



MARRIED TO THE MONEY

Should Women Be Financially Rewarded With "Wife Bonuses"? || BY LINDA HAASE

Many women envy Polly Phillips, who plunks down \$1,500 for shoes with the nonchalance of someone buying a newspaper. Others vilify the 30-something stay-at-home mom. But one thing is for sure: People are talking about her and the five-figure sum she gets annually from her husband, which is a percentage of his company bonus.

"I'm exceptionally lucky to have a husband who values how important a job it is to stay home and take care of a child, as well as understanding how difficult it is to leave friends, family and career prospects behind to further his career," Phil-

lips, whose husband works for a major American oil company, writes in a *New York Post* article earlier this

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— Polly Phillips, wife and mother

year. "He was actually pleased to have a tangible way to recognize the contribution that I also make to the success of our lives."

This trending and controversial new concept is known as a "wife bonus," and many women, especially those in the upper echelons of society, are becoming big proponents.

Phillips, who lives in Denmark but visits the states frequently, extolls the many wife bonus benefits: "The wife bonus gives me not only financial freedom, but freedom from guilt too. We have a joint account, and before we started the system, I was reluctant to spend our money

on myself, even though my husband insisted he was happy for me to."

Critics speculate whether a wife bonus is contingent on "wifely duties" in the boudoir, making it particularly offensive to some.

"To put those [dirty] minds at rest — the size of my bonus has nothing to do with my performance in the kitchen or the bedroom," Phillips says. "It's entirely dependent on how my husband does at work, and how well his company performs."

A bonus may be healthy for a wife's wallet, but is it healthy for her relationship? That depends, say our experts.



"I think it sets us back 60-plus years in terms of what we are striving for in marriage," says Marni Feuerman, a licensed clinical social worker and licensed marriage and family therapist in Boca Raton. "Equality is a big one. ... [A wife bonus] sets up an employee/employer-type dynamic between two people who have a romantic bond with each other. Those two things do not mix well."

And, warns Feuerman, who is also a marriage expert for About.com: "It perpetuates an imbalance of power, particularly over finances. It also removes the husband even further from his role in the home and as a father."

Elena Donovan Mauer, a New York writer and editor specializing in relationships, agrees that it's not a good idea.

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— Elena Donovan Mauer, New York writer and editor

than a true partnership. For many of us, our husbands are more like our best friends and teammates than our bosses. I like being able to ask my husband to change a diaper or go to a parent-teacher conference without wondering if it would put my bonus in jeopardy," she writes in a *Parenting* magazine column.

Michelle Cavaliere, a practicing therapist at the Whole Health Psychological Center in West Palm Beach and a registered intern therapist, sees another side. She points out that different arrangements work for different couples.

"Some have criticized wife bonuses and women staying home as

their job, but as a feminist, I can say that feminism is about equality and choice," she says. "As long as the wife is making the decision to stay home, then the values are in line with feminist beliefs. The amount of money given for wife bonuses does not usually have anything to do with performance but rather [is done] to show appreciation for a partner's important role in keeping the home, family and partner supported, healthy and functional."

In fact, the phrase "wife bonus" itself might be complicating the issue, Cavaliere contends.

"Most people merge assets in some way when they are married

and start a family," she says. "If the decision is for one partner to stay at home with the children and household, then it makes sense, for safety and security, for that partner to have some separate funds and assets. This so-called 'bonus' ... allows the partner freedom."

One of her clients, who calls his wife a "savior" for all her help around the house and with the kids, regularly gives his wife a percentage of his bonus, Cavaliere says.

"The husband reported how his wife saved so much of 'her' earnings that she started a small company ... and now gives *him* bonuses when she has made an exceptional deal," she says. "He likes the extra money because he loves to play blackjack and will usually never play with his own earnings because he doesn't enjoy it as much."

Who says money can't buy happiness? ○