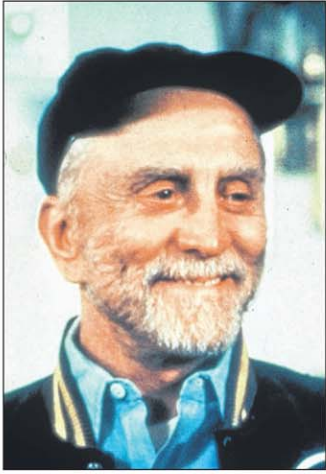




Actors nominated for Oscars, but who did not win and went on to get divorced soon after include (above, from left) Humphrey Bogart, Kirk Douglas and Mickey Rooney. Best Actress Oscar winners (below, from left) Jane Fonda, Sandra Bullock, Reese Witherspoon and Halle Berry saw their marriages break up after winning the statuette. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS, NEW YORK TIMES



Dr Heeyon Kim and Dr Michael Jensen, who wrote a research paper on the Oscar curse, argue that male Oscar winners and nominees are more likely to get divorced than non-winners. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

Oscar curse hits men more than women

Two academics argue that male Oscar winners and nominees are more likely to get divorced

Yip Wai Yee

How much truth is there to the famous "Oscar curse", which has it that actors' careers mysteriously go downhill after their Oscar wins?

The jinx apparently extends to the romantic relationships of Best Actress Oscar winners, as it is said that married female stars head for divorce soon after snagging their coveted acting trophies.

Just look at Jane Fonda, Sandra Bullock, Reese Witherspoon and Halle Berry, for example, whose marriages broke up in the years after bagging that coveted golden statuette.

But in a new study to be published in *Organization Science* journal tomorrow, two academics appear to have debunked both parts of the popular myth.

Dr Heeyon Kim, an assistant professor of strategy and policy at the National University Of Singapore Business School, along with Dr Michael Jensen, an associate professor of strategy at University Of Michigan's Ross School Of Business, argue that it is, in fact, the male Oscar winners and nominees who are more likely to get divorced – not the women.

Dr Jensen, 48, tells *Life!*: "After looking at more than 800 actors from 1930 to 2005 in our study, we found that divorce rates for male Oscar winners as well as for nominees increase following the Oscars, but not the divorce rates for women."

The researchers do not find this particularly surprising.

Dr Jensen adds: "The Oscars is a social event, which elevates the nominees and winners to a higher status in their field and this, in turn, opens doors to

more opportunities for them, such as spousal alternatives.

"Suddenly, they become more desirable to other women. While female Oscar winners and nominees are also presented with new opportunities, men in general, as past research has shown, react differently to such opportunities."

He says the men "are a lot more likely than women to show regret" at passing on sexual temptation. "And of course, if they cheat on their wives, then it could potentially lead to divorce."

Alarming, the divorce rate of male Oscar winners is 205 per cent higher than the rate of non-nominees within the first year following the awards.

What surprised the researchers is that male Oscar nominees also had higher divorce rates than actors who have never been nominated.

Dr Kim, 31, says: "We guessed that male Oscar winners would have higher divorce rates than non-nominees, but we found that to be true for male nominees as well.

"It does make sense if you think about it. When you are nominated but do not win, you suffer great disappointment. And men are worse at handling disappointments than women, especially when it comes to work-related events.

"So they are more likely to experience divorce following professional disappointments, such as not winning their Oscar nomination."

Examples of male actors who were nominated for Oscars, but did not win and then went on to get divorced soon after are the late Humphrey Bogart (nominated 1943, divorced 1945), Kirk Douglas (nominated 1949, divorced 1951) as well as Mickey Rooney (nominated and then divorced in 1943, remarried and nominated again in 1956, before

getting divorced in 1958).

Data for the actresses, however, is not as clear and so it is "inconclusive", say the researchers.

If anything, it seems that women are less likely to get divorced after the Oscars. In the first year of marriage following the Oscars, the divorce rates of female Oscar winners is 85 per cent lower than that for female non-nominees.

The academics, who profess to be film buffs, began their study in 2008, simply from a point of curiosity about the mythological Oscar curse.

Citing a love for the films of American director Richard Linklater and South Korean director Kim Ki Duk, they wondered about the paradox of how snagging a coveted prize could potentially have negative consequences.

But their study is not all bad news. Pessimistic as it may be about the romantic lives of male Oscar winners, it looks like the Oscars can only help to boost their careers professionally – not jinx them.

For both male and female Oscar winners, the study saw that they continued to be gainfully employed following their awards. Oscar winners, on average, appear in more films than Oscar nominees – who in turn, appear in more films than those who were never nominated.

Dr Kim says with a chuckle: "Professionally, it seems that there is no such thing as an Oscar curse. Actors and actresses continue to do well after winning or getting nominations.

"But when it comes to the personal lives of the men, it is not so great. And that's where the real Oscar curse is – that it could ruin marriages and increase the likelihood of divorce."

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