Exploring the Impact of Perceived Social Status in Role-Reversed Heterosexual Relationships on Women's Ambition in Masculine Occupations: The Role of Partner Support

Fruzsina Czine (7759622)

Utrecht University

Master Thesis Social, Health, and Organisational Psychology

Track: Work and Organisational Psychology

First reviewer: Melissa Vink

Second reviewer: Wieby Altink

27 June 2023

Word count: 8388

May be made publicly accessible

Abstract

Women within a role-reversed relationship whose status exceeds their partners and who are pursuing masculine occupations experience a lot of career barriers. The purpose of the study was the examine the impact of social status on women's career ambition who are pursuing a masculine occupation and to understand how emotional spousal support plays a role in this relationship. This was important due to the lack of research on at-home dynamics related to the career ambition of women. In total, 182 participants were used, with an age ranging from 18 to 66. As expected, social status was positively associated with a career ambition to pursue a masculine occupation. Furthermore, in line with the expectations, spousal emotional support was positively associated with career ambition. This means that women whose status exceeds their partners and who are ambitious to pursue a masculine occupation can benefit from spousal emotional support. Further research should examine the effects of age and level of education as these variables might have an underlying impact on career ambition because they showed a significant correlation with it. Practical implications are that couples should emphasize emotional spousal support. Support programs could also enhance the awareness of spousal support and provide women with further resources in battling career barriers. Finally, the research should be carried out on an ethnically diverse sample, as the results might differ culturally.

Keywords: perceived social status, role-reversed relationship, women in masculine occupations, spousal support

Exploring the Impact of Perceived Social Status in Role-Reversed Heterosexual Relationships on Women's Ambition in Masculine Occupations: The Role of Partner Support.

While many biases and obstacles related to gender have decreased over time, gender stereotypes still hinder the advancement of women's careers (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Gender preconceptions continue to have a negative impact on the prospects for women to advance their careers. These prejudices influence women's career advancement in the workplace (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). In recent years, there has been a shift in traditional gender norms, as more women than at any point in history have entered the workforce and obtained higher levels of education (Fry, 2022). According to Domenico and Horowitz (2007), by 1900, a quarter of the female population was included in the labor force. This increased over the next decade, and only ten years later, nearly 7.5 million women worked outside their homes. Despite the progress in gender equality movements, women are consistently underrepresented in traditionally masculine occupations (Martin & Barnard, 2013). This raises a question about the factors influencing their ambition and career choices. Research has mainly focused on factors that influence women's career choices within the workplace (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Such factors include workplace climate and the amount of stress that accompanies the workplace (Mutekwe et al., 2011). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that much of one's life occurs at home. Therefore, it is essential to take into account that at-home dynamics may also impact women's career ambitions and, consequently, the underrepresentation of women in male-dominated occupations (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). One such at-home dynamic is the amount of support one receives from their partner. Notably, according to Faniko et al. (2022), women, on average, receive less support from their partners. Given that support promotes professional achievement, this scenario may have an impact on women's career development (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). Thus, understanding the role of partner support is crucial.

Additionally, it is still common and challenging to change gender norms that dictate heterosexual relationships, with men serving as the family's breadwinners and having higher status roles in society and women serving as the homemakers and having lower status roles (Vink et al., 2022). Additionally, people stigmatize couples who defy traditional gender roles, making them perceive women with higher status than their partner as the relationship's dominant partner while men with lower status than their female partner as the relationship's weaker partner (Vink et al., 2022). Therefore, men might be more resistant to entering roles characterized as lower status, as they might receive backlash for it (Clow & Ricciardelli,

2011). Consequently, women might resist entering functions described as having higher status, as they might also be judged. Thus, there are still fewer heterosexual relationships where women have higher status than their partners (Vink et al., 2022). Consequently, less research is done on the topic of role-reversed relationships. For this reason, the following analysis will investigate how relationship dynamics in terms of status drive women's ambitions and whether support from their partner may buffer this. The following research question is explored: *"How do women's perceptions of gender role divisions within a role-reversed, heterosexual relationship (i.e., a relationship in which the woman has higher social status than her male partner) affect their ambition in a masculine occupation and how does emotional support moderate this relationship?*

Women's perceptions of gender role divisions and their career ambitions in masculine occupations

According to social role theory, sex differences and behavioral similarities between men and women reflect people's opinions of the social roles that men and women play in the society in which they live (Eagly, 1987). Due to economic, ecological, social, and technological constraints in the past, men and women were given labor jobs that corresponded with their physical characteristics (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Therefore, one would see men carry out tasks related to speed and strength, while women would be seen filling charges related to family and home. Gender role expectations—expectations about the traits and actions of men and women—have arisen due to the distinct societal positions that men and women have historically held based on this labor divide (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). This means that women are supposed to perform the feminine gender role, representing community values (e.g., nurturing and kindness), and males are expected to fulfill the masculine gender role, which reflects agentic attributes (e.g., assertiveness and strengths) (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). As a result, people believe that a woman's ability to provide for her family should precede her degree and income and that a man should provide financially for his family.

Nowadays, more men and women are taking on social positions historically belonging to the other sex (e.g., male homemakers, female leaders), which goes against traditional gender role expectations (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). When people deviate from traditional gender roles, they can experience negative social consequences and resistance. For example, they might become a subject of stereotypes and discrimination (Clow & Ricciardelli, 2011; Evans & Frank, 2003). Furthermore, when the gender hierarchy, which places males at the top of the status hierarchy and women below men, is violated, it can cause a backlash effect

(Rudman et al., 2012). This is in line with the status incongruity hypothesis, which states that people who defy the gender hierarchy by straying from conventional gender roles are viewed as deviants and subject to punishment (Rudman et al., 2012). For example, research by Clow and Ricciardelli (2011) has shown that men who take on traditionally viewed feminine roles, such as nursing, are frequently rejected and judged less competent and masculine. This is because they take on a role associated with a lower status than roles related to what the gender hierarchy dictates. Similarly, women who pursue traditionally masculine roles are frequently met with opposition and are perceived as less likable and capable than their male counterparts (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). This backlash effect can be explained by how people's opinions of others are shaped by their gender-based expectations and prejudices, which devaluate people who do not fit into their established gender norms (Rudman et al., 2012). The concept of gender role attitudes can be related to the status incongruity hypothesis because it can explain why women are frequently seen as having low status in various professions. The term "gender role attitudes" describes people's beliefs about the roles men and women should perform in society (Van Der Horst, 2014). When people adhere to traditional gender roles, where the man is the breadwinner, and the woman is the homemaker, they are said to have conventional gender role attitudes (Van Der Horst, 2014). The opposite, when an equal division of labor is preferred, is referred to as egalitarian or having modern gender ideas (Van Der Horst, 2014). These attitudes impact the choices individuals make in their everyday lives, including career decisions. The influence that gender role attitudes have on the career choices and outcomes of women is significant. When individuals hold traditional gender roles, it can influence societal norms and expectations that restrict women's career advancement and men's willingness to take an active role in the family domain (Van Der Horst, 2014).

While many gender-related expectations and barriers have diminished over time, gender stereotypes still prevent women from advancing in their careers. For instance, Tabassum and Nayak (2021) found that women are more likely to pursue a career in entrepreneurship if their fathers or other relatives have connections in that area, indicating that their role in the business is not a choice but rather a given due to their birth. Furthermore, women in more male-dominated fields, such as engineering, finance, and banking, encounter different issues (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Problems for women in male-dominated occupations represent female managers who are viewed less rationally than their male counterparts in management positions in male-oriented fields (Mishra & Kray, 2022). Also, female professors in high-status departments (such as engineering) are regarded less

favorably than female professors in low-status departments (such as history) (Mishra & Kray, 2022). These problems may negatively affect how women perceive themselves, such as being less competent than others, consequently affecting their ambition to pursue a career in a masculine occupation. It is essential to realize that women in female-dominated fields also encounter problems, such as less pay for equal work (Leuze & Strauß, 2016). However, this study focuses on women in male-dominated occupations because there is less research on the area, and this topic is becoming increasingly important. As the world constantly evolves, more women start pursuing high-status, male-dominated professions, leading to a chance to surpass their partners (Vink et al., 2022).

The fact that women with higher status than their male partners show higher ambition to pursue masculine occupations can often be attributed to their higher levels of education. Research by Wicht et al. (2021) highlights that women aspire to jobs with higher socioeconomic status (SES) than do their male partners. This aligns with the argument that highly educated women, who have surpassed their partners in status, are particularly inclined to pursue masculine occupations. One reason for this might be that they are more equipped with information which provides them with a broadened horizon and a more extensive range of employment alternatives (Le & Nguyen, 2020). By earning higher degrees, they gain advanced knowledge about critical thinking skills, which gives them competence and confidence to pursue a non-traditional career option. Furthermore, they might be more aware of these opportunities and view them as more reachable. However, it is essential to realize that there is still a lack of highly educated women who surpass their partners. This might be a reason for the lack of women striving to be in a masculine occupation. Regardless of all the challenges women face, they continue to strive for positions where they can become leaders and are successfully able to achieve their goals (Fry, 2022). Nonetheless, most researchers have focused on the ambition of men and a small amount of research addressed the importance of ambitious women in male-dominated occupations.

External factors do not solely drive the decisions that women make at work. To illustrate, ambition plays a central role in the decisions women make regarding their careers (Harman & Sealy, 2017). It is defined as the degree to which people prioritize their careers, seek promotions, and are prepared to make sacrifices for them (Harman & Sealy, 2017). According to research, ambitious women are more likely to pursue leadership positions and possibilities for job progression. For example, a study by Harman and Sealy (2017) showed that ambitious women had a higher chance of pursuing promotions, bargaining for higher wages, and prioritizing their careers over family responsibilities. However, pursuing careers

for ambitious women in the workplace can also involve negative consequences. For instance, ambitious women are perceived as less likable and less competent than their male partners (Heilman & Chen, 2005). Because of this, they frequently experience prejudice and a lack of support from peers and partners (Heilman & Chen, 2005). This is called a double-blind dilemma, where when women assume leadership roles, they are seen as capable leaders but are despised (Catalyst, 2023). This can lead to difficulties in balancing conflicting expectations and perceptions.

We expect that – despite the advantages of ambition – one of the under-investigated reasons why women encounter difficulties and roadblocks when pursuing ambitious goals in masculine occupations is driven by their home context. Specifically, we expect that women in a heterosexual relationship in which their ambition may surpass their partners may experience more difficulties as compared to women in more traditional gender-role relationships. Cultural norms that have survived for centuries have formed the conventional perspective of women's place in society. In many cultures worldwide, it is widely accepted that a woman's primary duty is to care for her husband and children. It was feared that once women entered the workforce, valued feminine characteristics, such as submissiveness, would be lost, leading to less caring mothers (Domenico & Horowitz, 2007). These expectations place a burden on women who eventually outshine their partners, and they might feel a sense of guilt or selfishness (Domenico & Horowitz, 2007). Guilt can develop as a fear of being judged by others or as self-doubt. The consequences of these feelings can cause women not to pursue career opportunities that are not in line with traditional gender stereotypes.

Partner support

The relationships of women may cause constraints in pursuing a masculine career, but their relationships may also form a buffer to support them in pursuing a career. In this regard, social support from partners is a crucial factor. Social support, defined as the physical and emotional comfort provided by others, has multiple positive effects (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). These include stress reduction, health improvement, and the enhancement of professional success (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008; Marcinkus et al., 2007). One person can receive support from multiple areas, such as friends, family, and partners. However, spousal support is particularly essential for working women, giving them a feeling of security, reduced work-life conflict, and improved well-being (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008; Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2004). In addition, emotional support from the partner can significantly impact a woman's career progression. Women who receive emotional support from their partners have the opportunity to focus on their careers more and might even take chances

otherwise impossible because of the competing demands or lack of resources. Research by Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) suggests that women who receive support from their spouses are more satisfied at work, are more likely to look for opportunities that allow them to enhance their skills and resources and are more likely to attend higher education. All of these positive outcomes occur because they enable women to concentrate on their careers while mitigating the challenges connected to work and family obligations. In addition, those women who receive emotional support from their partners are more able to cope with stress, maintain their mental health, and navigate interpersonal conflicts (Ozbay et al., 2007). All of these qualities can provide women with the necessary skills which are needed to have a successful career. Nevertheless, spousal support might not always benefit women's career progression. There are cases where one's partner might feel vulnerable and might even behave in a way that undermines their career, such as expressing jealousy (Frye & Breaugh, 2004). Furthermore, an unsupportive partner can cause a woman to feel increased work-life support and stress, leading to negative consequences for their career advancement (Frye & Breaugh, 2004). Because of all the upper mentioned information and unexplored areas, the following hypotheses are going to be examined in the context of relationships:
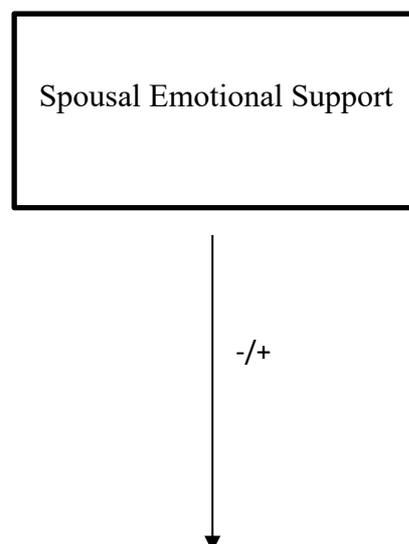
Hypothesis 1: *Women who view themselves as having higher social status than their partner (i.e., role-reversed relationship) will be more ambitious in pursuing a masculine career*
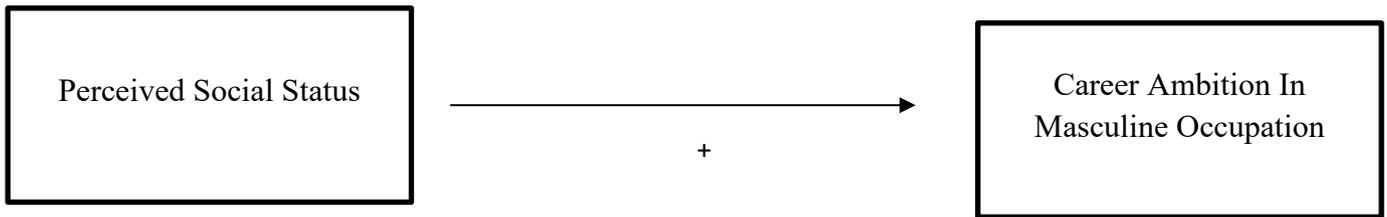
Hypothesis 1A: *Women within a role-reversed relationship whose partners show low emotional support will be less ambitious in pursuing a masculine career*

Hypothesis 2B: *Women within a role-reversed relationship whose partners show high emotional support will be more ambitious in pursuing a masculine career*

Figure 1

Research model visualizing the proposed hypotheses

```
┌─────────────────────────┐                                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │                                    │                         │
│  Perceived Social Status│ ──────────────────────────────▶    │   Career Ambition In    │
│                         │              +                     │  Masculine Occupation   │
│                         │                                    │                         │
└─────────────────────────┘                                    └─────────────────────────┘
```

Method

Participants and Design

We conducted a power analysis using G*Power software to understand how many participants we needed for our research. We aimed for a power level of 0.95, which indicates a 95% probability of detecting if an effect truly exists. We found that 111 participants are needed for the desired power level.

Participants (N=523) were recruited through a survey conducted in Qualtrics, which was then shared via an online link with our professional networks. This was part of a larger research project conducted with master's students who were also interested in similar research areas. All participants had to identify as a woman, be employed, and be in a relationship while participating in this research. The initial sample consisted of 523 participants, including men (N = 134), women (N= 253), gender non-conforming individuals (N = 3), and those who preferred not to disclose their gender (N = 3). Those who did not identify as women were excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, 73 participants were excluded because they failed to meet the requirement of being employed, and 102 participants were excluded because they failed to meet the relationship requirement. The researchers used a sample of 182 women for the analysis. The age range of the participants was from 18 to 66 (M = 34.7, SD = 13.7)

We used a cross-sectional design in this study, which is a type of study that collects data from a sample of participants at a specific point in time. It is also important to note that we measured the variable of interest rather than manipulated it.

Procedure

Data collection began on 21 March 2023 and continued until 01 June 2023, with other master students interested in related topics. We used convenience sampling, intending to obtain a broader sample. Participants were told that the study aimed to measure women's ambitions in the workplace, and no deception was involved. Respondents were informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they might revoke their consent at any moment with no consequences. Before the assessments started, informed consent was

acquired, and participants received guarantees that their information would be kept private. Furthermore, the participants completed all the tests online.

Participants first disclosed the following demographic data: age, the highest level of education, gender, relationship status, and employment status. They were then asked to complete scales measuring occupation ratio and ambition (dependent variable). Subsequently, the researcher assessed women's perceptions of the status division within their relationship (independent variable) and emotional support from their partner (mediator). The researcher included two attention check items within the ambition scale to ensure that participants completed the assessment in an alert state. Finally, the participants were thanked for participating and could leave questions or comments if they had any in a text box.

Ethical statement

The Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of Utrecht University granted ethical approval for this study, filed under the number 23-0709. This research was carried out in accordance with NIP.

Measures

Independent variable

Women's perception of status division within their relationship To measure the perception of the status division of women, the MacArtur's Status scale (MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status – Adult Version | SPARQtools, n.d.) was used. This scale intends to assess subjective social status with a numbered stepladder graphic. A ten-step ladder is used to present the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status. Two ladders were shown to the participants, and they were asked to imagine that the ladder is a representation of how society is set up. At the top of the ladder are people with the most money and the highest level of education, while at the bottom are the people with the least amount of money and little to no education. Participants were asked to indicate where they would place themselves on the first ladder and where they would place their partner on the second ladder ($r = .316, p < .001$). Furthermore, we measured relative status by subtracting women's perceived status from men's.

Moderator

Perceived emotional support In order to measure the perceived emotional support women receive from their partners, a seven-item questionnaire was used based on a study by Straughen et al. (2013). Items such as *"My partner is someone who is affectionate toward me"* and *"My partner is someone who understands how I am feeling"* were measured. The method was chosen because it is intended to measure the amount of support one receives

from their partner. A four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not much support*) to 4 (a *lot of support*), was used to report their answers. The reliability of the scale is found to be $\alpha= 0.8$

Dependent variable

Career Ambition scale. The author utilized the career ambition scale of nine items created by Duckworth et al. (2007) to measure career ambition. The scale is intended to measure statements such as "I *am ambitious*" and "I *have set high goals for my career*." Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *1 (totally disagree)* to *5 (totally agree)*. The reliability of the scale is found to be $\alpha= 0.9$

Occupation ratio scale. The occupation ratio scale by Glick et al. (1995) was used to assess the ratio of men and women in one's occupation. The questionnaire consists of one question, asking participants to indicate what the ratio of current female/male jobholders in their current occupation is, ranging from 0 (*meaning only males*) to 100 (*meaning only females*)

Results

Overview of Analyses

First, I will check preliminary results by examining the correlations for important covariates and inspecting the first associations between variables. Next, I will conduct a hierarchical linear regression to test Hypothesis 1. Lastly, I will conduct a regression analysis with the HAYES process model to test Hypotheses 1a and 2b.

Preliminary Analysis

The result of descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables are displayed in Table 1. First, I checked whether background variables had an effect on our independent, moderator, and dependent variables and potentially should be included as covariates in the hypothesis testing models. A negative correlation was found between age and career ambition, indicating that as individuals grow older, their career ambition tends to decrease ($r = .25, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, education showed a positive correlation with career ambition, indicating that individuals with higher levels of education show higher levels of career ambition ($r = .29, p < 0.01$). Lastly, employment status negatively correlated with career ambition, indicating that currently unemployed or lower-level status individuals exhibit lower levels of ambition ($r = -.23, p = .005$). As the variable's absolute and relative status affected our hypothesized variables, we included them as covariates in our hypothesis testing models. We did this to account for the disadvantage of relative scores.

Next, I checked the associations between the hypothesized paths. A positive correlation was found between perceived relative social status and career ambition, indicating

that the higher a women's status is compared to their partner, the more ambition they reported (r =.26, p < 0.01). This association is in the same direction as proposed by hypothesis 1. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between emotional support and career ambition, indicating that the more or less support one receives from their partner, the more or less ambitious she will be (r = .14, p < 0.01). This finding is in line with hypothesis 1A and is also in line with hypothesis 2B.

Table 1

Means, SD's, and correlations of the variable of interest

		Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Age	34,7	13,7										
2	Level of education	4,9	1,3	0,08									
3	Employment status	2,4	1,8	-0,14	-.33**								
4	Hours Worked	35,2	28,4	0,12	0,07	.21**							
5	Level of Work	6,4	2,5	.42**	0,01	-0,11	0,15						
6	Occupational ratio	54,7	23,0	0,13	-.25**	0,01	0,00	0,13					
7	Own status	6,5	1,6	.16*	.42**	-.21*	0,11	.28**	-0,02				
8	Relative Status	-0,1	1,9	0,03	.47**	-.19*	-0,09	0,07	-.28**	.55**			
9	Perceived Partner Support	3,5	0,6	-0,15	.20*	-0,06	0,01	0,05	-0,04	0,12	0,03		
10	Career Ambition	3,9	0,8	-.25**	.29**	-.23**	0,05	0,06	-.23**	0,16	.26**	0,14	

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Assumption checks

Several assumption checks were conducted to ensure that the assumption for regression and PROCESS were met. These included an assumption of normality, homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity.

First, the assumption of normality was assessed on the P-P plot. It revealed a linear relationship between the predictor and the outcome variable. Therefore we concluded that the assumption of linearity was met. Furthermore, we examined the assumption of homoscedasticity by examining scatterplots of standardized residuals against predicted values. It showed a constant spread of residuals across different levels of the predictor variables. Thus, we concluded that the assumption was met. At last, we looked at the assumption of the absence of multicollinearity by examining the VIF values. All the values fell below the threshold of ten, indicating the absence of multicollinearity (*VIF*= 1.4).

Do women with relatively higher status than their partners also report higher career ambitions?

In line with hypothesis 1, the analysis revealed that women who view themselves as having higher status than their partner reported more ambitions in pursuing a masculine career as compared to women who consider themselves to have lower status than their partner ($b = .18$, $se = .08$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .19$) (see table 2). On the other hand, we examined women who view themselves as having higher status than their partners but are in a feminine or equally distributed occupation. We found a non-significant effect that women in feminine or equally distributed occupations will be less ambitious in pursuing a masculine profession ($b= 0.8$, $se= .05$, $p= .15$, $\eta^2 =.04$).

Table 2

Regression analysis of status on career ambition of women in a masculine occupation

	β	SE	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.76	0.78	6.13	0.000
RelStat	.18	.08	2.26	.033
Own status	-.12	.17	-1.02	.318

Note. a. ORD = 1.00

b. Dependent Variable: CAmbitionMean

Does emotional support qualify the relationship between relative status and career ambition?

In line with hypotheses 1a and 2b, we found an interaction effect of $b=.19$, $se= .09$, $t(22)=1.98$, $r^2=.32$, $p=.05$. Inspecting the direction of the interaction; the findings suggest that the effect of relative status on career ambition is statistically significant. This suggests that women who receive low support from their partner are less likely to report higher levels of ambition when they are in a relationship in which they have a higher status than their male partner ($b= .19$, $se =t(22) = 2.5$ $p= .02$). These results indicate support for hypothesis 1a which states that women within a role-reversed relationship whose partners show low emotional support will be less ambitious in pursuing a masculine career. Additionally, at the level of high support, the findings suggest that women who receive high support from their partners are more likely to report higher ambition when they are in a relationship with higher

status than their partner (b=.25, se =.09 t(22) = 2.9 p=.009). This shows supportive evidence for hypothesis 2b which states that women within a role-reversed relationship whose partners show high emotional support will be more ambitious in pursuing a masculine career.

Discussion

The study aimed to examine how gender role division within role-reversed heterosexual relationships affects women's ambition in a masculine occupation and whether a supportive partner impacts this. Therefore, we decided to study the relationship between women's status and career ambition and whether emotional support moderates the relationship.

First, we found that women who view themselves as having higher status than their partners will be more ambitious in pursuing a masculine career. This might be attributed to the fact that they violated traditional gender roles proposed by the status incongruity theory. By perceiving themselves as having higher status, they challenge the traditional gender roles and hierarchy (Rudman et al., 2012). This might lead to them receiving more backlash than women who do not view themselves as having higher status than their partners (Rudman et al., 2012). Consequently, they might develop more resilience and strengths, causing them to be less prone to such judgments (Martin & Barnard, 2013). As a result, these women might be more likely to show determination to pursue a male-dominated occupation.

Furthermore, in line with our predictions, emotional support positively affects women's ambition to pursue a masculine occupation. This finding highlights the importance of emotional spousal support. Notably, research by Faniko et al. (2022) indicates that women, on average, report having less support than their male partners, emphasizing the importance of emotional support. The study further implies that women face additional barriers during their career pursuits due to the lack of emotional support they receive. As mentioned above, such barriers include gender biases and stereotypes (Hanek & Garcia, 2022). The issue with these is that they associate some occupations with men, creating expectations and limitations for women. Thus, they contribute to women feeling less ambitious to pursue a career in a masculine field. However, emotional support can buffer these effects by providing women with encouragement and belief in their abilities (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2004). Therefore, a supportive partner can help women to overcome the societal expectations placed on them. By recognizing the importance of emotional support, couples can encourage each other to create an environment where women feel encouraged to pursue a career in a masculine occupation.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

One of the main strengths of the paper is that it highlights the complex dynamics faced by women pursuing a career in a male-dominated field. By doing so, the paper challenges gender norms and stereotypes because it shows how hard it is for women to navigate societal expectations and career ambitions. Therefore, the study helps to increase our understanding of gender dynamics. At the same time, it fills in gaps in existing literature regarding the underrepresentation of women in masculine occupations and the reasons behind it because it highlights the importance of at-home dynamics and relationship dynamics experienced by women. Consequently, it shows how these dynamics impact women's career decisions. Thus, it closes a theoretical gap in research, as most research has focused on how workplace factors influence women's career choices and disregarded at-home dynamics (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of the prescriptive part of social role theory to investigate the expectation society places on women in masculine occupations. By examining the expectations placed on women, the study incorporates a more focused understanding of the factors that might impede women's career ambitions. Furthermore, the focus was explicitly on women because they face significant challenges associated with at-home societal expectations and gender stereotypes (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). By choosing this population of interest, we gained a better understanding of the experiences and challenges they face, which helped us understand the complex challenges associated with gender roles. Hence, our results might be generalized from our sample to the target population, strengthening the validity of our research. Lastly, the online questionnaire helped reach many participants, leading to representative sample size. Regardless, our sample mainly consisted of WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) participants, which threatened the external validity of the research.

It is essential to highlight the cultural differences in understanding gender roles and career choices. According to, Eagly and Chin (2010), gender stereotypes and discrimination can vary across cultures. They found that in countries exhibiting lower gender equality, women may encounter more backlash if they wish to pursue a masculine occupation. For instance, Eagly and Chin (2010) reported that Black and Latinos are more likely to agree that men and women should adhere to socially prescribed norms. Consequently, women would face more challenges pursuing a masculine occupation in countries with such views. On the other hand, countries that view gender equality positively show less backlash towards women wanting to pursue a male career. For instance, Asians report having more positive views on gender equality than whites, affecting the career choices and barriers women make (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Thus, this implies that cultural differences affect women's career pursuit in a

masculine occupation. Similarly to that, only heterosexual women in relationships were included in this study. When drawing conclusions about what the women in our sample received and valued to what lesbian women receive and value, we must be cautious. According to research, lesbian couples face unusual and particular stressors (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). Lesbian couples typically lack the parenting models that are available to others, and their gender role socialization can leave them confused about who gets to be the man and the woman. In contrast, all parents deal with the time constraints and exhaustion associated with raising young children (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). Lesbian couples have also been found to be more egalitarian than heterosexual couples in the home and with raising children. Research should systematically compare the intimate partner support needs and preferences of homosexual versus heterosexual women due to the differently gendered nature of lesbian relationships as well as the social and relational challenges that lesbians face (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). Looking into this could enhance our understanding of lesbian couples' support needs and consequently could examine how it affects their career ambitions.

Considering the implications mentioned above, further research should examine a more diverse cultural context to understand better how women's career progression is affected in different cultures. Additionally, this research paper mainly looked at perceived social status and how that impacts career ambition. Therefore, further research should consider studying other variables in more depth, such as age and level of education, as, according to our findings, they might impact women's career ambitions. Women are ambitious to pursue a career at a young age, as they prioritize career advancement and skill development. As women age, their career ambitions change, and they start prioritizing work-life balance and personal fulfillment (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Furthermore, at this age, women often reach the point of having kids. When women in professional positions reach a parenting threshold and have children, they decide to leave their jobs and prioritize home-related concerns (Harman & Sealy, 2017). This gives us a deeper understanding of why age positively affects career ambitions. Education can also play a role in influencing women's career ambitions. For instance, women with lower education might prefer a socially conservative ideology that supports upholding the status quo, such as the gender hierarchy (Vink et al., 2022). On the other hand, highly educated women might be more aware of these ideologies and show a preference for an equal division of labor. Consequently, they might be exposed to more career opportunities and have access to higher-status career options (Meeting & Development, 2011). Therefore, we can assume that women with higher education might exhibit greater career ambition aspirations, especially in the field of

masculine occupations. Another factor that should be considered is personal interest. Personal interest should be considered when choosing a career because people are more successful, happy, and likely to pursue a career that interests them (Humayon et al., 2018). For instance, if a woman is interested in becoming an engineer, which is considered a masculine occupation, she would likely not be a nurse, which is regarded as a feminine occupation. Research by Humayon et al. (2018) suggests that personal interest plays a vital role in career choices. Thus, a very strong personal interest in something will motivate you to be more driven and to pursue it vigorously (Humayon et al., 2018). Consequently, we can expect that women who show high interest in masculine occupations might exhibit higher levels of ambition to pursue them. Moreover, the research could benefit from conducting a longitudinal study because it helps track changes in women's career aspirations. Women's ambitions changes throughout their career as they navigate different life stages. For instance, research by Faniko et al. (2022) suggests that with age, women are expected to reduce their career ambitions and become mothers. This does not only impact women who already have children but also women who are without children and are unmarried (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Thus, the domestic responsibilities associated with women might have an impact on their career aspirations in the long run (Martin & Barnard, 2013). A longitudinal design could assess these shifts in women's careers and enhance our understanding of the relationships. At last, further research could examine our findings in an organizational context because it can be beneficial for organizations. Understanding how social status and support affect ambition can help organizations create a more inclusive and diverse environment, as support is already an essential part of several organizations (Shadur et al., 1999). Organizations need to recognize that women who perceive themselves as having higher status will be more ambitious. Organizations that recognize this could enhance the career aspirations of their employees, especially women (Kossek et al., 2016). By doing this, they can open doors for women to pursue careers in fields where men traditionally predominate. Thus, organizations could benefit from mentorship programs providing support for women (Kossek et al., 2016).

Practical Implications

The research was conducted to understand better how women's social status plays a role in their career ambition to pursue a masculine occupation. Furthermore, partners' emotional support was examined as a moderator between status and career ambition in masculine occupations. The assumption was that if women encompass higher social status than their partner, their career ambition would also be higher, and that support would positively affect the relationship. The results confirmed the link between social status and

career aspirations, indicating that social status is a critical factor in women's efforts to challenge long-held gender norms. Our research also shows that a supportive partner significantly influences women's lives and increases their desire to pursue careers traditionally associated with men.

The results highlight that open communication and a supportive partner can be essential in the career advancement of women. Support plays a crucial role in individual well-being and career success, especially for women (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008). For instance, it allows them to recognize and combat goal-related low self-worth feelings (Overall et al., 2010). Individuals can implement strategies that enhance women's career progression by recognizing the importance of support. The promotion of support in role-reversed heterosexual relationships and tailored support programs could help women fight against career barriers, consequently affecting the representations of women in male-dominated occupations. Creating programs that raise awareness of the importance of emotional support could enhance guidance and provide women with resources and a network that helps them navigate societal expectations and biases. Furthermore, we can examine that education plays an essential role in promoting gender equality and can help challenge traditional gender stereotypes (Meeting & Development, 2011). As mentioned beforehand, more educated women might be equipped with skills and resources that allow them to pursue a career in masculine occupations. Therefore, educating others about the prejudices and stereotypes experienced by women might enhance the awareness of the barriers women face in pursuing a masculine field. Therefore, workshops and seminars can be useful to enhance the understanding of people about the existing stereotypes. Consequently, these can affect the challenges women face within their career pursuit journey.

Conclusion

The authors conclude that women who are in a heterosexual relationship and whose status exceeds their partners, and who aspire to pursue a male-dominated occupation experience several career barriers. The findings implicate that women whose status exceeds their partners are more likely to show ambition toward masculine occupations. While the study highlighted several factors that can influence this, the focus was mainly on spousal emotional support. The research found that emotional support can buffer against the career barriers experienced by women, such as stereotypes and prejudice. Thus, by promoting awareness of emotional support's positive effects, individuals and organizations can create a supportive environment that empowers women to pursue their career aspirations.

References

Catalyst. (2023, March 24). *The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership (Infographic) | Catalyst*. https://www.catalyst.org/research/infographic-the-double-bind-dilemma-for-women-in-leadership/

Clow, K. A., & Ricciardelli, R. (2011). Women and Men in Conflicting Social Roles: Implications from Social Psychological Research. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, *5*(1), 191–226. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-2409.2011.01030.x

Domenico, D. M., & Horowitz, M. (2007). Career Aspirations of Women in the 20th Century. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, *22*(2). https://doi.org/10.21061/jcte.v22i2.430

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. R., & Kelly, D. D. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*(6), 1087–1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-role Interpretation*. Psychology Press.

Eagly, A. H., & Chin, J. L. (2010). Diversity and leadership in a changing world. *American Psychologist*, *65*(3), 216–224. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018957

Eagly, A. H., & Sczesny, S. (2019). Editorial: Gender Roles in the Future? Theoretical Foundations and Future Research Directions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01965

Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social Role Theory. In *SAGE Publications Ltd eBooks* (pp. 458–476). SAGE Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n49

Evans, J., & Frank, B. (2003). Contradictions and Tensions: Exploring Relations of Masculinities in the Numerically Female-Dominated Nursing Profession. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *11*(3), 277–292. https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1103.277

Ezzedeen, S. R., & Ritchey, K. D. (2008). The Man Behind the Woman. *Journal of Family Issues*, *29*(9), 1107–1135. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x08315363

Faniko, K., Ellemers, N., & Derks, B. (2022). Lack of ambition or lack of support? Diverging career experiences of men and women explain the persistence of gender bias. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *52*(9), 851–864. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12883

Fry, R. (2022, October 12). Women now outnumber men in the U.S. college-educated labor force. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/09/26/women-now-outnumber-men-in-the-u-s-college-educated-labor-force/

Frye, N. K., & Breaugh, J. A. (2004). Family-Friendly Policies, Supervisor Support, Work?Family Conflict, Family?Work Conflict and Satisfaction: A Test of a Conceptual Model. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *19*(2), 197–220. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-004-0548-4

Gordon, J. S., & Whelan-Berry, K. S. (2004). It takes two to tango: an empirical study of perceived spousal/partner support for working women. *Women in Management Review*, *19*(5), 260–273. https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420410545980

Hall, D. T., & Chandler, D. S. (2005). Psychological success: When the career is calling. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *26*(2), 155–176. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.301

Hanek, K. J., & Garcia, S. M. (2022). Barriers for women in the workplace: A social psychological perspective. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *16*(10). https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12706

Harman, C., & Sealy, R. (2017). Opt-in or opt-out: exploring how women construe their ambition at early career stages. *Career Development International*, *22*(4), 372–398. https://doi.org/10.1108/cdi-08-2016-0137

Harrison, L. M., & Lynch, A. H. (2005). Social Role Theory and the Perceived Gender Role Orientation of Athletes. *Sex Roles*, *52*(3–4), 227–236. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-1297-1

Heilman, M. E., & Chen, J. (2005). Same Behavior, Different Consequences: Reactions to Men's and Women's Altruistic Citizenship Behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *90*(3), 431–441. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.3.431

Heilman, M. E., & Okimoto, T. G. (2007). Why are women penalized for success at male tasks?: The implied communality deficit. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*(1), 81–92. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.1.81

Humayon, A. A., Raza, S., Khan, R., & Ansari, N. (2018). Effect of Family Influence, Personal Interest and Economic Considerations on Career Choice amongst Undergraduate Students in Higher Educational Institutions of Vehari, Pakistan. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, *7*(2), 129–142. https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2018.60333

Kossek, E. E., Su, R., & Wu, L. (2016). "Opting Out" or "Pushed Out"? Integrating Perspectives on Women's Career Equality for Gender Inclusion and Interventions. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 228–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316671582

Le, K., & Nguyen, M. (2020). How Education Empowers Women in Developing Countries. *B E Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, *21*(2), 511–536. https://doi.org/10.1515/bejeap-2020-0046

Leuze, K., & Strauß, S. (2016). Why do occupations dominated by women pay less? How 'female-typical' work tasks and working-time arrangements affect the gender wage gap among higher education graduates. *Work, Employment & Society*, *30*(5), 802–820. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015624402

MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status – Adult Version | SPARQtools. (n.d.). https://sparqtools.org/mobility-measure/macarthur-scale-of-subjective-social-status-adult-version/

Marcinkus, W. C., Whelan-Berry, K. S., & Gordon, J. S. (2007). The relationship of social support to the work-family balance and work outcomes of midlife women. *Women in Management Review*, *22*(2), 86–111. https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420710732060

Martin, P., & Barnard, A. (2013). The experience of women in male-dominated occupations: A constructivist grounded theory inquiry. *Sa Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *39*(2). https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v39i2.1099

Meeting, O. F. E. C. a. D. C., & Development, O. F. E. C. A. (2011). *Report on the Gender Initiative: Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship : Meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial Level, Paris, 25-26 May 2011*.

Mishra, S., & Kray, L. J. (2022). The mitigating effect of desiring status on social backlash against ambitious women. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *102*, 104355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104355

Mutekwe, E., Modiba, M., & Maphosa, C. (2011). Factors Affecting Female Students' Career Choices and Aspirations: A Zimbabwean Example. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *29*(2), 133–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2011.11892963

Overall, N. C., Fletcher, G. J. O., & Simpson, J. A. (2010). Helping Each Other Grow: Romantic Partner Support, Self-Improvement, and Relationship Quality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*(11), 1496–1513. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210383045

Ozbay, F., Johnson, D. B., Dimoulas, E., Charney, D. S., & Southwick, S. M. (2007). SOCIAL SUPPORT AND RESILIENCE TO STRESS. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*.

Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, S. (2012). Status incongruity and backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice against female leaders. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*(1), 165–179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.008

Shadur, M. A., Kienzle, R., & Rodwell, J. (1999). The Relationship between Organizational Climate and Employee Perceptions of Involvement. *Group & Organization Management*, *24*(4), 479–503. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601199244005

Straughen, J. K., Caldwell, C. H., Young, A. A., & Misra, D. P. (2013). Partner support in a cohort of African American families and its influence on pregnancy outcomes and prenatal health behaviors. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2393-13-187

Tabassum, N., & Nayak, B. S. (2021). Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Women's Career Progressions from a Managerial Perspective. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, *10*(2), 192–208. https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975220975513

Van Der Horst, M. (2014). Gender Role Attitudes. *Springer EBooks*, 2451–2453. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_1135

Vink, M., Derks, B., Ellemers, N., & Van Der Lippe, T. (2022). All is nice and well unless she outshines him: Higher social status benefits women's well-being and relationship quality, but not if they surpass their male partner. *Journal of Social Issues*, *1–34*. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12573

Vink, M., Van Der Lippe, T., Derks, B., & Ellemers, N. (2022). Does National Context Matter When Women Surpass Their Partner in Status? *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.670439

Wicht, A., Miyamoto, A., & Lechner, C. M. (2021). Are Girls More Ambitious Than Boys? Vocational Interests Partly Explain Gender Differences in Occupational Aspirations. *Journal of Career Development*, *49*(3), 551–568. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845321991665

Appendix A

Career Ambition Scale

For the following 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	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 fulfill 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

Appendix B

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 people don't prefer, and the least respect. You are closer to the people at the top of the ladder, the higher you are; conversely, the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the bottom.
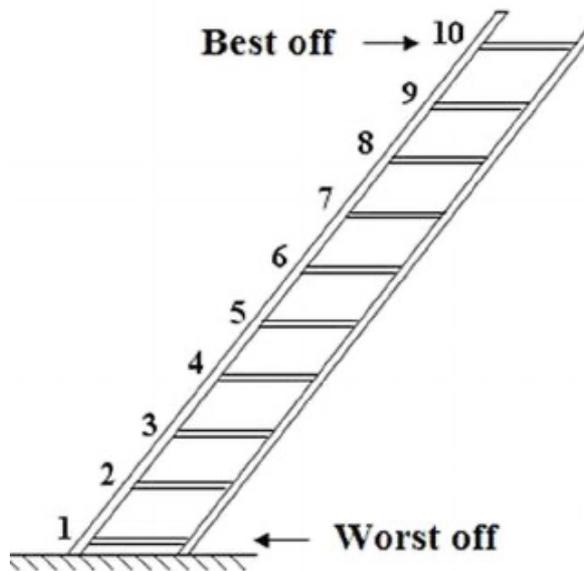
1. Now, think about your own situation. Please tell us where you would place yourself on this ladder.

Number:
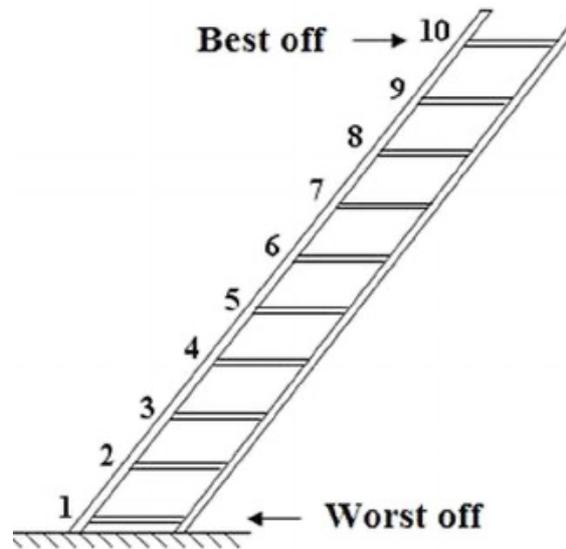
2. Now, tell us where you would place your partner on this ladder.

Number:

Appendix C

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	

Appendix D

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)