectly affects both partners’ marital quality. Nonetheless, we emphasize that this not be viewed as a negative consequence for highly successful women. Rather, wives who achieve high job status can expect rewards both in the workplace and beyond. Successful wives who are unhappy in their marital relationships enjoy greater financial independence and are not dependent on their spouses to have a fulfilling life; they have more options from which to choose. In this sense, wives’ higher job status resulting in marital instability is not necessarily a reflection of a “failed” marriage, but rather a relationship in which one partner could choose to leave a dissatisfying relationship because of the financial independence earned through career success.

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Endnotes


2 We use the term “indirect effect” to explain the serial mediation relationships in the study (Hayes 2013) and the term “indirect crossover effect” to address the second mechanism of crossover (Westman et al. 2004).


4 All samples obtained through Qualtrics were verified to ensure that no participant took part in more than one survey. See www.qualtrics.com/panel-management/.

5 See www.qualtrics.com/panel-management/.

6 Analyses for all spillover hypotheses were run separately on the sample of wives whose husbands did respond to the survey. Despite significant differences between samples on relationship satisfaction and marital instability, the spillover results were significant and comparable across both the full and partial sample.

7 See www.qualtrics.com/panel-management/.

8 We tested for and found significant differences between the five- and three-factor models ($\chi^2(7, N = 208) = 1,321.45, p < 0.01$) and between the five- and one-factor models ($\chi^2(10, N = 208) = 2,336.41, p < 0.01$).

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