ORIGINAL ARTICLE

JOURNAL OF
Social Issues
A Journal of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

WILEY

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

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Abstract

In two studies, we find that climbing the societal ladder has positive associations with women's well-being and relationship outcomes but can also have negative consequences when women surpass their male partners in status. In Study 1 (N = 314), we found that women who reported having higher personal status also reported several positive relationship outcomes (e.g., higher relationship quality than women with lower personal status). However, these associations reversed for women who surpassed their partners in social status. In Study 2, a diary study (N = 112), we show how women's implicit endorsement of gender stereotypes qualifies the negative associations of surpassing one's partner in status. Among women with higher status than their partner, traditional women intend to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm (e.g., thinking about reducing work hours in favor of their time at home), whereas egalitarian women did not, but felt guilty toward their partner. We show how the relationship dynamics of women who have surpassed

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their partners in social status should be considered when attempting to tackle structural discrimination and advance women's careers.

INTRODUCTION

Many women in European and North-American countries have entered the workforce and gained higher educational degrees than women in earlier generations (OECD, 2018). They also increasingly enter male-dominated and high-status occupations (Lippa et al., 2014). Consequently, US public opinion polls show that people perceive men and women to be almost equally competent and agentic nowadays (Eagly et al., 2020). Women's increased career success also positively affects heterosexual couples' romantic relationship outcomes (e.g., high quality of life and satisfying marriages; Bartley et al., 2005; Belle, 1990; Wilcox & Marquardt, 2010).

Despite these advantages of women's increased career success, gender stereotypes of heterosexual couples prescribing men to be the breadwinner of their family and having higher status roles in society and women to be the homemaker and taking on lower status roles persist and are quite resistant to change (Haines et al., 2016). Indeed, heterosexual relationships in which women have higher social status than their partners remain scarce (Pew Research Center, 2013; Portegijs & Van den Brakel, 2018). Moreover, couples who break with traditional gender role divisions tend to be stigmatized such that people perceive men with lower status than their female partner to be the weaker partner in the relationship, whereas they perceive women with higher status than their partner to be the dominant partner in the relationship (Hettinger et al., 2014; MacInnis & Buliga, 2019; Vink et al., in press). This stigmatization of role-reversed heterosexual couples resonates with the position of Goffman (1963), who noted that stigma is not defined by the attributes of specific targets but is created in social interactions and should be understood in "a language of relationships" (Doyle & Barreto, 2023).

In the current research, we investigate how gender stereotypes affect women in role-reversed relationships. We propose that women's increased status in society can have detrimental consequences for their relationship experiences once they have surpassed their male partner in status. Subsequently, we expect that one way to reactively cope with their higher status role in the relationship is that these women may be inclined to behave in line with traditional gender roles in romantic relationships (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). We argue that persisting gender stereotypes are an important reason why women in role-reversed relationships experience negative relationship outcomes. For this reason, we hypothesize that these negative outcomes are most clearly experienced by women who have internalized gender stereotypes of "breadwinning men" and "caring women." Conversely, we anticipate that these negative outcomes are less salient for women who do not endorse these gender stereotypes.

How gender stereotypes direct people to traditional relationships

People perceive a correspondence between the *actions* men and women engage in (i.e., the social and relational roles they have; prescriptive stereotypes) and their inner *dispositions* (i.e., what they are "really" like; descriptive stereotypes; Eagly, 1987). Gender stereotypes follow from and are reinforced by observations of men and women in gender-typical social roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly

et al., 2000). Although descriptive stereotypes slowly change with the shifting roles of men and women in society, prescriptive stereotypes lag behind and still dictate that men should be the breadwinner in the family and have higher status roles in society while women should be the homemaker and take on lower status roles (Eagly, Nater et al., 2020; Eagly, Wood et al., 2000; Haines et al., 2016; Heilman, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Men and women who deviate from the current gender hierarchy – in which men are associated with high status and women with low status- face prejudice, stigmatization, and social penalties (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Rudman et al., 2012). This process is known more broadly as "backlash" against people who display stereotype disconfirming behaviors (Ellemers, 2018). Stigmatization and backlash also occur when people evaluate romantic relationships where the woman has surpassed her male partner in social status (Hettinger et al., 2014; MacInnis & Buliga, 2019; Vink et al., in press). Specifically, because people expect a woman with a higher status profession than her male partner to be the dominant one in their relationship, they tend to dislike her (i.e., dominance penalty; Vink et al., in press). On the other hand, to the extent that people expect a man with lower status than his partner to be the weak one in their relationship, they disrespect him (i.e., weakness penalty; Vink et al., in press). Further, people generally expect such role-reversed relationships to be less satisfying for the couple than being in a traditional relationship (MacInnis & Buliga, 2019; Vink et al., in press).

Prior research corroborates the notion that prescriptive gender stereotypes impact romantic relationships by influencing men's and women's beliefs and interactions. Women tend to believe that men are attracted to women who behave in a humble, compliant, and agreeable way (Hornsey et al., 2015). Additionally, although men claim to be attracted to women who are as intelligent or more intelligent than they are, when these men actually have to interact with a potential romantic partner, they tend to prefer women who are less intelligent than themselves (Park et al., 2015). Last, men's implicit self-esteem suffers when their female partner experiences a success, especially when the success is relevant to them (in this study, this was an academic success rather than a social success; Ratliff & Oishi, 2013). Although these effects seem to emerge mainly among men who reported low relationship satisfaction (Hawkins et al., 2021), they are relevant for men in role-reversed relationships as they also experience lower relationship satisfaction than men in more traditional relationships (e.g., Syrda, 2019).

Women gaining higher status: Positive associations until they exceed their partner

The effects of prescriptive stereotypes on romantic relationships guide how women's social status relative to their partner is related to their relationship outcomes. Specifically, we propose that higher personal status has positive associations with women's relationship outcomes until they surpass their partner in social status. Compared to couples with only one source of income, couples who have two sources of income experience higher quality of life (Belle, 1990). Two sources of income relieve men from being the sole breadwinner and give women the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of work outside the house (Bartley et al., 2005; Belle, 1990). Most dual-career couples agree that equality in relationships is beneficial for both husbands and wives (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). Indeed, couples with higher socioeconomic status were happier with their marriages and were less likely to divorce than couples with lower socioeconomic status (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2010).

However, women who surpass their partner in status and thus violate prescriptive stereotypes face negative outcomes. When thinking about their role as providers, female breadwinners reported feelings of worry, guilt, and pressure (Meisenbach, 2009). Couples in relationships where women earn more than 50% of the total household income indicate lower satisfaction with their marriage (Bertrand et al., 2015; Syrda, 2019; Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Zhang, 2015). Moreover, men tend to use more erectile dysfunction medication within these relationships, and women tend to use more anxiety and sleep deprivation medication (Pierce et al., 2013).

These studies include the associations of women who earn more than their partner, but additional status indicators such as education level and prestige in society also influence people's life outcomes (Adler et al., 2000). We will investigate women's relative status division in their relationship by including women's subjective perceptions of their and their partner's income, education, and prestige. This way, we complement previous work that focused on objective income differences only.

Women's intentions to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm

People are not just passive victims of stigma; they instead try to cope with stigma by avoiding atypicality and engaging in gender conformity (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). According to the *gender deviance neutralization*-idea, men and women who violate gender norms will attempt to reduce their deviance by showing more traditional behaviors (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). When dividing paid and unpaid work within a relationship, women tend to reduce their share of household tasks when their income increases (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). However, once they earn more than their partner, they continue to do the same amount of household tasks (Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000) or even increase their share of household tasks (Bittman et al., 2003). By engaging in these behaviors that confirm the feminine stereotype, women can cope with the stigmatization caused by their role as breadwinners.

The impact of women's own implicit gender stereotypes on relationship outcomes

Additionally, the extent to which women themselves have internalized the gender stereotypes associated with their relatively higher status than their partner may also affect their relationship outcomes. Ample research shows how women's beliefs about gender roles influence their relationship outcomes. To illustrate, a woman's income positively predicts the childcare her male partner provides, but only when she has egalitarian gender ideologies and is supportive of maternal employment (Nitsche & Grunow, 2018). Women with a more traditional gender ideology were more likely to prefer older men with high breadwinning potential as partners (Eastwick et al., 2006). In contrast, college women with high work ambitions were found to prefer communal and family-oriented male partners (Meeussen et al., 2019). These studies focus on women's explicit claims about their gender ideologies.

However, explicit gender ideologies often do not match the extent to which people have internalized gender stereotypes on a more unconscious level (Ellemers, 2018; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Gender stereotypes affect us without us realizing it (Ellemers, 2018). People may be reluctant to explicitly claim that men should be breadwinners and women should be caregivers, even when they do automatically associate caring more easily with women and breadwinning with

men (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In order to get a more realistic idea of how women's gender ideology affects the way in which they cope with the relationship stereotype violation, we believe it is more insightful to include implicit measures of gender ideology.

Implicit gender beliefs also have actual affective and behavioral consequences. To illustrate, couples who implicitly believed that women need to be protected by men were found to prioritize the man's need for intimacy over the work ambitions of the woman (Hammond & Overall, 2015). Also, mothers with stronger implicit gender stereotypes evaluated boys and girls playing with gender incongruent toys less positively and made more stereotypical comments to their children in response to such play as compared to mothers with weaker implicit gender stereotypes (Endendijk et al., 2014). Taken together, these studies suggest that women with a more egalitarian gender ideology may feel less of a need to cope with the relationship stereotype violation and are less inclined to adjust to traditional gender roles within their relationship.

Hypotheses and overview of the studies

In the current research, we predict that women with higher personal status will generally experience more positive relationship and work-life outcomes compared to women with lower personal status, as women with higher personal status enjoy the financial benefits and the satisfaction of working outside the house. Specifically, we predict that women who perceive to have higher personal status report overall higher relationship quality, report themselves and their partner to be more satisfied with the income distribution, and are less worried that the income distribution negatively affects their relationship as compared to women who perceive to have lower personal status (H1). However, we also predict that women who perceive to have higher status relative to their partner generally report lower relationship quality, report themselves and their partner to be less satisfied with the income distribution, and are more worried that the income distribution negatively affects their relationship compared to women who have lower or equal relationship status (H2).

These associations should be visible when monitoring women's day-to-day experiences. For this reason, we predict that women who perceive to have higher personal status report higher daily relationship quality, less daily relationship conflict, higher overall daily well-being, less daily work-family conflict, less daily feelings of guilt toward their partner, and higher daily satisfaction with how work and family are combined as compared to women who perceive to have lower personal status (H3). Notwithstanding these positive associations of higher personal status, we additionally argue that women who perceive to have surpassed their partner in status experience negative daily relationship outcomes (i.e., lower day-to-day relationship quality, more daily relationship conflict, lower overall daily well-being, more daily work-family conflict, more daily feelings of guilt toward their partner, lower daily work-life satisfaction compared to women with lower or equal status than their partner; H4).

Furthermore and in order to cope with the stereotype violation, we reason that women who perceive to have higher status *relative* to their partner intend to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm, such that women who perceive to have surpassed their partner in status report less intention of focusing on their career or taking up extra tasks at work (H5a), and adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm by sacrificing leisure time and spending more time on domestic chores and childcare compared to women with lower or equal status than their partner(H5b).

Finally, we anticipate that implicit gender attitudes will moderate the negative outcomes of women's higher relative status. We predict that especially women with traditional implicit gender

associations experience the negative outcomes specified in Hypothesis 4 and (intend to) adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm as indicated in Hypothesis 5 when they perceive to have surpassed their partner in status (H6).

In sum, we aim to contribute to the literature in three ways. First, by investigating a broader concept of status (i.e., women's perceptions of their and their partner's prestige in society, education level as well as income), we extend previous literature that shows negative relationship outcomes for couples in which the woman outearns the man (e.g., Bertrand et al., 2015; Syrda, 2019). Second, by investigating relationship experiences on a daily basis, we provide insight into how the daily experiences of women in role-reversed relationships add to their general relationship experiences and well-being. Third, by including women's implicit endorsement of gender stereotypes and their intentions to adjust their behavior, we provide further insight into the underlying mechanisms that explain how relative status division impact relationship outcomes.

In order to investigate this, we first conducted a large cross-sectional study to investigate the discrepancy between women's perceived personal status versus their relative status to their male partner on relationship and life outcomes (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Next, we conducted a diary study to further substantiate the observed patterns and examine women's daily outcomes specified in Hypotheses 3 and 4. In this second study, we additionally investigate whether women who perceive to have higher status than their partner have more intentions to adjust their behavior (as specified in Hypothesis 5) compared to women who perceive to have lower status than their partner. Further, the second study includes an implicit gender ideology measure to investigate how implicit gender attitudes moderate daily outcomes, as anticipated in Hypothesis 6.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and design

We recruited 545 women to participate in our survey through a Dutch network that brings together working women. The network aims to help women combine their ambitions in three different domains: work, family, and society. For the current analysis, we selected respondents older than 18 and had a male partner, resulting in a total of 341 women (see Table 1).

This study had a correlational design as we measured rather than manipulated our predictor variables (i.e., participants' social status compared to their partner's social status).

Procedure

The current investigation was part of a more extensive online survey about women's work and personal life.[1] The survey was distributed online among a community of women with professional ambitions. Participants first read an informed consent where they were informed that their responses would be treated confidentially, that participation was voluntary, and that participants

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[1] These concerned questions about work-family conflict and guilt, as well as questions about women's professional and personal identity.

TABLE 1 Participant Characteristics Study 1

Measure	%	*M*	*SD*
Age		44.30	7.63
Age partner		46.98	8.28
Highest degree of education:			
- High school/ vocational degree	5.8		
- College degree	28.9		
- University degree	62.4		
Highest degree of education partner:			
- High school/ vocational degree	11.2		
- College degree	19.7		
- University degree	48.4		
Percentage with a job	85.3		
Partner with a job	92.0		
Organizational tenure in years		10.17	7.55
Actual hours working per week		38.07	9.36
Actual hours partner works per week		42.80	10.97
Area of labor market:			
- business services	25.6		
- health care/ well-being	11.4		
- education	9.0		
- governmental organizations	9.2		
Percentage with children	81.9		
Age oldest child		13.91	6.90
Duration relationship with partner in years		17.77	8.26
Total *N*	341		

had to be female and 18 years or older to participate. Next, participants completed a series of questions, including questions regarding their background information, social status, and relationship outcomes. At the end of the survey, participants read a debriefing in which they were thanked for their participation and were asked to fill out potential comments/complaints. We awarded six vouchers of €50 for an online store by lottery among all participants to show our gratitude for their participation. The survey took, on average, 15 min to complete. We followed the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 2017). We did not request ethical approval from our university's ethical committee, as applying for ethical approval was less commonplace at the moment of data collection.

Materials

We measured all items on 7-point Likert scales with response options ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*), unless otherwise indicated. Materials are described based on chronological order in the survey.

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Demographic background information

We asked participants to indicate their highest completed education, marital status, employment status, number of working hours per week according to their contract and in reality. Further, we asked them to indicate their partner's gender, age, highest completed education, employment status, and hours their partner worked. We also asked participants to indicate the duration of their relationship in years and how many children they had.

Perceived relative status

We measured women's perceived relative status in the relationship based on the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000). Participants were presented with a ladder with 10 different rungs. The instructions explained that the ladder reflects the society with people at the top of the ladder being best off in terms of income, education, and prestigious jobs, whereas people at the bottom being worst off. We asked women to think about their own situation and indicate the rung where they would place themselves ($M = 7.19$, $SD = 1.35$) and their partners ($M = 7.04$, $SD = 1.70$). We counterbalanced the order of these questions to control for possible anchoring effects (having initial ratings of the self or the partner as 'anchor').[2] We then assessed relative status by subtracting the perceived status of the male partner from the perceived status of women themselves. Out of 341 women, 36.3% placed themselves higher on the ladder than their partner, 35.7% placed themselves on the same level, and 28% indicated their partner to have higher social status than themselves. This distribution is not representative of the Dutch population (e.g., only 12% of Dutch women had a higher income than their male partner in 2018; Portegijs & Van den Brakel, 2018). Because we distributed our survey among a community of women with professional ambitions, we were able to find a high percentage of women with higher status than their partners.

Income distribution

We asked participants to give their best estimate of what percentage of their joint income is brought in by participants themselves and what percentage is brought in by their partner. Response options ranged from 1 (*0% by myself; 100% by my partner*) to 11 (*100% by myself; 0% by my partner*).

Satisfaction with the income distribution

We included two items regarding own and partner's satisfaction with the current income distribution. These items were: "I am happy with this distribution of our incomes," and "My partner is happy with this distribution of our incomes."

Worry that the income distribution negatively affects relationship

We included two items regarding own and partner's worry that their income distribution negatively affects their relationship. These items were: "I am sometimes worried that our income distribution might negatively affect our relationship," and "My partner is sometimes worried that our income distribution might negatively affect our relationship."

Relationship quality

We measured participants' relationship quality using one item of the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). This item was "In general, I am satisfied with my relationship." Relation-

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[2] T-tests showed no differences for women who first reported about their own status versus women who first reported about their partner's status.

ship quality is a construct that is well measured by one item (see e.g., Blom & Hewitt, 2020; Hardie et al., 2014).

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

First, we conducted a correlational analysis to investigate whether background variables (i.e., age, having children, duration of relationship) were correlated with the variables relevant to our predictions (see Table 2). Some background variables showed moderate to strong associations with our predictor and outcome variables. Older women reported lower quality of their relationship. Also, women with higher status were more likely to have children and have a long relationship with their partners. As women's age and the duration of their relationship were very highly correlated ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), we included age and having children (yes/no) as covariates in our regression analyses. We ran the analyses again by including relationship duration as a covariate instead of age and this did not change the results.

Furthermore, the mean of relationship quality was quite high and the mean of worry that the income distribution negatively affects the relationship was quite low, indicating that the results should be interpreted in the context of a sample that was fairly satisfied with their relationships.

Overview of regression analyses

We conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses. First, we entered the background variables (i.e., age and having children) in step 1 and the main effects of women's personal status and relative status (standardized score of status woman minus status man) in step 2.

Does having higher personal status predict more positive relationship outcomes?

In line with hypothesis 1, we found that the higher women positioned themselves on the social ladder the more positive outcomes they reported (see Table 3). Specifically, the higher women reported their personal status, the higher relationship quality they reported, as well as higher satisfaction with the income distribution, and fewer worries that the income distribution would negatively affect their relationship. Furthermore, women's higher personal status was associated with the thought that their partner was more satisfied with their income distribution and fewer worries that the income distribution might negatively affect their relationship.

Do women with higher status *relative* to their partner report more negative relationship outcomes?

Apart from the positive associations of having higher social status, we found that surpassing one's partner in social status carried some negative consequences (see Table 3). In line with hypothesis 2, we found that the higher women placed themselves on the status ladder than their partner,

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TABLE 2 Correlation Analyses of Background, Predictor, and Outcome Variables for Women in Study 1

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Age	44.30	7.63	–															
2. Age partner	46.98	8.28	.85**	–														
3. Education			–.13**	–.16**	–													
4. Education partner			–.05	–.09	.50**	–												
5. Children	1.87	.34	.09	.08	.02	.10	–											
6. Real workhours	38.07	9.36	.01	.04	.27**	.19**	–.10*	–										
7. Real workhours partner	42.80	10.97	.17**	.14*	.04	.14*	.01	.11	–									
8. Duration relation	17.77	8.26	.61**	.52**	–.15**	.02	.20**	–.03	.13*	–								
9. Own status	7.19	1.35	.07	.09	.43**	.27**	.23**	.37**	.05	.05	–							
10. Relative status	.27	1.62	.07	.06	–.02	–.24**	.00	.32**	–.38**	–.04	.33**	–						
11. Relationship quality	6.06	1.16	–.13*	–.12*	.05	.17**	–.10	.09	.00	–.06	.10	–.12*	–					
12. Income distribution	6.16	1.81	.09	.09	.08	–.21**	–.07	.40**	–.32**	–.10	.14*	.64**	–.04	–				
13. Own satisfaction with income distribution	5.33	1.79	.02	.02	–.01	–.01	–.04	.07	.02	.05	.18**	–.03	.31**	.07	–			

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
14. Perceived partner's satisfaction with income distribution	5.54	1.61	.02	.02	.02	.09	-.09	-.05	.10	.02	.10	-.16**	.28**	-.07	.75**	–		
15. Worry that income distribution affects relationship	1.89	1.41	.07	.05	-.09	-.21**	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.11	-.24**	.19**	-.31**	.19**	-.42**	.37**	–	
16. Perceived partner's worry that income distribution affects relationship	1.83	1.33	.04	.05	-.11*	-.21**	.00	.02	-.05	-.07	-.21**	.19**	-.22**	.21**	-.26**	.36**	.81**	–

Note: $**p<.01$, $*p<.05$, the following variable was dummy-coded: Children (0 = no children, 1 = one or more children). Higher scores on relative status indicate that the woman has higher status than her male partner, higher scores on income distribution indicate that the woman earns a higher percentage of the joint income of herself and her partner.

TABLE 3 Regression Coefficients of Women's Status, and Relative Status in Study 1

Measure	Age	Children	Status	Relative Status
Satisfaction with income distribution				
β	.01	−.25	**.33****	−.20
95% C.I.	[−.02, .03]	[−.83, .33]	**[.17, .49]**	[−.39, .00]
SE	.01	.29	**.08**	.10
t	.42	−.84	**4.08**	−1.97
Semi-part r²	.00	.00	**.05**	.01
Perceived partner's satisfaction with income distribution				
β	.01	−.43	**.26**	−.37
95% C.I.	[−.02, .03]	[−.95, .09]	**[.12 .40]**	**[−.54, −.19]**
SE	.01	.26	**.07**	**.09**
t	.58	−1.64	**3.58**	**−4.10**
Semi-part r²	.00	.01	**.04**	**.05**
Worry that income distribution affects relationship				
β	.01	−.08	**−.39**	**.42**
95% C.I.	[−.01, .04]	[−.53, .38]	**[−.51, −.27]**	[.27, .57]
SE	.01	.23	**.06**	.08
t	1.30	−.33	**−6.50**	**4.47**
Semi-part r²	.00	.00	**.11**	**.08**
Perceived partner's worry that income distribution affects relationship				
β	.01	−.03	**−.33**	**.39**
95% C.I.	[−.01, .03]	[−.46, .40]	**[−.45, −.22]**	**[.25, .53]**
SE	.01	.22	**.06**	**.07**
t	.77	−.13	**−5.81**	**5.40**
Semi-part r²	.00	.00	**.09**	**.08**
Relationship quality				
β	**.02***	−.29	**.18****	**−.20***
95% C.I.	**[−.04, -.00]**	[−.66, .08]	**[.07, .28]**	**[−.33, −.07]**
SE	**.01**	.19	**.05**	**.12**
t	**−2.25**	−1.54	**3.40**	**−3.09**
Semi-part r²	**.01**	.01	**.03**	**.03**

Note: The following variable was dummy-coded: Children (0 = no children, 1 = one or more children). Higher scores on relative status indicate that the woman has higher status than her male partner.

the more they worried that their income distribution would affect their relationship. They also expected their partner to be less satisfied and more concerned about the income distribution. Contrary to our expectations, women's higher status relative to their partner was not associated with lower satisfaction with the income distribution. Finally, women's higher relative status than their partner was associated with lower reported relationship quality. The amount of variance explained by these models varied between 5% and 14%.

Conclusion

In line with hypothesis 1, we found evidence that, in an absolute sense, gaining higher social status was associated with positive relationship outcomes for women. However, and in line with hypothesis 2, the reverse is true for women who indicated that they have higher status *relative* to their partner. These data offer first evidence of these different personal versus comparative associations of women's increasing status in society. We reveal that women who break with prescriptive gender stereotypes by perceiving to have gained higher social status than their partner experience difficulties in their relationship in general, despite the positive associations of having high social status per se. However, these results need to be viewed in light of the fact that, overall, these participants were in satisfying relationships.

Our next step was to investigate how these overall judgments are anchored in more daily relationship dynamics. In our follow-up study, we additionally included measures of intentions and behaviors to fit the gender norm to investigate whether women who perceived to have surpassed their partner in status intend to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm, as indicated in hypothesis 5. Furthermore, we included an implicit gender associations measure to investigate whether the different patterns observed in Study 1 might be qualified by women's implicit gender attitudes, as indicated in hypothesis 6. This study design will allow us to examine additional evidence for the observations made in Study 1 with a different sample. Moreover, this study gives us an opportunity to delve deeper into the processes through which implicit gender attitudes relate to the relationship experiences of women with higher status relative to their partners.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants and design

In total, 112 women participated in the daily diary study (see Table 4). We intended to recruit at least 100 women based on sample criteria for diary studies (Ohly et al., 2010). Women were around the same age as the participants in Study 1 (M_{age} = 39.20, SD_{age} = 5.50) and were also highly educated (38.9% with college or bachelor degree and 33.2% with university master's degree). On average, women had been in a relationship with their partners for 16.42 years (SD = 6.64) and had two children on average (SD = .75). On average, women worked 28.69 h per week (SD = 8.99), whereas their partners worked 39.06 h (SD = 9.69). Notice that the average working hours of participants in this study were lower than in Study 1 but closer to the average for working women in the Netherlands (i.e., 28 h per week; Portegijs & Van den Brakel, 2018).

Procedure

We recruited women via our own network. We specifically aimed to recruit higher educated women to find enough women who would indicate higher status than their partner. We asked women to participate in a diary study which consisted of one longer background questionnaire and eight brief daily questionnaires. We explained that we were interested in the experiences of working women in combining work and family life and emphasized that participation was

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TABLE 4 Participant Characteristics of Women in Study 2

Measure	%	M	SD
Age		39.20	5.50
Age partner		41.85	5.90
Highest degree of education:			
- High school degree	2.8		
- Vocational degree	22.9		
- College or bachelor's degree	38.9		
- University master's degree	33.2		
- PhD	2.3		
Highest degree of education partner:			
- Primary school	3.9		
- High school degree	5.1		
- Vocational degree	22.6		
- College or bachelor's degree	37.7		
- University master's degree	28.6		
- PhD	2.2		
Employment status			
- Wages	80.1		
- Self-Employed no personnel	12.1		
- Self-Employed with personnel	3.0		
- Other	1.9		
Employment status partner	75.8		
- Wages			
- Self-Employed no personnel	9.3		
- Self-Employed with personnel	7.6		
- No Job	1.0		
Duration of relationship in years		16.42	6.64
Cohabiting with partner	98.5		
Married with partner	70.8		
Number of children		2.03	.75
Number of children living at home		1.98	.73
Father is parent of children	98.3		
Organizational tenure in years		10.28	7.55
Organizational tenure partner in yrs		10.25	7.34
Actual hours working per week		28.69	8.99
Actual hours partner works per week		39.06	9.69
Net income in euros		1908.48	897.35
Income distribution (100 = 100% partner)		40.13	17.29
Household tasks division (100 = 100% self)		64.48	16.08
Ideal household task division		57.25	13.48
Own status		7.20	1.00
Status assigned to partner		7.45	1.21
Total *N*	112		

voluntary and anonymous. Women who consented to participate filled out a starting questionnaire which took them around 15 min to complete. After this questionnaire, women were immediately asked to fill out the first daily measure, which took them around 5 min to complete. Women filled out these eight daily measures on 8 consecutive days, always starting on a Saturday. Sample criteria for diary studies prescribe collecting data for at least 5 days per person (Ohly et al., 2010). We decided to collect data for 8 consecutive days to make sure that we include both workdays and weekend days.

In the starting questionnaire, we asked women to indicate their and their partners' demographic background information and their perception of the status division in their relationship. Furthermore, we asked them to complete an implicit association task to assess their implicit associations between male/female names and words related to family and career.

In the daily questionnaires, we asked women to indicate their satisfaction with their relationship and the extent to which they experienced relationship conflict that day. Furthermore, we asked them to report the amount of time they spent on work, household, and child care tasks that day. Last, women reported their experience of work-family conflict, feelings of guilt toward family and partner about how they combined work and family on that day, and the extent to which they had thought about restructuring their time in the future. As a reward for participation, we randomly selected two women to win a voucher of 50 euros.[3] The ethical committee of the first author's faculty approved the data collection of this study (FETC17-044).

Materials

We first describe materials included in the starting questionnaire and then specify materials included in the daily questionnaires.

Perceived relative status
We again measured perceived relative status with the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000). On average, women placed themselves a bit lower on the societal status ladder ($M = 7.19$, $SD = 1.03$) than they placed their partner ($M = 7.43$, $SD = 1.19$). Out of 112 women, 14.3% placed themselves higher on the ladder than their partner, 50% placed themselves on the same level, and 35.7% indicated their partner to have higher social status than them. We again calculated relative status by subtracting women's perception of their partner's status from their perception of their status.

Implicit associations of traditional gender roles
We measured women's implicit associations of men and women with career and family with an Implicit Association Task (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). In this family-career IAT, examples of career words were *management* and *professional* (in Dutch), and examples of family words were *children* and *parents*. We used common Dutch names for each gender to represent the male (e.g., *Luuk* & *Thomas*) and female category (e.g., *Anna* & *Sanne*). The test started with three practice trials to make sure participants understood the test instructions. The actual trials comprising the IAT consisted of two congruent blocks and two incongruent blocks. In the congruent blocks,

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[3] This study was conducted in collaboration with Aarntzen et al. who used part of the data to investigate consequences of work-family guilt (Aarntzen et al., 2019) and the impact of daily working hours on experiencing work-family guilt (Aarntzen et al., 2022).

participants were to link the career words to the male category and family words to the female category. In the incongruent blocks, participants were to connect the career words to the female category and the family words to the male category. The two congruent and two incongruent blocks were counterbalanced. D-scores were calculated by subtracting response latencies of incompatible blocks from compatible blocks and dividing the mean differences in latencies by participants' standard deviation on all trials except for the three practice trials. This way, higher scores reflect more traditional implicit associations, and scores close to zero reflect more egalitarian implicit associations (Greenwald et al., 2003).

Daily measures

The following materials were measured in the daily questionnaires. Answers for all items were captured with 5-point scales unless mentioned otherwise. Following Ohly et al.' (2010) recommendations to keep daily measures as short as possible, we aimed to include single-item measures only.

Relationship Satisfaction. We assessed daily relationship satisfaction using one item from the time competition survey (developed by Van der Lippe & Glebbeek, 2003). This item was "How satisfied are you with your relationship today? Please, indicate this on a scale from 1 to 10 (*1* = very unsatisfied, *10* = very satisfied)."

Relationship Conflict. We assessed daily relationship conflict using one bipolar item we developed for this purpose: "Could you indicate how conflictual or harmonious your relationship with your partner was today? (*−2* = conflictual, *2* = harmonious, reverse-coded)."

Well-Being. We assessed daily well-being with one item: "How happy do you feel today?" (*1* = very unhappy, *5* = very happy).

Work-Family Conflict. We asked women whether on that day their work had caused them to focus less on activities at home than they would have liked (*1* = not at all, *5* = very much). We included an explanation asking women, in the case that they did not work that day, whether they could still estimate whether their work had an impact on their activities at home that day.

Work-Family Guilt Toward Partner. Women were asked whether they experienced work-family guilt toward their partner. The item was "When you think about how you combined work and family today, to what extent do you feel guilty towards your partner. Today, I feel …" (*1* = not at all guilty, *5* = very guilty).

Satisfaction with Work-Family Combination. We assessed whether women were satisfied with how they combined work and family with one item, "Today I am satisfied with how I combined work and family."

Time Allocation. We asked women to give their best guess of how many minutes they had spent and how many minutes they still planned to spend that day on various tasks. For each task, we created a sum score of these two answers. The tasks were *leisure (hobbies, sport, etc.)*, *care for children (think of washing, dressing, putting to bed, but also playing, helping with homework, reading to, etc.)*, and *time spent on (paid) work*. We also asked women to give their best guess of how many minutes they had spent and how many minutes they still planned to spend on household chores. These household chores were *doing laundry (washing, ironing, repairing clothes)*, *cleaning*, *running errands*, *cooking food (including preparing food, cooking, doing dishes, and cleaning after eating)*.

Intention to Adjust in Terms of Career. To assess whether women thought about reducing their work hours, we asked them two items. These items were "Today I thought about reducing the hours I spend on paid work" and "Today I thought about how to deal with things differently at work to have more time available at home," r_{range} over 8 days = .63–.73, $p < .001$.

Take up of Extra Tasks at Work. We asked women whether they thought about taking up extra tasks at work with two items, "If I were asked today to take up extra tasks at work that would enhance my career, I would say yes," and "If I were asked today to take up extra tasks at work that would take a lot of time, I would say yes," $r_{range} = .71–.79$, $p < .001$.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

First, we checked correlations between background variables measured in the starting questionnaire and between participants' daily experiences (i.e., averaged per variable for each individual over 8 days; see Table 5). Women's age, relationship duration, number of children, and organizational tenure were associated with several background and daily variables. For instance, older women reported less relationship conflict with their partner and fewer thoughts of compensating in terms of their career. Also, women said to experience more work-family conflict and guilt toward their partner when they had been together with their partner for a longer time. Women with more children reported to be happier and had fewer intentions to lower their working hours in favor of their families. Last, women who already worked longer for their organization reported greater overall well-being and a decreased intention to take up extra tasks at work. We decided to control for these background variables (i.e., women's age, relationship duration, number of children, and organizational tenure by including) by including them as covariates in our analyses.

Intraclass correlations

Next, we analyzed null models with the mixed model procedure in SPSS to calculate intraclass correlations (ICC). We did this to check whether multilevel analyses in which daily experiences are nested within individuals are justified. This is the case when a sufficient amount of variances cannot be explained by between-person differences (see Table 6). In this case, ICC ranged between .02 and .73, indicating that between-person differences explained 2% to 73% of the total variance. Especially the more subjective variables had higher variance explained by between-person differences (e.g., thinking about taking up extra tasks at work). In contrast, the more objective variables had less variance explained by within-person differences (e.g., doing groceries). This makes sense, as it is most likely that people differ more on subjective variables. However, there was also a sufficient amount of the total variance explained by within-person differences. This underlined the importance of analyzing the data with multilevel modeling.

Person-level differences: Between-participants associations

We conducted multilevel models to examine person-level differences. These differences show the experiences of women with higher personal status compared to women with lower personal status and the experiences of women with higher relative status than their partner compared to women with lower relative status. This way, we could examine whether higher personal status was on average related to more positive outcomes during the 8 days and whether higher status relative to

TABLE 5 Correlation Analyses of Background, Predictor, and Outcome Variables Between Persons in Study 2

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. Age	39.20	5.50	—																					
2. Age partner	41.85	5.90	.81**	—																				
3. Education			-.05	.11**	—																			
4. Education partner			-.02	.09*	.39**	—																		
5. Duration relationship	16.42	6.64	.69**	.58**	-.06	.22**	—																	
6. Number of children	2.03	.75	.28**	.16**	-.01	.10**	.34**	—																
7. Organizational tenure in years	10.28	7.55	.52**	.39**	.29**	.21**	.53**	.12**	—															
8. Tenure partner in years	10.25	7.34	.44**	.30**	.37**	.25**	.44**	.07	.53**	—														
9. Work hours	28.69	8.99	-.05	—	.43**	.26**	.10**	.15**	.15**	.28**	—													
10. Work hours partner	39.06	9.69	-.07*	.04	—	.12*	.07*	-.03	.11**	.09**	.20**	—												
11. Income distribution	40.13	17.29	.08*	-.06	.24**	.19**	-.03	-.05	.03	.16**	.58**	.57**	—											
12. Personal status	7.20	1.00	.13**	.13**	.36**	.34**	.07	.02	.01	.22**	.31**	-.07*	.20**	—										
13. Relative status to partner	-.26	1.35	.00	-.05	.26**	.14**	-.02	.09**	-.03	.17**	.39**	.42**	.63**	.50**	—									
14. IAT score	.50	.28	.09*	.20**	.09*	-.07*	.13**	.22**	-.05	.04	.20**	.04	-.06	.10**	.16**	—								

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Daily measures:																								
15. Relationship quality	8.20	1.28	.12**	.09*	.12**	-.02	.11**	-.02	.18**	.07*	.00	.03	.03	.24**	.04	-.05	—							
16. Relationship conflict	1.54	.82	—	.14**	.13**	-.07*	.09*	-.06	.16**	.06	.14**	.04	-.01	-.03	.13**	-.04	-.05	—						
17. Well-being	3.86	.79	.12**	.06	-.04	.00	.04	—	.17**	.04	-.03	.07*	-.05	.07*	-.05	—	.63**	.35**	—					
18. Work-family conflict	2.22	1.36	-.03	-.07*	.00	-.06	-.06	.01	-.01	-.04	.15**	.13**	.20**	-.03	.10**	-.01	-.05	-.03	.29**	—				
19. Guilt toward partner	1.53	.89	-.07*	—	.11**	-.04	—	.01	—	.11**	.15**	.19**	.20**	.12**	.12**	-.04	-.07*	-.08*	.44**	.27**	—			
20. Satisfaction with work-family combination	3.67	1.26	.08*	.08*	-.08*	.05	.11**	-.04	.06	.03	—	.11**	—	.01	—	.01	.20**	.15**	.44**	.36**	.41**	—		
21. Compensation toward career	1.72	1.00	.20**	.17**	.10**	-.02	.14**	.00	—	.14**	.15**	.15**	.21**	-.01	.06	.00	-.09*	-.08*	.38**	.37**	.30**	.35**	—	
22. Taking up extra tasks at work	2.25	1.20	.06	.06	.01	.12**	.09*	-.06	-.01	.18**	.10**	-.02	-.09*	-.05	-.04	-.04	-.09*	-.04	.02	.01	-.04	.05	-.02	—

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, higher scores on income distribution indicate that the woman earns a higher percentage of the joint income of herself and her partner, higher scores on relative status indicate that the woman has higher status than her male partner, higher scores on the IAT-score indicate more traditional associations between men and work and women and family.

T A B L E 6   Intraclass Correlations for all Outcome Variables

Measure	ICC	Between-person variance	Within-person variance
Relationship quality	.69	1.15	.54
Relationship conflict	.41	.25	.43
Time allocation:			
- Leisure	.14	1901.87	11,427.86
- Laundry	.12	157.78	907.05
- Cleaning	.08	188.56	2157.78
- Groceries	.02	3.31	770.81
- Eating	.21	220.37	762.64
- Childcare	.39	8604.66	15,659.72
- Working	.04	11.35	48.29
Work-family conflict	.17	.36	1.50
Work-family guilt toward partner	.28	.21	.59
Well-being	.26	.17	.45
Satisfaction with work-family combination	.21	.32	1.25
Compensation toward career	.53	.54	.48
Taking up extra tasks at work	.73	1.03	.39
Division of time and energy	.35	.55	.87

one's partner was on average related to more negative outcomes during the 8 days. This way, we were able to draw conclusions that can be compared to those of Study 1.

Furthermore, to investigate whether women's implicit gender attitudes moderated negative outcomes for women with higher status relative to their partner, we included implicit gender associations and their interaction with women's relative status in these models. In the case of a significant interaction effect, we used simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) to compare the relationships between women's relative status (i.e., high relative status for women scoring 1 SD above the mean and low relative status for women scoring 1 SD below the mean). We also used simple slope analyses to compare the specific outcome for traditional women (i.e., scoring .70 on the IAT) and egalitarian women (i.e., scoring .00 on the IAT). We chose a threshold score of .70 to delineate women with implicit traditional gender attitudes as this is a common cut-off criterium for traditional associations (Aarntzen et al., 2022; Project Implicit, 2022). The threshold score of .00 was chosen to delineate women with egalitarian gender attitudes as 0 represents equally strong associations for men and women with work and family. We included centered scores of relative status and implicit gender attitudes in our multilevel models.

Do women with higher personal status experience more positive outcomes during the 8 days?

As hypothesized and extending our findings of Study 1, we again found that a higher personal position on the social ladder was associated with several positive outcomes for women (see Table 7). Specifically and in line with hypothesis 3, we additionally found that the daily experiences of women who reported higher social status also indicated higher relationship satisfaction. Women's

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TABLE 7 Between-participants effects of women's personal status and relative status

Measure	Women's personal status			Women's relative status			Implicit gender associations			Relative status × implicit gender associations		
	B (SE)	[95% CI]	p	B (SE)	[95% CI]	p	B (SE)	[95% CI]	p	B (SE)	[95% CI]	p
Relational outcomes												
Relationship quality	.38 (.06)***	[.27, .49]	<.001	−.11 (.04)**	[−.19, −.03]	.006	−.08 (.18)	[−.44, .28]	.658	.02 (.17)	[−.33, .36]	.924
Relationship conflict	−.14 (.03)***	[.07, .21]	<.001	.01 (.03)	[−.06, .04]	.768	−.09 (.12)	[−.15, .33]	.458	−.18 (.11)	[−.04, .41]	.105
Well-being	.08 (.03)*	[−.01, .15]	.028	−.10 (.02)***	[−.15, −.05]	<.001	−.23 (.11)*	[−.46, −.01]	.037	.14 (.10)	[−.07, .35]	.201
Work-family conflict	−.15 (.06)*	[−.27, −.03]	.015	.13 (.04)**	[.04, .21]	.004	.10 (.20)	[−.29, .49]	.618	.04 (.19)	[−.33, .41]	.829
Work-family guilt toward partner	−.09 (.04)*	[−.17, −.01]	.025	.12 (.03)***	[.06, .17]	<.001	.01 (.13)	[−.24, .27]	.923	−.41 (.12)**	[−.65, −.17]	<.001
Satisfaction with work-family combination	.09 (.06)	[−.02, .20]	.111	−.15 (.04)***	[−.22, −.07]	<.001	−.11 (.18)	[−.47, .24]	.534	.18 (.17)	[−.16, .51]	.299
Compensatory outcomes												
Time allocation:												
- Leisure	3.97 (4.24)	[−4.35, 12.29]	.349	.36 (3.07)	[−5.67, 6.38]	.908	8.67 (13.79)	[−18.42, 35.77]	.530	−28.55 (13.07)*	[−10.09, 1.45]	.029
- Childcare	−10.35 (6.79)	[−23.68, 12.28]	.128	2.78 (4.84)	[−6.73, 12.28]	.566	51.52 (22.01)*	[8.29, 94.75]	.020	−3.89 (20.67)	[−44.48, 36.70]	.851
- Working	−.05 (.18)	[−.42, .31]	.770	.20 (.13)	[−.06, .46]	.123	−1.04 (.60)	[−2.23, .14]	.083	−.25 (.56)	[−1.35, .85]	.652
Household chores:												
1) Laundry	.83 (1.46)	[−2.04, 3.70]	.570	−1.16 (1.05)	[−3.21, .89]	.267	9.06 (4.75)	[−.24, 18.36]	.056	−2.34 (4.48)	[−11.13, 6.49]	.601
2) Cleaning	−2.47 (2.01)	[−6.43, 1.48]	.219	−.28 (1.42)	[−3.07, 2.52]	.846	−19.39 (1.40)**	[−32.13, −6.64]	.003	5.83 (6.13)	[−6.21, 17.87]	.342
3) Groceries	.32 (1.23)	[−2.11, 2.75]	.795	−.34 (.89)	[−2.08, 1.40]	.702	2.19 (4.02)	[−5.71, 10.09]	.586	.77 (3.78)	[−6.67, 8.20]	.840
4) Eating	.87 (1.42)	[−1.92, 3.64]	.544	.43 (1.02)	[−1.57, 2.43]	.672	4.16 (4.95)	[−4.86, 13.17]	.365	2.66 (4.34)	[−5.86, 11.19]	.540
Compensation toward career	.05 (.04)	[−.03, .14]	.233	.04 (.03)	[−.02, .10]	.177	.09 (.14)	[−.19, .38]	.516	−.28 (.14)*	[−.55, −.02]	.037
Taking up extra tasks at work	−.09 (.05)	[−.19, .01]	.065	.02 (.04)	[−.05, .09]	.530	−.15 (.16)	[−.47, .18]	.373	−1.04 (.15)***	[−1.34, −.74]	<.001

Note: *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, higher scores on relative status indicate that the woman has higher status than her male partner, higher scores on the IAT-score indicate more traditional associations between men and work and women and family.
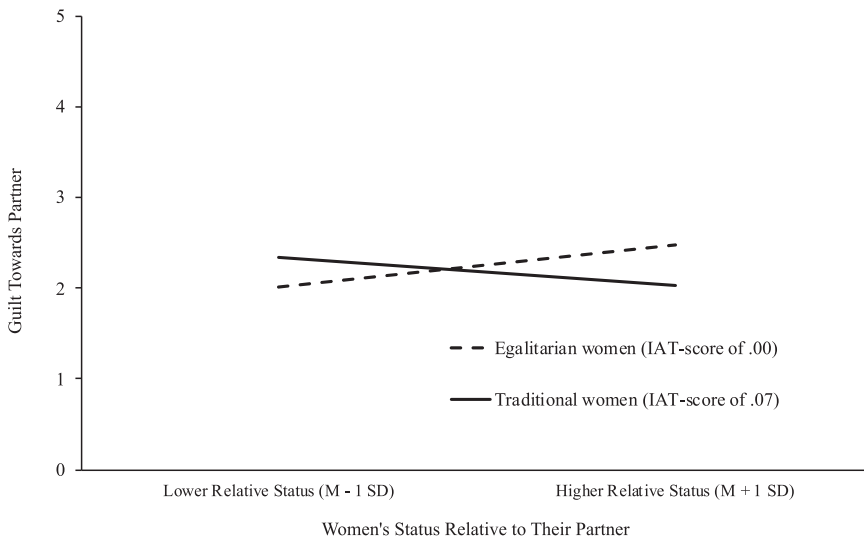
FIGURE 1 Guilt toward partner for egalitarian and traditional women as a function of their status relative to their partner

higher social status was further associated with lower relationship conflict, increased well-being, less work-family conflict, and fewer feelings of guilt about combining work and family toward their partner.

Do women with higher status relative to their partner experience negative outcomes during the 8 days and are these experiences moderated by implicit gender associations?

Further, in line with our predictions, we found that women's higher social status *relative* to their partner was associated with several negative relationship outcomes (see Table 7). In line with hypothesis 4, we found that women's higher status relative to their partner was associated with lower relationship satisfaction during the 8 days of the study. Women's higher relative status to their partner was associated with lower well-being, more work-family conflict, more feelings of guilt about combining work and family toward their partner, and less satisfaction with how they combined work and family life that week. However, we did not find that women's higher relative status was associated with more relationship conflict.

Other than anticipated in hypothesis 6, we did not find that women's implicit gender associations moderated the experiences of relative status. We did find a main effect of women's implicit gender associations on well-being that we had not predicted, indicating that women with more traditional implicit gender expectations generally reported lower well-being during the 8 days.

We also found an interaction effect of women's relative status and their IAT-score on the average guilt they experienced toward their partner that we had not anticipated (see Table 7). Simple slopes analyses revealed that reporting higher relative status was associated with more guilt toward the partner among egalitarian women, $B = .11$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$, C.I. [.06, .17], but with *less* guilt among traditional women, $B = -.17$, $SE = .08$, $p = .044$, C.I. [−.34, −.00] (see Figure 1).
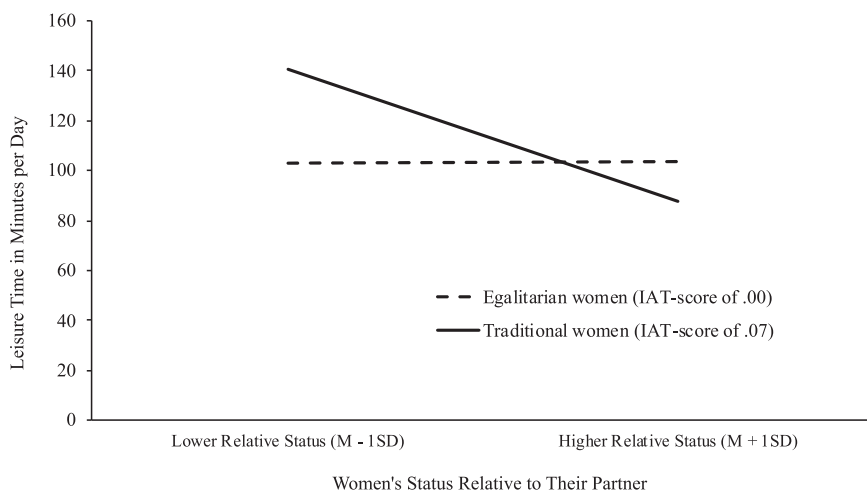
FIGURE 2 Leisure time in minutes per day for egalitarian and traditional women as a function of their status relative to their partner

Do women with higher status relative to their partner intend to adjust their behavior during the 8 days and are these intentions moderated by implicit gender associations?

Our data offered no support for hypothesis 5, as we did not find evidence that women with higher status relative to their partner intended to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm. However, and in line with hypothesis 6, we did find interaction effects of relative status and implicit gender associations on intentions to adjust behavior (i.e., thinking about spending less time on work and intending to take up extra tasks at work) and self-reported behavior (i.e., leisure time). We found an interaction effect of women's relative status and their IAT-score on the average amount of leisure time women reported during the 8 days (see Table 7). Simple slopes analyses showed that reporting higher relative status was associated with having less leisure time among traditional women, $B = -19.63$, $SE = 9.07$, $p = .031$, CI $[-37.44, -1.82]$, but this relationship was not found among egalitarian women, $B = .36$, $SE = 3.07$, $p = .908$, CI $[-5.67, 6.38]$ (see Figure 2).

Additional support for this prediction emerged from an interaction effect of women's relative status and their IAT-score on the extent to which they intended to adjust their behavior in terms of their career (i.e., thinking about spending less time on work; see Table 7). This interaction emerged because the pattern was different for traditional versus egalitarian women (see Figure 3). Although final result supporting hypothesis 6 was an interaction we observed of women's relative status and their IAT-score on the extent to which they intended to take up extra tasks at work. Simple slopes analyses revealed that reporting higher relative status was associated with a lower intention to take up extra tasks at work among traditional women, $B = -.71$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$, CI $[-.91, -.50]$, but not for egalitarian women, $B = .02$, $SE = .04$, $p = .530$, CI $[-.05, .09]$ (see Figure 4).

The amount of time women had spent on childcare, paid work, and household chores during the 8 days revealed no support for our reasoning in hypothesis 6. We observed that women's IAT-score was related to how much time they spent cleaning and caring for their child(ren) (see Table 7). We had not anticipated this association, which indicates that traditional women spent less time cleaning and more time on childcare than egalitarian women.
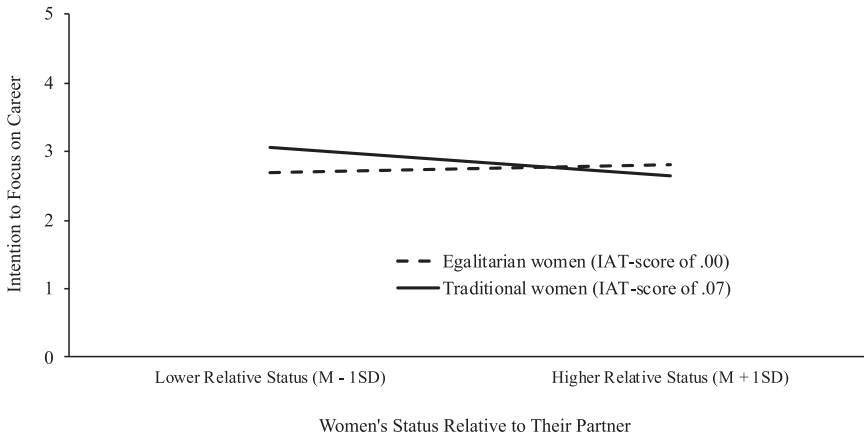
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FIGURE 3   Intention to focus on career for egalitarian and traditional women as a function of their status relative to their partner

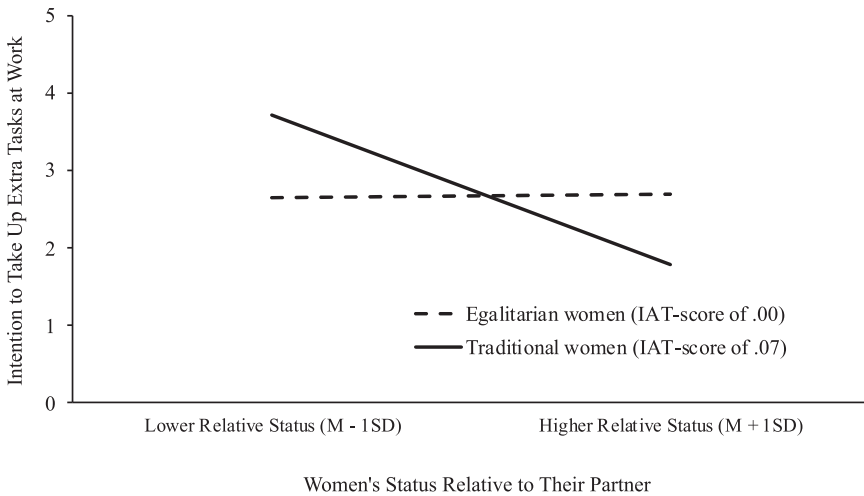**FIGURE 4**   Intention to take up extra tasks at work for egalitarian and traditional women as a function of their status relative to their partner

Conclusion

Consistent with our findings of Study 1, we show that even though women who indicated higher personal status reported higher relationship satisfaction over 8 consecutive days, women who suggested to have surpassed their partner in status reported lower relationship satisfaction. Supporting hypothesis 3, we also observe that women who indicated high personal status indeed experienced more increased well-being, less relationship conflict, less work-family conflict, and less guilt toward their partner during the 8 days. In line with hypothesis 4, daily experiences of women who indicated to have exceeded their partner in status evidence less well-being, more work-family conflict, more feelings of guilt toward their partner, and lower satisfaction with how they combined work and family.

Contrary to hypothesis 5, we find no direct indications that women who perceived to have surpassed their partner in status intended to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm. However, and in line with hypothesis 6, we find that only women with traditional implicit gender beliefs tend to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm when they perceive to have surpassed their partner in status. Specifically, these women reported more intentions to reduce working hours in favor of their family and fewer intentions to take up extra tasks at work. Also, they reported having less leisure time during the 8 days. However, this is not to say that egalitarian women are protected against the negative associations of having higher status than their partner; although these women do not intend to adjust their behavior, they do report feeling guilty toward their partner. On the contrary and unexpectedly, traditional women reported less guilt toward their partner when they perceived to have surpassed their partner in status. It could be that their intentions to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm may alleviate their feelings of guilt toward their partner.

Unexpectedly, we find that women with traditional gender beliefs experience less well-being in general compared to egalitarian women. Also, traditional women spend more time on childcare and less time on cleaning than egalitarian women. Although this was not the scope of the current study, these findings nuance the idea that women with traditional associations might be protected against negative outcomes by preventing a role-reversed relationship in the first place.

In sum, we show that women with high personal status experience positive outcomes but that these associations reverse once women surpass their partner in status. These findings suggest that gender stereotypes prescribing men to be the breadwinner and women to be the caregiver of their families have an influence on women who break with these gendered expectations and that women's own implicit endorsement of these stereotypes has an impact on their feelings of guilt toward their partner and their intentions to adjust their behavior to fit the gender norm.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies, we reveal the contradictory associations women contend with when they reverse traditional status divisions in their relationships. Our data shows that climbing the social ladder has several positive outcomes for women, but this only is the case insofar as their social status does not surpass that of their male partner. Furthermore, the way women respond to their higher status depends on whether they implicitly endorse stereotypical gender beliefs. This research suggests that gender stereotypes prescribing that men should be the breadwinner and women should be the caregiver of their families have their impact on the relationship of women who break with these gendered expectations (Eagly et al., 2000; Heilman, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Replicating earlier findings that higher social status is related to more happy marriages (Bartley et al., 2005; Belle, 1990; Wilcox & Marquardt, 2010), we show in both studies that women who reported high social status also experience more positive outcomes in romantic relationships than women who reported low social status. The main point of the cross-sectional study, however, is that relationship outcomes are not only predicted by women's personal status. Crucially, women's relationship outcomes were also predicted by how their social status compared to their partners' status, and here the results are generally more negative as their relative status is higher. This pattern was replicated and extended in the diary study in which we showed that women who

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reported higher status relative to their partner also reported more negative relationship and work-life outcomes during the 8 days of the study.

By providing insight into the underlying dynamics that partly explain negative relationship outcomes for women in a role-reversed relationship, we complement previous work showing that relationships in which the woman earns more than the man are less satisfying than more traditional relationships (Bertrand et al., 2015; Meisenbach, 2009; Pierce et al., 2013; Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Zhang, 2015). Specifically, we show that—in addition to objective income differences—women's perception of the social status division of their own relationship also predicts relationship outcomes. We reveal how these perceptions influence daily experiences and decisions about time allocations and activities in relationships where the woman has higher status relative to her partner.

Both women with traditional and egalitarian gender associations face difficulties

Additionally, we show how women's implicit gender associations (i.e., the degree to which they associated career-related words with men and family-related words with women) related to how women feel and cope when they surpass their partner in social status. Other than anticipated, we did not find that women's implicit gender associations qualify their relationship outcomes. However, we did find that among women who had higher status relative to their partner, those with more traditional implicit gender associations were more likely to consider on a daily basis how they might adjust their behavior to accommodate this (e.g., by sacrificing leisure time and reducing working hours in favor of their family). It is possible that especially women with traditional gender associations feel that they deviate from the traditional norm when they have surpassed their partner in status. These women may be more sensitive to the negative associations of surpassing one's partner in status. This would be in line with the notion of *gender deviance neutralization*, which maintains that men and women who violate gender norms try to reduce their deviance by showing more traditional behaviors (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). In this case, this might be achieved by these women sacrificing leisure time and time at work to spend more time with their families.

We observed a different pattern for women with more egalitarian associations. When they had higher status relative to their partner, these women did not think about adjusting their behavior. However, they did report feeling guilty toward their partner on a daily basis. Women with egalitarian gender associations might realize that surpassing their partner in status is not in line with current gender norms in society. People feel guilt when they evaluate their moral transgression as a violation of an important norm and having hurt another person (Haidt, 2003; Ortony et al., 1988; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Feeling guilt toward their partner might motivate women to change their behavior and recognize that their partner's relationship expectations and standards differ from their own (Baumeister et al., 1995). Repeated and uncontrollable feelings of guilt are associated with lower well-being (Ferguson et al., 2000) and psychological distress (e.g., anxiety; Jones & Kugler, 1993). Consequently, women's feelings of guilt toward their partner might eventually cause them to adjust their behavior somehow to bring it more in line with current gender norms. However, this might also imply that if gender norms are more egalitarian (e.g., because friends have similar role-reversed status divisions within their relationships), these women feel less or no guilt (Haidt, 2003). Future research might investigate how norms relate to long-term consequences of

guilt experienced by women with egalitarian gender associations and who have surpassed their male partner in status.

Limitations

A first limitation of our studies is that we only investigated women's perceptions of the status division in their relationship as well as how it impacts their relationship outcomes and well-being. Future research can expand these associations by applying a dyadic approach and see how women's outcomes are affected by their partner's perceptions of the relative status division within their relationship. Furthermore, this line of research could also investigate whether these associations are similar for men in role-reversed relationships. In our own work, we find first evidence that heterosexual couples highly agree upon the status division within their relationship and that both the man's and the woman's relationship quality suffers when they report being in a role-reversed relationship (Vink et al., in press).

A second limitation is that we chose to use the Implicit Association Task to measure a person's endorsement of gender stereotypes because explicit measures of gender stereotypes are susceptible to social desirability, and the IAT has been found to outperform these explicit gender stereotype measures in predicting actual behavior (Greenwald et al., 2009). It is important to be mindful of the recent critiques on using the IAT to measure a person's implicit gender stereotypes (Hahn & Gawronski, 2019; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Gawronski et al., 2017). These critiques are related to women's potential awareness of their scores, susceptibility to situational factors, and stability over time. Irrespective of these critiques, our results indicate that the extent to which women associate work with men and family with women predicts how women themselves feel and cope when they surpass their partner in social status 8 days after filling out the IAT.

A third limitation is that both of our samples included women with mostly higher educational degrees. As such, it remains to be seen whether our results are generalizable to women with lower educational degrees. Lower educated individuals are more likely to endorse social conservative ideologies that favor maintaining the current status quo (e.g., the existing gender hierarchy; Jost et al., 2003). For this reason, it could be that lower educated women who have surpassed their partner in status report even more negative relationship outcomes compared to higher educated women. On the other hand, lower educated women are more often the breadwinner of the family because of temporary economic reasons (e.g., the man being unemployed) than higher educated women (Drago et al., 2005). When women work out of financial necessity, both men and women may find it easier to justify women's breadwinning role (Heckert et al., 1998; Orbuch & Custer, 1995). Future research could examine whether lower educated individuals indeed report more negative relationship outcomes when they are in a role-reversed relationship. Furthermore, it could assess whether their relationship outcomes are qualified by the fact that the woman works out of economic necessity or not.

Implications

This research adds another layer to our understanding of why gender inequality persists (see e.g., Ellemers, 2018). Women are stigmatized when they are successful in the workplace (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman et al., 2012), but growing evidence shows how women who become more

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successful than their partner are also stigmatized (Hettinger et al., 2014; MacInnis & Buliga, 2019; Vink et al., in press). Moreover, we show that successful women experience negative relationship outcomes when they surpass their partner in status. These relational dynamics offer an additional perspective on the other considerations that may prevent women from pursuing professional and societal success.

More specifically, women with higher status than their partners walk a tightrope for breaking with traditional gender norms. Women with traditional gender beliefs and who thus feel that their relative status in the relationship is conflicting with their gender role try to adjust their behavior but still report lower relationship quality and well-being. On the other hand, women with egalitarian gender beliefs and who thus feel that their role is in line with their own attitudes feel guilty toward their partner. Though the process of women with traditional and egalitarian gender associations is different, either way, these women are worse off compared to women who have not surpassed their partner in status.

Consequently, and in order to increase women's labor market participation and their chances of career success, systematic and structural change is needed rather than (well-intended) interventions aimed at individual women or couples (Barker et al., 2010). Our results suggest that social policies aiming to promote women's employment and career success must not only focus on individual women but also on what support they need from the organization in their careers, and what support is required in order to ensure that no problems arise on the home front. Policies that target individual women and the support they need at work may unintentionally assume that the male employees have the "most important" or "most successful" career in the family. In contrast, men also need support in combining their own careers with that of their partners. In fact, men who violate traditional gender norms are still stigmatized, and there have been few changes in that regard in the past decades (Croft et al., 2015). To illustrate, fathers who decide to work fewer hours to take care of their families are seen as "weak" and experience worse work outcomes than mothers who also choose to work fewer hours (Rudman & Mescher, 2013). For policies to be successful, they should also tackle the stereotype that men should be breadwinners and prioritize their careers. By placing the focus primarily on female employees and not on male employees, organizations are actually also perpetuating the stigma that a relationship with a more successful woman is "abnormal" and therefore stigmatizing.

In order to break this stigma, policymakers who address gender equality should be mindful of the broader relational contexts in which the targets of their policies operate. This focus is in line with the argument presented by Doyle and Barreto (2023), who emphasize the role of the social and relational context in which individuals operate as a crucial factor in understanding and tackling stigma. Policymakers can do this by applying a more relational focus when designing and implementing new social policies within the government and organizations. For example, policies that aim to facilitate career advancement for women might be complemented with policies that support homemaking roles for fathers (e.g., extending paid parental leave) to help them move away from the male breadwinner model (Cooke, 2006). Furthermore, HR professionals and managers in organizations can facilitate role-reversed couples by, for instance, by considering the careers of employees' partners during performance reviews and by stepping away from the expectation that a good employee is someone who prioritizes their work 24/7 (Petriglieri, 2018). Indeed, team leaders that facilitate the combination of work-life issues succeed in preventing stress and conflict among male and female employees, resulting in increased well-being, health, and work performance (Van Steenbergen, 2007). Through this relational approach toward careers, employers can become more aware of how the careers of their employees' partners also affect the choices and behaviors of individual employees.

Suggestions for future research

This research shows how women's social status can have negative consequences for their relationship outcomes once they surpass their male partner in status, and how women intent to behave in line with traditional gender roles. Future research can unravel the specific mechanisms that cause these associations. Some studies show how others outside the relationship stigmatize men and women in role-reversed relationships (Hettinger et al., 2014; MacInnis & Buliga, 2019; Vink et al., in press). However, more research is needed to examine how the negative social evaluations of others relate to the experiences of women and men in role-reversed relationships. To illustrate, future research can investigate whether it is mainly men's loss in status that causes stigmatization in heterosexual relationships or whether women's relative increase in status also predicts stigmatization (see Link & Phelan, 2001 for how stigmatization is associated with status loss). Also, a more elaborate investigation of how stigma is related to couples' experiences may show that role-reversed couples experience less support and social acceptance than traditional couples, which is also related to negative outcomes in the interpersonal context (less flourishing and increased distress; Debrosse et al., 2022). Also, Park et al. (2022) show how lower socioeconomic status is often devaluated in higher education contexts. Consequently, the lower status of men with successful female partners may be even more salient in the couples' contexts, making stigmatization even more likely to occur for these men. As experiences with stigma are associated with decreased relational closeness and impaired relationship satisfaction (Frost & LeBlanc, 2023), future research can investigate whether couples in role-reversed relationships experience decreased relational closeness toward each other compared to traditional couples.

Conclusion

Although women benefit from increased personal status, the two studies presented here reveal that the reverse is true once they surpass their male partner in status. Women who have exceeded their male partner in social status experience negative relationship outcomes. Their efforts to deal with these negative experiences are likely counterproductive for women's career and relationship success. Gender stereotypes of heterosexual relationships help explain how prescriptive gender norms encourage women toward building traditional relationships in which men are the ones with the highest status of both partners. This research shows that gender stereotypes prescribing men to be the breadwinner and women to be the caregivers of their families influence women who break these gendered expectations, depending on their own implicit endorsement of these stereotypes. Women's romantic relationships should be considered when tackling structural discrimination and advancing women's empowerment in society.

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