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**Navigating Career Ambitions: The Impact of Relative Status, Gender, and Career-Home  
Conflicts among Individuals in a Romantic Relationship**

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## Contents

Introduction.....	5
Role Strain Theory and Spillover Theory .....	6
Career Ambition- Examining its Relationship with Relative Status.....	7
The Challenge of Balancing Work and Family: Career-Home Conflict.....	8
The Importance of Gender in Occupational and Family Roles .....	10
Method .....	11
Participants and Design.....	11
Procedure .....	12
Measures .....	13
Demographic background information .....	13
Career Ambition.....	14
Relative Status .....	14
Career-Home Conflict.....	14
Statistical Analysis .....	15
Results.....	15
Preliminary Analysis.....	15
Do women’s relative statuses compared to their partner predict higher career ambition?.....	16
Does having higher career ambition predict more career-home conflicts and is this association further qualified by participants’ gender? .....	17
Discussion.....	18
Limitations .....	19
Implications.....	20
Future Recommendations .....	20
Conclusion .....	21

CAREER AMBITION, RELATIVE STATUS, CAREER-HOME CONFLICTS, GENDER DIFFERENCES	3
References.....	22
Appendix A. Information Letter of the Questionnaire.....	27
Appendix B. Career Ambition Scale.....	30
Appendix C. Relative Status Scale .....	31
Appendix D. Career-Home Conflicts Scale.....	32
Appendix E. Results Output .....	38

### **Abstract**

Gender expectations influence career ambitions reported by men and women. Traditional gender norms associate men with the role of primary breadwinner and women with the role of caregiver, contributing to the experience of career-home conflict which is reported to be higher for women. In this study, we aim to explore how career ambition is impacted by men and women's relative status compared to their partner and if this is qualified by their experienced career-home conflicts. Furthermore, we tested whether especially women with higher status than their partner experience career-home conflicts, resulting in lower reported ambition. The findings of this study ( $N = 209$ ) indicated that women who have higher relative status compared to their partner report higher career ambition. However, we did not find an effect of relative status on career ambition for men. Contrary to our predictions, career-home conflicts did not moderate the association between relative status and career ambition, and there were no gender differences. Overall, the results imply that the relationship between relative status, career-home conflict, and career ambition is not significantly different for men and women. In the discussion section, it is shown how these findings contribute to a better understanding of heterosexual couples' dynamics and how to address and understand better career-home conflict.

*Keywords:* career ambition, career-home conflicts, relative status, gender differences

## Introduction

Despite shifts in gender dynamics, the dual-career literature emphasizes that there are different expectations about how men and women prioritize their careers over their family responsibilities (Perrone & Worthington, 2001). Traditional gender norms often assign men the role of primary breadwinner and emphasize that they focus on work, while women are expected to take care of childcare and household responsibilities (Moya et al., 2000; Meeussen et al., 2019; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Vink, 2020). Moreover, in such cases where women are the primary caregivers, they report feelings of guilt, worry, and pressure for breaking these gender norms (Meisenbach, 2009).

These gendered expectations also have an impact on the ambition reported by men and women. Career ambition can be described as a person's motivation to advance and excel in their chosen career field (Chng and Wang, 2016; Judge et al., 2004; Desrochers and Dahir, 2000). Numerous factors such as personal characteristics, societal expectations, and cultural norms can influence these aspirations and change the way an individual views their professional development (Lent et al., 2000). In collectivistic cultures, the desires, and expectations of important individuals, such as family members, can influence personal orientations. Contextual factors such as perceived peer/parental support can directly influence career development. For example, perceived parental support has been shown to influence women's interest in pursuing careers in engineering as well as increasing self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2000). When addressing gender bias and ambition, it is important to note that many challenges can arise when trying to balance career and home roles, such as completing tasks at work, working overtime, and spending time with the partner/family (Perrone & Worthington, 2001; Kalliath et al., 2011). Such challenges contribute to the occurrence of career-home conflicts, where research (Thurairajah, 2013; Aarntzen et al., 2022) shows that women do experience higher levels of conflict comparing to men.

Consequently, researchers have examined how individuals in committed relationships prioritize their careers, considering several influential factors. These factors include personal characteristics such as education, employment status, gender beliefs and gender role identity, relationship dynamics such as dependence on a partner, the presence of children, non-sexist partner, a partner without a job and a higher educational attainment (Moya et al., 2000). The findings show that men and women place similar personal value on their careers. However, women with children, lower levels of education, and traditional gender beliefs tended to place less

importance on their careers than women without children. Moreover, the importance of pursuing a career for men does not depend on the characteristics of their partners, such as employment status and education level (Moya et al., 2000). Even when responsibilities at home are shared between partners, gender role expectations can trigger feelings of guilt among women as they feel obligated to prioritize motherhood over their career (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018; Aarntzen et al., 2021).

To better understand career ambition among individuals who are in a romantic relationship, it is important to investigate how gender differences play a role in the presence of various influencing factors (e.g., the experience of career-home conflict, income). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how the relative status of men and women compared to their partner affects their career ambition. How does the perceived work-family conflict impact this relationship? Are there gender differences in perceiving work-family conflict? Understanding the impact of such concepts (relative status, career-home conflict) on career ambitions is crucial to understanding the difficulties faced by individuals trying to balance their personal and professional lives. To explore this goal, this study posits the following research question.

“How does women’s status relative to their male partner affect men’s and women’s career ambition and to what extent is this association qualified by men’s and women’s experienced career-home conflict?”

### **Role Strain Theory and Spillover Theory**

The theoretical framework for this study draws on Role Strain Theory (Goode, 1960) and Spillover Theory (Wilensky, 1960), which are used together to examine the influence of relative status and work-family conflict on career ambition. Role Strain Theory states that social structures, which include status, social networks, groups, organizations, social institutions, and society, consist of multiple roles. These roles include attitudes and behaviours, which are expected to be performed by individuals who occupy certain positions. For example, as a father it is expected to provide for the family or as women/mother to take care of the housework’s and/or children (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Meeussen et al., 2019; Vink, 2020). However, individuals often face challenges meeting the demands and obligations of all their roles (Kalliath et al., 2011).

Women who choose to pursue a career while raising a family face significant challenges due to societal expectations and established gender roles. They are forced to take on the dual responsibilities of both working at a job and taking care of the household, leading to increased

workloads and demanding schedules (Bierema, 2009). Dual-career couples must constantly renegotiate their roles to meet the demands that come within their responsibilities in the relationship (i.e., house chores, spending qualitative time with each other). Otherwise, this can result in role strain that leads to tension, disharmony, and conflict in dual-career marriages (Perrone & Worthington, 2001).

Kalliath et al. (2011) links role strain directly to spillover theory. Spillover theory examines the transfer of emotions and behaviours from one domain (e.g., the family) to another (e.g., work; Kalliath et al., 2011). It suggests that perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours in one's social setting can be manifested in another setting as a reflection of one's experience (Wilensky, 1960). Although there are usually physical and temporal boundaries between the work and family domains, spillover of emotions and behaviours often occurs in dual-career marriages in which spouses are committed to both their careers and family lives (Kalliath et al., 2011).

For instance, knowledge, skills, and resources in one domain, such as workplace, directly improve performance in another, such as family (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). According to Eldor et al. (2020), the importance of work to employees goes beyond solely job security and financial gain. They argue that active participation in work not only improves the overall work experience but also has positive effects on personal life inside and outside the workplace, such as family. As for example, feeling positive about certain job achievements, such as showing good job performance and engagement, will also reflect the same emotion at home, such as good relationship with children and family engagement (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

### **Career Ambition- Examining its Relationship with Relative Status**

As more women are joining the workforce, while also attaining higher education degrees, it is still expected of them to prioritise their home and family responsibilities rather than their careers (Perrone & Worthington, 2001, Vink 2020). Indeed, ambition serves as a potent motivating force that shapes personal decisions and directs individuals toward their chosen career path (Bruhn & Lowrey, 2012; Ladkin, 2002). Career ambition, as defined by Judge et al. (2004), specifically refers to an individual's intention to secure a high-level position and advance in the future. It represents a person's motivation to advance and excel in their chosen career field (Chng and Wang, 2016; Judge et al., 2004; Desrochers and Dahir, 2000). Yet, many women still face challenges and guilt in prioritizing their careers over their families (Aarntzen et al., 2022).

Eldor et al. (2020) show that professional achievements contribute to future career goals, indicating that engagement at work helps in pursuing one's personal goals and ambition. Interestingly, when it comes to how pursuing career ambition while in a romantic relationship, the research of Hettinger et al. (2014) found that people perceive men as less happy when women reach higher occupational positions than men. Conversely, men who have a higher occupational status than women are perceived by people as the happiest. The author explains this phenomenon by saying that a man who has a lower occupational status than his wife is seen as less traditionally masculine, while she is seen as less traditionally feminine.

Consequently, this contributes to the overall impression that he is less happy. In addition, in couples where the wife has more power in the relationship under non-traditional circumstances, the couple is perceived to be more equal. The author (Hettinger et al., 2014) suggests that this pattern is influenced by women's ratings of characteristics typically associated with their gender, but not by men's ratings. Thus, attributions of gender nonconformity toward high-status women not only lead to perceptions of hostility in the workplace (Heilman, 2001), but also have the potential to influence perceptions of a balanced romantic relationship. When a woman has a higher occupational status than her husband, she is perceived as extremely dominant and consequently in control of her marriage.

In the current study we propose the following hypotheses, to further understand career ambition among women and men.

H1a: The higher women's relative status (as indicated by accommodation of women's relative income, educational degree, and prestige of their occupation) compared to their male partner the higher their career ambition.

H1b: The lower men's relative status (as indicated by accommodation of men's relative income, educational degree, and prestige of their occupation) compared to their female partner the lower career ambition they report.

### **The Challenge of Balancing Work and Family: Career-Home Conflict**

Exploring career ambition among individuals in a relationship entails more than looking only at one's relative status compared to the other. Gender stereotypes often lead to the expectation that mothers, but not fathers, prioritize family over work (Aarntzen et al., 2022). This expectation



contributes to the occurrence of career-home conflict among individuals in a romantic relationship. There is a notable difference between male and female workers in their perceptions of career-home conflict, as noted by Thurairajah (2013), who found that male respondents experience lower levels of conflict than female respondents.

Despite societal progress in gender equality, women continue to experience high levels of career-home conflict, regardless of whether they assume a traditional or egalitarian mothering role (Aarntzen et al., 2022). Nomaguchi's (2012) study supports these findings by showing that single mothers face more career-home conflict compared to single fathers and married parents. The study also shows that various factors such as work pressure, workplace environment, and age of children contribute to this conflict, which is influenced by marital status and gender.

Consistent with these findings, Michel et al. (2011) conducted a study that identified work role stressors (such as work stress, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload) and social support at work (including organizational support, supervisor support, and peer support) as predictors of career-home conflict. As well, family role stressors (such as family stressors, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload), family engagement (family interest/centeredness), family social support (including family and spouse support), and family characteristics (family climate) were identified as predictors of career-home conflict (Michel et al., 2011; Shockley et al., 2017).

In line with the above, Meeussen et al. (2019) found that women with high career ambitions seek partners who prioritize the community and family, suggesting that this orientation reduces work-family conflict. When men take a more active role in family responsibilities, women's workload is reduced and the tensions between their career and home responsibilities are alleviated, allowing women to actively pursue their career ambitions. As it was shown by the spillover theory (Wilensky, 1960; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Eldor et al., 2020) emotions from home spectrum can be transfer in other domains, such as work, indicating that for women's high role overload (i.e., being the one always to take care of children or chores) at home can be reflected at their workplace, such as not reaching their career goals because of career and home conflicts.

In line with the following evidences, we propose the following hypothesis.

H2: The association between perceived relative status and career ambition will be moderated by career-home conflicts, such that women and men with higher relative status than their partner

who experience career-home conflicts will report lower career ambition, as compared to women and men who experience low career-home conflicts.

### **The Importance of Gender in Occupational and Family Roles**

The actual amount of time spent on household or childcare tasks is less important than each member of the couple's perception of whether the division of labour between them is generally fair (Lavee & Katz, 2002, as cited in Perrone et al., 2009). Dual-career couples who successfully navigate the challenges of balancing career and family have certain common characteristics, as found by Haddock et al. (2006). These characteristics include flexibility and personal control over scheduling, acceptance of unconventional work schedules such as long hours or evening shifts, work autonomy, the possibility of working from home, support from supervisors and colleagues, clear boundaries between work and personal life, and working in family-friendly organizations. However, there are often no specific guidelines or rules for equitable task sharing (Himsel & Goldberg, 2003, as cited in Perrone et al., 2009).

Although flexibility is possible in the workplace, in general, men do not use it to adjust their time for household or childcare responsibilities. In contrast, women tend to use flexibility to manage both housework and childcare (Noonan et al., 2007). For instance, women are the ones that use their maternity leave more than their partner. This discrepancy suggests that traditional gender roles continue to influence the use of family-friendly policies in the workplace. In addition, perceptions of work-life balance priorities play an important role in women's evaluations of maternity leave decisions, with negative evaluations observed in both the work and family domains (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). These conflicting evaluations may contribute to role conflict and ultimately role strain for couples (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Perrone et al., 2009). As an indication, career-home conflict may appear influencing career ambition in different ways for men and women, such as women would have higher conflicts which results in negative impact in their career and men lower conflicts (Nomaguchi, 2012; Thurairajah, 2013; Aarntzen et al., 2022). Cultural stereotypes regarding men's career orientation and women's career barriers further contribute to gender differences in these conflicts (Cooper et al., 1994; Reverberi et al., 2022).

Similarly, as Reverberi et al. (2022) study shows, reconciling work and family responsibilities continues to be a barrier to gender equality. Their findings suggest that the perception of difficulty in achieving this balance affects individuals' ability to develop an

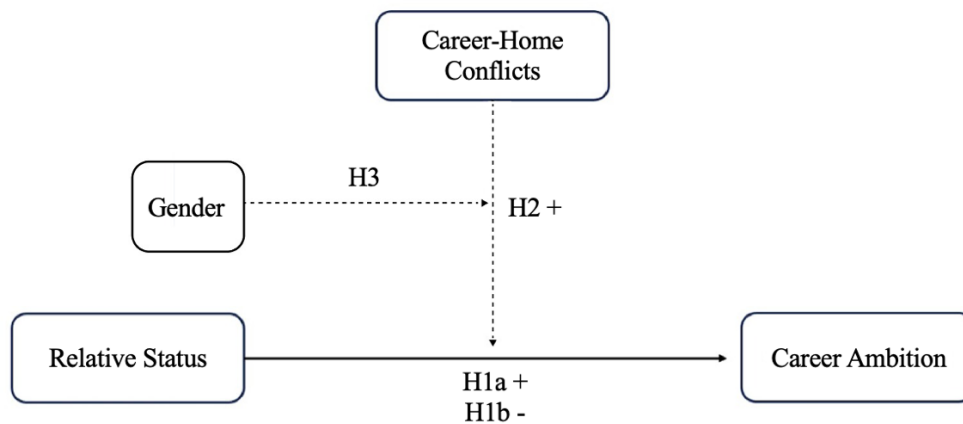
integrated identity that encompasses both their gender and work roles. Building from all the literature presented so far, a moderated moderation is hypothesized, indicating that gender (male, female) will moderate the moderation stated in hypothesis 2.

H3: The moderation as stated in hypothesis 2 will be moderated by gender such that especially women with high relative status than their partner experience higher career-home conflicts and also report lower ambition. Whereas for men with higher status than their partner is less likely to experience career-home conflicts and also will not report lower ambition.

The hypothesized relationships between all four constructs are visualised in the research model in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Research model of the proposed hypotheses (e.g., high relative status refers to high career ambition for women: H1a+)*



**Method**

**Participants and Design**

The current study used a convenience sampling method to recruit employed individuals over the age of 18. Prior to the study, a power analysis was conducted to determine the adequate sample size needed to detect meaningful effects or relationships, with a higher power providing greater confidence in the validity and reliability of the results. According to the G\*Power test (version

3.1.9.2), a minimum of 176 respondents was required, based on a medium effect size 0.07, the alpha level of 0.05, power of 0.8 and 4 predictors. The primary sample size consisted of 523 individuals. However, 281 participants were excluded from the analysis due to the exclusion criteria of not having been in a relationship for at least 12 months ( $N = 82$ ) and missing data in the scales of interest, such as Relative Status, Career-Home conflict, and Career Ambition ( $N = 216$ ). A total number of 16 cases were also removed from the data as they qualified as outliers (see preliminary analysis).

The overall sample used for the purpose of this study consisted of 209 individuals. Among the participants, 69.9% ( $N = 146$ ) identified as female, 29% ( $N = 61$ ) identified as male and 1% ( $N = 2$ ) as non-binary. The third gender (non-binary) were excluded from the dataset as the main target group for this research were men and women. The mean age of the sample was 37.6 ( $SD = .47$ ) years old (see Table 1). All the remaining participants were individuals who had been in a consistent relationship for at least 12 months, employed for an average of 2.33 years ( $SD = 1.87$ ) and with an average of working hours of 38.8 hours per week ( $SD = 41.61$ ). Most (32.1%) of all participants reported a bachelor's as their highest level of education, followed by a master's degree (29.7%) and higher vocational education (18.2%). The majority of participants reported full-time employment (52.2%).

A quantitative cross-sectional design was used throughout this study. This design was chosen because it is efficient and cost-effective, and therefore suitable when resources and time are limited. It allows examination of the prevalence or frequency of the variables of interest and facilitates hypothesis generation by identifying potential associations (Maier et al., 2023). Although it cannot demonstrate causality or capture changes over time, the cross-sectional design provided valuable insights in the context of the study. It provided important insights into the characteristics (i.e., education degree, occupational prestige) and relationships within a population at a particular point in time. These insights can further guide future research, support decision making, and contribute to broader understanding of career-home conflict and its relationship to career ambition among men and women in a romantic relationship.

## Procedure

The survey was conducted electronically through the Qualtrics platform by distributing it via online forms (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, emails) over the course of three months, in March, April

and May 2023. The snowballing technique was used to enhance participant recruitment and ensure a diverse sample. Prior to their involvement, respondents received a comprehensive explanation of the study objectives, duration, and instructions for completing the questionnaire (see Appendix A). First, participants were informed that only individuals who were at least 18 years old could respond. Further, they were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The participants were explicitly pointed out that their anonymity was guaranteed, and that the data collected would only be used for empirical purposes and that they would not be exposed to any risks by participating in the study. To address ethical considerations, a prior informed consent was obtained from each subject. In addition, participants were encouraged to contact the administrative staff via email for any questions regarding the study.

Next, participants completed a set of questions including their background, responsibility at work, career ambition, occupational ratio, relative status, career-home conflict, work engagement, work addiction, relationship conflicts, support from partner and loss of gender status. At the end of the survey, respondents read a debriefing where they were thanked for their participation and were invited to fill in any comments/complaints they might have. On average, the survey took 10 minutes to be completed. In addition, the submission of this research was ethically approved by the Board of Directors of the School of Social and Behavioural Sciences under file number 23-0693 prior to the start of data collection for this study.

## **Measures**

The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with response alternatives ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*), unless indicated otherwise. Materials are presented in a chronological order in the survey.

### ***Demographic background information***

Participants were asked to indicate their highest education level, employment status, number of working hours per week, and relationship status. Moreover, they were also asked to indicate the duration of their relationship in years.

### ***Career Ambition***

In order to measure career ambition, participants filled out the "Career Ambition Scale" developed by Dikkers et al. (2010, see Appendix B). The scale consists of nine items, with higher mean scores indicating higher levels of professional ambition. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). Two of the items had to be reverse coded to ensure that higher scores reflected higher levels of negative career aspiration. Examples of scale items include "I am not really interested in achieving the highest possible levels at work" and "A career does not have priority in my life" (reverse coded). The reliability analysis revealed high internal consistency for the career aspirations questionnaire with a Cronbach's alpha value of  $\alpha = .83$ , with 3 cases excluded from the overall 209 sample size.

### ***Relative Status***

To measure relative status, we included the "MacArthur Subjective Social Status Scale" (Adler et al., 2000). This scale consists of a 10-rung ladder that represents individuals' perceptions of their status in society. It was described that the ladder represents society as it is, with people on the highest rung representing people with the highest income, educational level, job quality, and prestige in society. Vice versa, a lower position implied the opposite (see Appendix C). Respondents were instructed to indicate their own position and their partner's position on the ladder. Participants' relative status was calculated by subtracting the status scale of women and men. Particularly, for male participants it was calculated by subtracting the relative status of partner from the self. Whereas, for female participants the calculation was made by subtracting the relative status of self from the partner. During the reliability check, 8 of 209 items were excluded. The scale reliability analysis revealed a medium correlation ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ).

### ***Career-Home Conflict***

The Work and Family Conflict Scale (WAFCS) by Haslam et al. (2015) was used to measure career-home conflict. This scale consisted of ten items designed to assess conflict between work and family responsibilities. Participants rated statements such as "My work prevents me spending sufficient quality time with my family" or "My work has a negative impact on my family life" (see Appendix D) on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The reliability test for the career-home conflict questionnaire revealed high internal consistency with a

Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha = .86$ . In this analysis 20 cases out of 209 were excluded, due to the missing data in this scale.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using *IBM SPSS Statistics* version 28 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 28). Initially, reliability tests were conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The data was checked for outliers by using the Mahalanobis, Cook's, and leverage distances. All cases that had the same value or higher than the thresholds for considering outliers, were removed from the data (Mahalanobis distance  $\leq 16.27$ ; Cook's distance  $\leq 0.0178$ ; leverage distance  $\leq 0.0355$ ). Subsequently, a set of descriptive statistics, such as means, were used to analyse the demographic data. Prior to hypothesis testing, preliminary analysis utilizing correlational models was conducted to examine if background variables (i.e., age, length of the relationship, educational degree) were correlated with variables important regarding the hypothesis.

Regression analysis was applied to further examine the relationships between relative status and career ambition, considering both male and female participants. Therefore, gender data was split in two categories (male, female). Additionally, to investigate the potential moderating effect of career-home conflict on the abovementioned associations, a moderation analysis (one-way interaction) was performed by using PROCESS macro, model number 1 (Hayes, 2013). Lastly, to examine how this moderating effect may vary by gender (male or female), the PROCESS macro, model number 3 (moderated moderation) was included (Hayes, 2013).

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

An analysis of the data set for outliers was performed using the Mahalanobis, Cook's, and leverage distances. The thresholds for considering outliers were determined as follows: 16.27 for the Mahalanobis distance, 0.0178 for the Cook's distance, and 0.0355 for the leverage value distance. Cases with scores equal to or higher than these thresholds were identified as outliers and subsequently removed from the data set, resulting in the exclusion of a total of 16 cases. Due to ethical considerations, individuals whose values were equal to or higher than the leverage-value distance threshold, were not removed from the dataset. Such a decision was made because these

individuals may not necessarily be outliers but may have scored higher values in certain scales. Homogeneity of variances was also confirmed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = .003$ ).

Next, to examine the correlation analysis between the background variables (i.e., gender, age, work hours, relative status of self and partner) and the variables of interest regarding our research hypotheses, a correlation analysis was conducted (see Table 2). The results indicate a correlation between gender and career-home conflict, meaning that individuals who identify as female tend to report higher levels of career-home conflict than individuals who identify as male. In addition, older individuals were found to be less likely to experience career-home conflict. The data also showed a relationship between age and ambition. Given the medium correlation between age and career ambition ( $r = .34, p = .01$ ), age was included as covariate in the regression analyses. Education level revealed a low correlation to ambition ( $r = .16, p = .05$ ) and relative status ( $r = .25, p = .01$ ) but since education level is part of the relative status, it was not used as a covariate. Further, the hours worked per week showed no correlation with ambition ( $r = .088, p > .05$ ), therefore were not taken in consideration.

Additionally, relative status of the self (where would you place yourself in the ladder) was included to control for the effect that those who ranked women on a scale of 10 and a man on a scale of 8 scored the same as those who ranked women on a scale of 4 and men on 2.

A regression analysis was conducted to check the hypothesis testing. To explore if this result is different for women and men, gender data was split in two categories (male, female). The coefficient table showed that overall, the higher the women's status is compared to the man the higher career ambition is reported. The residuals were normally distributed, as assessed by statistical plots.

### **Do women's relative statuses compared to their partner predict higher career ambition?**

In line with hypothesis 1a, we indeed found that women who reported to have higher status than their male partner also reported higher career ambition ( $\beta = .10, SE = .04, p = .010, \eta^2 = .05$ ). Specifically, the higher women placed themselves in the social ladder compared to their partner, the higher career ambition they reported (see Table 3). The  $R^2$  value of .15 revealed that predictor variable explained predict 15% of variance in the outcome variable with  $F(1,135) = 8.06, p < .001$ .



Contrary to hypothesis 1b, men’s lower relative status to their partner was not associated with lower career ambition (see Table 4). Hence, hypothesis 1b was not supported and the findings were not statistically significant ( $\beta = -.06, SE = .05, p = .216, \eta^2 = .03$ ).

**Does having higher career ambition predict more career-home conflicts and is this association further qualified by participants’ gender?**

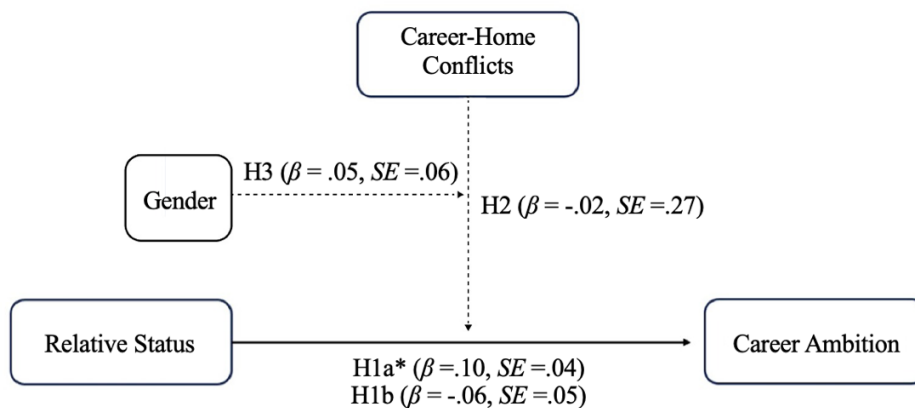
Contrary to hypothesis 2, there was no significant effect ( $\beta = -.02, SE = .27, p = .414$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 predicting that the association between perceived relative status and career ambition will be moderated by career-home conflicts, such that women and men with higher relative status than their partner who experience career-home conflicts will report lower career ambition, as compared to women and men who experience low career-home conflicts, cannot be supported (see Table 5).

Similar results were obtained for hypothesis 3 (see Table 6). The prediction assumed that the moderation effect described in hypothesis 2 would also be moderated by gender. In particular, it was anticipated that women who have higher relative status than their partners would experience higher levels of career-home conflicts and consequently report lower ambition. Whereas, for men with higher relative status than their partner would be less likely to experience career-home conflicts and therefore not report lower ambition. However, the analysis could not confirm these predictions, as no significant effect was found ( $\beta = .05, SE = .06, p = .403$ ).

For a graphic representation of the results, see Figure 2.

**Figure 2.**

*Research model of the analysis results (H stands for hypothesis)*



### Discussion

The current study provides some insights into the relationship between relative status between men and women in romantic relationships, career ambition, and career-home conflict. In line with our expectations, we find evidence that women who perceive themselves as having higher status than their partners are more motivated to achieve success in their careers. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of relative status on individuals' career aspirations (Judge et al., 2004; Chng and Wang, 2016;).

Contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence that men's lower relative status compared to their female partners is associated with lower career ambitions. Men's relative status had no significant effect on their career ambitions, rejecting the assumption that men's career ambition is influenced by their relative status compared to their partner. It suggests that other factors may play a more significant role, although the gender imbalance with more female participants may have influenced the results. It may be that due to the limited number of male participants ( $N = 61$ ), this effect could not be detected in the analysis.

On the other hand, the results did not confirm the relationship between career ambition and career-home conflict as posed under hypothesis 2. Perceived relative status and career-home conflict did not interact significantly to affect career ambition. This finding indicates that career-home conflict does not necessarily diminish career ambition for individuals with higher relative status compared to their partners. It may suggest that other factors, such as individual coping mechanisms or career-home integration strategies (i.e., flexibility, work autonomy, working from home, support from supervisors and colleagues, clear boundaries between work and personal life, and working in family-friendly organizations) might mitigate the negative impact of career-home conflict on career ambition (Haddock et al., 2006). This includes, for example, open communication with the partner about the boundaries between work and home/family life, as well as the possibility to decide for oneself on which days one would prefer to work from home.

Contrary to expectations, no gender specific differences were observed among men and women in the experience of career-home conflicts in relation to one's relative status and career ambition. It is possible that women, especially, have become accustomed to balancing both work and home responsibilities, possibly leading them to conceal career-home conflicts due to feelings of guilt and shame (Meeussen et al., 2019; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). On the other hand, according to traditional gender stereotypes women are expected to put family first and their career

as second (Aarntzen et al., 2022; Nomaguchis, 2012). Under such a situation, women may sacrifice their recreational time and work to spend more time with their family, implying high levels of career-home conflict. The lack of such a gender difference could also be attributed to the small number of male participants, which is represented by an unbalanced gender representation of the data. In addition, the higher number of female participants compared to males may have further affected the reliability and significance of the results. Furthermore, the data did not identify whether the participants had children, which may have had an impact on the results.

These findings challenge some of the common assumptions in the literature. They suggest that gender dynamics and relative status may have a more nuanced relationship with career ambition and career-home conflict than previously anticipated. They highlight the importance of considering individual differences and contextual factors when examining these relationships.

### **Limitations**

It is important to acknowledge that there are certain limitations in the study. First, the study was uneven in terms of gender representation. Few men filled out the questionnaire, which may have resulted in false the rejection of the posed hypotheses (H1b, H3). The sample size and exclusion of certain cases may have compromised the robustness of the results. In addition, the data incorporated multiple missing values, which affected the power of the current study. Furthermore, a large sample size is necessary to obtain a large effect. For this reason, it may be that there are indeed gender biases in the experience of career-home conflict, such that men may have lower levels of conflict and women may have higher levels of conflict. Future research should take these limitations into account by using larger and more diverse samples and including a broader range of relationship types.

A second limitation is that the study focused on randomly selected individuals who were in romantic relationship. It is important to see how individuals from the same couple assess their perceptions of the self and their partner. In addition, this line of research could examine the actor-partner effect and gain a better understanding of how concepts such as career ambition and career-home conflict are experienced by individual in a romantic relationship (Wright et al., 2023). In the present study, only a generalized account of these contracts was examined, which limits the results to a broader range of cases.

A third limitation is that this study analysed only certain variables to examine the relationship between career ambition, relative status, and career-home conflict. A number of variables (Perrone & Worthington, 2001; Michel et al., 2011) have been shown to have an important influence on couples' career ambitions (e.g., partner support, social support, role ambiguity, social norms and expectations, family role stressors). These other factors could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how one's career aspirations may be influenced in daily life. For example, parenthood could be a significant factor impacting the outcome of hypothesis 2.

### **Implications**

This study serves as a baseline for a deeper understanding of the work-life behaviours of heterosexual couples. It lays the groundwork for future research that can further explore the complexities and nuances of these dynamics. By applying longitudinal or mixed-research methods (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000; Mielniczuk, 2023), researchers can build on this initial study and provide more comprehensive insights into the factors that influence work-life balance in heterosexual relationships.

Understanding work-life behaviours and dynamics among heterosexual couples has valuable implications for professional development programs. For example, organizations can develop targeted interventions to help individuals achieve a healthy work-life balance (DeSimone, 2020). Research shows that countries that use more holistically workplace practices and policies integration, such as Scandinavian countries, report lower career-home imbalance (Gallie, 2003; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006). This knowledge can inform the development of career planning strategies, mentoring programs, and training initiatives to help employees better manage their professional and personal commitments.

### **Future Recommendations**

To enhance our understanding of career ambitions within romantic relationships, it is recommended that future research examine larger sample sizes and take a more comprehensive approach. Rather than relying solely on individual self-assessments, including both partners of the same couple in the study would provide a more holistic perspective. This would allow researchers to examine how the perceptions and aspirations of both individuals jointly influence career aspirations.

In addition, it is critical to examine how one's perceptions interact with their partner's perceptions in influencing career ambition. By looking at the dynamic interplay between partners, researchers can reveal the complex mechanisms that drive career ambition in the context of a romantic relationship. This understanding can shed light on how support, competition, or other relationship dynamics affect career ambition and decisions.

Finally, cultural factors and social biases should also be considered when examining career-home conflicts and career ambitions among romantic couples. Different cultures have different norms, values, and expectations regarding work-life balance, gender roles, and career development. For example, women from places with lower levels of egalitarianism might have lower expectations of support from their partner (Reverberi et al., 2022). Researchers should be aware of these cultural nuances to avoid generalizations and ensure that findings are contextually relevant.

### **Conclusion**

The results of our study are in line with the existing literature, which reports differences in behaviour towards career ambition between men and women. Overall, the findings suggest that women's career ambition is influenced by their relative status compared to their partners, indicating that women with higher relative status report higher career ambition. For men, on the other hand, the data revealed no relationship between men's relative status compared to their partner in career ambition levels. It may be possible that men's ambition is supported by other factors, such as traditional societal norms, and is not affected by the comparison of their status with that of their partners.

Further, it was examined whether career-home conflict contributes to explaining the interaction between relative status and career ambitions, but the results did not support such influence. The study also examined whether there are gender differences in experiencing career-home conflict and whether this would impact the one's career ambition. The findings did not indicate the presence of such a difference. Future research could explore the impact of additional effects, such as cultural factors and parenthood effects, when examining these relationships. Understanding these dynamics has an impact on individuals who are aiming to balance their career goals and family responsibilities, and on organizations that are seeking to create more supportive work environment that promotes career-home balance.

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## Appendix A

### Information Letter of the Questionnaire

Welcome!

Thank you for taking the time to cooperate in this study.

On the next page you receive some information about the study. Please read through this carefully.

NEXT PAGE

#### **Information letter**

The purpose of this research is to get more insights into the relationship between different factors at work and in your private life. We will ask you questions about your relationship and how you feel about your work. As we are interested in your vision and experiences, there are no right or wrong answers.

You can participate in this study if you are 18 years or older. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. Your responses will be confidential as we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address.

The study is conducted according to the guidelines of the ethics committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with representatives of Utrecht University. The procedure involves filling in an online survey that will take approximately 5-10 minutes.

First, you will be asked general demographic questions. Subsequently, you will answer a few questions. The topic of the questions varies. We ask that you answer the questions truthfully. Your first idea for the answers is usually the most applicable. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact [g.limani@students.uu.nl](mailto:g.limani@students.uu.nl).

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "I agree" button below indicates that:

- you have read the information given above
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

If you wish to participate in the research study, please agree to participate by clicking on the "I agree" button.

• I agree

• I disagree

(If "I disagree" link to end the questionnaire)

### Demographic Data

1. What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/ third gender
- Prefer not to say

2. What is your age?

Open-ended question (only numbers, accept from 18+)

3. What is the highest level of your education?

- High-School Degree
- Vocational Degree
- Secondary Vocational Education (MBO)
- Higher Vocational Education (HBO)
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD or higher
- Other (please specify)

4. What is your employment status?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Employed by Wages
- Student
- Retired
- Other (please specify)

5. How many hours do you work per week?

- Open-ended question (only numbers)

### **Responsibility at Work**

(Added-if female)

6. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 10 at what level you're working in your organization?

1 = lowest level (having little to no responsibility)

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 highest level (being a manager or the owner)

7. What is your current romantic relationship status?

(If in a committed relationship, please indicate how many years. In case this is less than one year, place 0 in the box.)

- Single
- In a committed relationship for ... years

If in a committed relationship over 12 months, continue

8. Please indicate the percentage of the income that is earned by you vs. by your partner.?

[slider ranging from 0 (100% by my partner, 0% by me) to 100 (100% by me, 0% by my partner)]

If unemployed and retired is not selected:

### Appendix B

#### Career Ambition Scale

For the following question please rate how much you agree with the following statements from “totally disagree” (= 1) to “totally agree” (= 5).

		Totally disagree	Partially disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially agree	Totally agree
1	I want to achieve the highest possible level in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I have the ambition to reach a higher position.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I like to be challenged in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I am ambitious.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I am not really interested in achieving the highest possible levels at work (reversed).	1	2	3	4	5
6	A career is important for my self-actualization and self-development.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I would like to fulfil a top position.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I have set high goals for my career.	1	2	3	4	5
9	A career does not have priority in my life (reversed).	1	2	3	4	5

If unemployed and retired is not selected:

#### Occupation ratio

Please indicate what you would expect to be the ratio of current male/female jobholders in your current occupation (Glick et al 1995)

With responses given on a slider from 0 (only male) to 100 (only female)

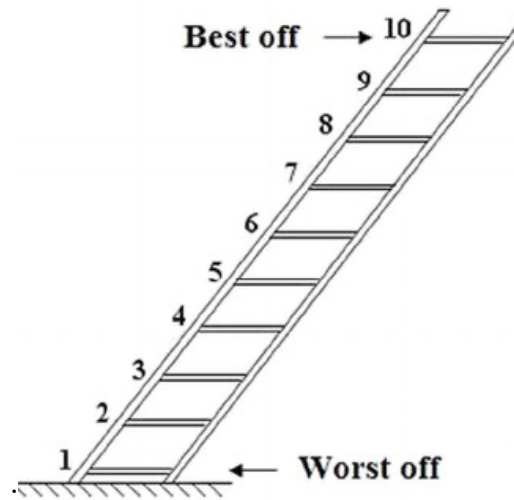
If in a committed relationship:

## Appendix C

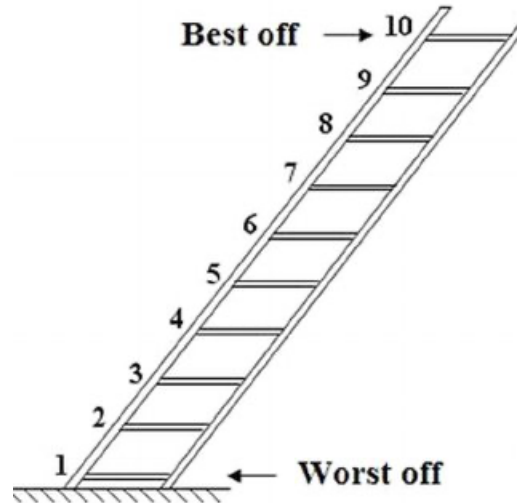
### Relative Status Scale

Instructions: Imagine that this ladder is a representation of how society is set up. At the top of the ladder are the people who have the most money, the highest amount of schooling, the best jobs, and the most respect. At the bottom are the people who have the least money, little to no education, no jobs or jobs no one wants, and the least respect. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

1. Where would you place yourself on this ladder? Please slide the “X” (at the end of this page) to where you think you stand at this time in your life relative to your partner in the perceived level of honor or prestige in society.



2. Where would you place your partner on this ladder? Please slide the “Y” (at the end of this page) to where you think he/she stands at this time in your life relative to you in the perceived level of honor or prestige in society.



If unemployed and retired is not selected:

**Appendix D**

**Career-Home Conflicts Scale**

Please rate how much you agree with the following statements from “totally disagree” (= 1) to “totally agree” (= 5).

		Totally disagree	Partially disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially agree	Totally agree
1	My work prevents me spending sufficient quality time with my family.	1	2	3	4	5
2	There is no time left at the end of the day to do the things I'd like at home (e.g., chores and leisure activities).	1	2	3	4	5
3	My family misses out because of my work commitments.	1	2	3	4	5
4	My work has a negative impact on my family life.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Working often makes me irritable or short tempered at home.	1	2	3	4	5
6	My work performance suffers because of my personal and family commitments.	1	2	3	4	5



7	Family related concerns or responsibilities often distract me at work.	1	2	3	4	5
8	If I did not have a family, I'd be a better employee.	1	2	3	4	5
9	My family has a negative impact on my day-to-day work duties.	1	2	3	4	5
10	It is difficult to concentrate at work because I am so exhausted by family responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5

If female and working over 20 hours/fulltime a week, continue:

How often do you experience that a male co-worker...

(A co-worker can be a same level colleague, but also a subordinate or supervisor)

		Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
1	Gives unwanted sexual attention.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Attempts to discuss sex.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Attempts to establish a sexual relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Stares/leers at you.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Repeats requests for drinks/dinner despite rejection.	1	2	3	4	5
6	(Attempts to) touch you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Subtly bribes you.	1	2	3	4	5

8	Makes you afraid of poor treatment if you do not cooperate.	1	2	3	4	5
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If unemployed and retired is not selected:

**Work engagement (UWES-9)**

Below you find nine questions related to your work/job. Answer each of the nine questions by selecting the one response alternative (ranging from “never” to “always”) for each question that best describes you.

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy	1	2	3	4	5
2	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am enthusiastic about my job.	1	2	3	4	5
4	My job inspires me.	1	2	3	4	5
5	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I feel happy when I am working intensely.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I am proud of the work that I do.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I am immersed in my job.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I get carried away when I am working.	1	2	3	4	5

If unemployed and retired is not selected:

**Work addiction**

Below you find seven questions related to your work/job. Answer each of the seven questions by selecting the one response alternative (ranging from “never” to “always”) for each question that best describes you. How often during the last year have you ...

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	Thought of how you could free up more time to work?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Spent much more time working than initially intended?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Worked in order to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness and depression?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Been told by others to cut down on work without listening to them?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Become stressed if you have been prohibited from working?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Deprioritized hobbies, leisure activities, and exercise because of your work?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Worked so much that it has negatively influenced your health?	1	2	3	4	5

If in a committed relationship:

**Relationship conflicts**

Below you find three questions related to your romantic relationship. Answer each of the three questions by selecting the one response alternative (ranging from “little or none” to “the most”) for each question that best describes you.

		Little or none	Somewhat	Very Much	Extremely much	The most
1	How much do you and this person get upset with or mad at each other?	1	2	3	4	5
2	How much do you and this person disagree and quarrel?	1	2	3	4	5

3	How much do you and this person argue with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
---	--	---	---	---	---	---

If in a committed relationship:

**Support from partner**

Below you find 7 questions related to the support you receive from your partner. Please indicate on each question from 1 (not much support) to 4 (a lot of support) which best describes your partner.

1.	My partner is someone I can count on for financial support if I need it	4	3	2	1
2.	My partner is someone I can talk with about things that are important to me	4	3	2	1
3.	My partner is someone who is affectionate toward me	4	3	2	1
4.	My partner is someone who understands how I am feeling	4	3	2	1
5.	My partner is someone who talks with me and spends time with me	4	3	2	1
6.	My partner is someone whom I can count on	4	3	2	1
7.	My partner is someone who does things with me	4	3	2	1

If Male and in a committed relationship:

**Gender Status loss Questionnaire**

Please rate how much you agree with the following statements from "strongly disagree" (=1) to "strongly agree" (=5)

**Within my romantic relationship:**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly disagree
I feel like less of a man.	1	2	3	4	5
I would feel upset if it was not my duty to provide the necessary resources for my family.	1	2	3	4	5

I feel like being the wage earner in the family suits me.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I cannot let myself appear weak.	1	2	3	4	5

### Closing

Thank you for your participation!

If there is anything you would like to say about this research, you can do so here:

[text box]

If you have any questions or comments regarding this research, please contact [g.limani@students.uu.nl](mailto:g.limani@students.uu.nl). For formal complaints about this study, you can contact an independent complaints officer ([complaints officer-fetcsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:complaints_officer-fetcsocwet@uu.nl)).

Click Next to submit your responses.

**Appendix E**

**Results Output**

**Table 1**

*Demographics Analysis*

	N	%	M	SD
	209		1.72	.47
Gender				
Female	146	69.9		
Male	61	29.2		
Non-Binary	2	1.0		
	209			
Age			37.59	14.99
	209			
Level of Education			4.71	1.52
High-School Degree	17	8.1		
Vocational Degree	2	1.0		
Secondary Vocational Education (MBO)	15	7.2		
Higher Vocational Education (HBO)	38	18.2		
Bachelor's Degree	67	32.1		
Master's Degree	62	29.7		
PhD or Higher	5	2.4		
Other	3	1.4		
	209			
Employment Status			2.33	1.87
Full-Time	109	52.2		
Part-Time	43	20.6		
Self- Employed	23	11.0		
Employed by Wages	15	7.2		
Student	11	5.3		
Retired	4	1.9		
Other	4	1.9		
	209			
Working Hours			38.78	41.60

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlation Analysis of Background, Predictor and Outcome Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	1	-.21**	.20**	-.08	-.10	-.10	.01	.15*	.07
2. Age	-.21**	1	.05	-.01	.23**	.19**	-.05	-.17*	-.34**
3. Educational level	.20**	.05	1	-.04	.29**	-.11	.25**	.00	.16*
4. Working ours	-.08	-.01	-.04	1	-.07	.15*	.09	.02	.09
5. Status scale of the self	-.10	.23**	.29**	-.07	1	.31**	.31**	.01	.06
6. Status scale of the partner	-.10	.19**	-.11	.15*	.31**	1	-.31**	-.15*	-.20**
7. Relative status	.01	-.05	.25**	.09	.31**	-.31**	1	.15*	.19**
8. Career-home conflict	.15*	-.17*	.00	.02	.01	-.15*	.15*	1	.23**
9. Career ambition	.07	-.34**	.16*	.09	.06	-.20**	.19**	.23**	1

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$ .*

\**. Correlation is significant at the  $p = 0.05$ .*

**Regression Analysis- Hypothesis 1a and 1b**

**Table 3**

*Regression Coefficients of Relative Status in Career Ambition*

Variable	$\beta$	SE	p
Constant	4.32	.33	<.001
Age	-.02	.00	<.001
Relative status of the self	.03	.05	.600
Relative status	.09	.04	.010
R2	.15		

Note. N= 139

\*Gender=Female

\*Dependent variable= Career ambition

**Table 4**

*Regression Coefficients of Relative Status in Career Ambition*

Variable	$\beta$	SE	p
Constant	4.95	.49	<.001
Age	-.02	.01	<.001
Relative status of the self	-.04	.08	.581
Relative status	-.06	.05	.216
R2	.29		

Note. N= 57

\*Gender=Male

\*Dependent variable: Career ambition



**PROCESS macro, Model 1 Moderation- Hypothesis 2**

**Table 5**

*Career-Home Conflicts Moderation Model Coefficients*

Model	Estimate	S. E	t	p	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
H <sub>0</sub> constant	4.103	.33	12.46	.000	3.45	4.75
H <sub>1</sub> MRelstat	.14	.07	1.93	.055	-.00	.27
MCHC	.13	.06	2.16	.032	.01	.26
MRelstat*MCHC	-.02	.03	-.82	.414	-.07	.03
Age_1	-.02	.00	-4.89	.000	-.02	-.01
MStat 1	.02	.04	.40	.687	-.06	.09

Note. N= 189

\*Model 1.

*Y: Career ambition*

*X: Relative status*

*W: Career-home conflicts*

\*Covariates: age and relative status of the self

**PROCESS macro, Model 3, Moderated Moderation- Hypothesis 3**

**Table 6**

*Gender Moderated Moderation Model Coefficients*

Model	Estimate	S. E	t	p	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
H <sub>0</sub> constant	4.60	.36	12.75	.000	3.88	5.31
H <sub>1</sub> MRelstat	.00	.11	.04	.970	-.22	.22
MCHC	-.17	.25	-.67	.502	-.66	.32
MRelstat*MCHC	-.10	.10	-.96	.336	-.31	.10
Gender	-.07	.11	-.64	.525	-.28	.14
MRelstat*Gender	.04	.06	.71	.481	-.08	.18
MCHC*Gender	.17	.14	1.27	.207	-.09	.45
MRelstat*Gender*Gender	.05	.06	.84	.403	-.07	.17
Age_1	-.02	.00	-5.06	.000	-.02	-.01
MStat 1	.01	.04	.32	.749	-.07	.09

Note. N= 187

\*Model 1.

*Y: Career ambition*

*X: Relative status*

*W: Career-home conflicts*

*Z: Gender*

\*Covariates: age and relative status of the self