

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The main focus of this study is on interpersonal contributions to the pursuit of work and family goals in employed parents with preschool children. Therein special attention is given to the question of how multiple goals are organized within the partnership, what factors contribute to differences in the quality of interpersonal goal relations, and whether grandparental childcare provision facilitates successful development in the present sample.

One characteristic of the present approach is the assumption that development does not take place in isolation but is closely intertwined with social partners (Antonucci, 2001; Asendorpf & Bause, 2000; M. M. Baltes & Silverberg, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Erikson, 1966; Schneewind, 2000). Or, in referring to the interactive minds perspective by life-span scholars: “it is difficult for developmentalists to conceive of development as a process primarily or solely driven and organized from within the organism“ (P. B. Baltes & Staudinger, 1996, p.2), but rather that individual development both influences and is influenced by other co-developing persons (M. M. Baltes & Silverberg, 1994; P. B. Baltes & Staudinger, 1996). Within the present study it is assumed that families form developmental niches characterized by specifics of the individuals they are constituted of who influence each other in non-random ways, thereby producing more or less favorable outcomes for everyone involved.

Following this line of thinking, M. M. Baltes and Carstensen (1998) extended the model of selective optimization with compensation to include collective processes in order to integrate individual and social aspects involved in the setting and pursuit of personal goals. According to this model it is equally important to consider the mutual influences among the members of specific groups such as families and the individual antecedents and person-specific outcomes (M. M. Baltes & Carstensen, 1998). The present study aims at highlighting three aspects that are expected to be involved in the successful combination of work and family goals in middle adulthood. The first refers to the extent to which each partner sets time-adequate personal goals and how this relates to the quality of interpersonal goal relations within the partnership. The second addresses differences in social goal-relevant means and is concerned with the influence of interpersonal goal conflict and convergence on the ability to pursue and progress on multiple goals in both husbands and wives. And the third concerns access to social support in the form of childcare by grandparents, which is expected to contribute to the successful combination of work and family goals in employed

parents, possibly even buffering the effect of interpersonal goal conflict between the partners on individual goal pursuit.

The following chapter aims at elaborating on these three aspects. Because the theoretical background to these broad research questions has already been introduced in the theory chapter, only the components relevant for these research questions will be reviewed.

### **3.1 How are Time-Related Characteristics of each Partner's Work and Family Goals Linked with Conflict and Convergence in Interpersonal Goal Relations?**

The selection principle of the SOC model emphasizes the developmental benefits of the selection of a specific set of personal goals that match available resources (Freund & P. B. Baltes, 2000). Because time is a particularly limited resource in employed parents (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000), this study focuses on the selectivity with regard to time-related characteristics of work and family goals in the present sample and how it relates to the organization of goals between the partners.

In line with the saying that “every chain is as strong as its weakest link,” I expect that it might suffice for interpersonal goal conflict to occur if only one partner chooses work and family goals that exceed the available time and flexibility characteristic of the phase in life when children are small and parents are still working on establishing their career. This proposition leads to the following first set of hypotheses:

- 1a.** It is assumed that interpersonal goal conflict is positively related to one's time-intensity and negatively related to one's temporal flexibility in work and family goals (actor effect).
- 1b.** In addition, it is expected that interpersonal goal conflict is positively related to the respective partner's time-intensity and negatively related to his or her temporal flexibility in work and family goals (partner effect).

It is further assumed that specific combinations of time-related goal-characteristics within a partnership can enhance interpersonal goal conflict over and above the described individual-level effects. Hence, the third hypothesis states that:

- 1c.** A combination of high time-intensity and low temporal flexibility in the goals of both partners is more likely to lead to interpersonal goal conflict than combinations where only one or no partner selects time-intensive goals that are low in temporal flexibility (compositional effects).

Perceptions of interpersonal goal convergence are thought to occur if both partners constrain themselves to a selection of work and family goals that match their time and flexibility. Hence, it is expected that:

- 1d.** Interpersonal goal convergence is negatively related to one's time-intensity and positively related to one's temporal flexibility in work and family goals (actor effect).
- 1e.** Interpersonal goal convergence is negatively related to the respective partner's time-intensity and positively related to his or her temporal flexibility in work and family goals (partner effect).
- 1f.** A combination of low time-intensity and high temporal flexibility in the goals of both partners is associated with high interpersonal goal convergence (compositional effects).

### **3.2 Are Differences in the Quality of Interpersonal Goal Relations Associated with Everyday Goal Pursuit and Goal Progress?**

Differences in the quality of interpersonal goal relations are thought to be linked with goal pursuit and goal progress insofar as they influence goal relevant means. Because social relations have a gain-loss dynamic (M. M. Baltes & Carstensen, 1998), positive as well as negative interpersonal goal relations will be examined for their impact on the ability to act on personal goals in the present sample. Despite the fact that the term "quality of interpersonal goal relations" refers to the organization of goals within the partnership, positive and negative interpersonal goal relations need not be symmetric for both members of the couple. A husband's goals, for instance, can be in conflict with his wife's goals without her goals being in conflict with his goals. Accordingly, conflict and convergence in interpersonal goal relations are assumed to vary not only across but also within couples. This study considers the processes associated with positive as well as negative interpersonal goal relations in employed parents at different levels of abstraction. Hence, it will be examined whether similar processes operate in everyday life as well as with regard to more extended time-spans.

Self-regulation theories specify two important ways through which social partners may influence the successful pursuit of personal goals. Discrepancy reduction models state that under conditions where two interrelated persons work on their goals, one person's actions can either disturb or foster the engagement in goal pursuit of the other person (Carver & Scheier, 1982; 2002). According to the model of action phases (Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996; H. Heckhausen, 1991) social relations may influence situational circumstances for personal goal pursuit providing the individual with varying amounts of opportunities to engage in goal-relevant actions. With respect to the micro-level processes operating in everyday life, it is assumed that interpersonal goal convergence extends action opportunities and fosters goal pursuit and is therefore positively related to the engagement in activities furthering work and family goals in working parents. The proposed positive relationship between interpersonal goal convergence and goal pursuit should be present not only within each individual person (actor effect) but also across both partners (partner effect). Over and above the proposed actor- and partner-effects, it is assumed that individuals in couples where husband's goals converge with wife's goals and wife's goals converge with husband's goals are more successful in engaging in goal pursuit than individuals in partnerships where only one or no partner experiences high interpersonal goal convergence (compositional effect).

In line with research by Brunstein and colleagues (Brunstein et al., 1996) as well as Zaleski (1988), it is further assumed that interpersonal goal convergence is positively associated with opportunities of goal enactment and persistence in working on personal goals and should therefore also be related to more goal progress in the long run. Parallel to the propositions about micro-level processes, actor-, partner-, and compositional effects will be considered. These considerations lead to the following expectations:

- 2a.** Interpersonal goal convergence on the part of the individual is associated with increased goal pursuit and goal progress (actor effect).
- 2b.** Interpersonal goal convergence on side of the respective partner leads to increased goal pursuit and goal progress (partner-effect).
- 2c.** Partnerships characterized by high interpersonal goal convergence on side of both partners provide a good basis for goal pursuit and goal progress in both members of the couple (compositional effect).

Interpersonal goal conflict, in contrast, is thought to be associated with disturbances and set-backs as well as a decreased number of action possibilities in daily life (Carver &

Scheier, 2002; Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996). I therefore expect interpersonal goal conflict to be associated with few goal-relevant actions and the experience of ups and downs when trying to work on personal goals on side of both partners (actor- and partner-effect). Additionally, it is expected that experiences of interpersonal goal conflict on the part of both members of the couple exaggerate the difficulties both partners face in their daily goal pursuit (compositional effect).

With respect to the long-term consequences, it is assumed that interpersonal goal conflict restricts the overall amount of possibilities for goal enactment resulting in little goal progress. Again, interpersonal goal conflict is expected not only to affect individual goal progress, but also to have an influence on the respective partner. Additionally, couple combinations of high interpersonal goal conflict are thought to decrease the chances for goal progress in husbands and wives over and above the described individual-level effects. Hence, the following predictions are made:

- 2d.** High interpersonal goal conflict on the side of the individual leads to decreased goal pursuit, a high goal pursuit variability, and little goal progress (actor-effect).
- 2e.** High interpersonal goal conflict on the side of the respective partner is associated with decreased goal pursuit, a high goal pursuit variability, and little goal progress (partner-effect).
- 2f.** Partnerships characterized by high interpersonal goal conflict on the side of both partners lead to decreased goal pursuit, a high goal pursuit variability, and little goal progress in both members of the couple (compositional effect).

### **3.3 Does Access to Grandparental Childcare Facilitate the Combination of Work and Family Goals in Employed Parents?**

Besides an investigation of the influence of partnership characteristics on personal goal pursuit, this study also encompasses the impact of social support provided by older relatives, namely grandparental childcare. Given the time-constraints characteristic of middle adulthood and the sometimes complicated arrangements that are necessary when dual-earner couples try to combine their work and family goals, grandparental childcare is thought to represent one key social resource that helps managing the pursuit of multiple goals in the present sample (see section 2.2.2.). Based on these considerations it is expected that:

- 3a.** Employed parents with access to grandparental childcare are better able to manage the pursuit of their work and family goals than partners without this specific source of support (compositional effect).

I already pointed out that the endeavor to combine work and family goals within the partnership does not necessarily lead to interpersonal goal convergence but can also result in interpersonal goal conflict. Employed parents with high interpersonal goal conflict might be in a situation where they need to acquire additional goal-relevant means that help to counter the proposed negative effects of interpersonal goal conflict on individual goal pursuit. Based on the idea that grandparental childcare provision extends to its full effect only under conditions of severe resource constraints, it is proposed that:

- 3b.** Grandparental support in the form of childcare serves compensatory means for daily goal pursuit in the presence of interpersonal goal conflict between the partners (compositional effect).

### **3.4 Is the Engagement in Goal Pursuit and Goal Progress Associated with High Levels of both Subjective as well as Physiological Well-Being?**

Within the present approach, multiple criteria covering different time-ranges are employed to capture differences in the developmental success of employed parents with preschool children. I will now turn to the assumed relationships between behavioral indicators of developmental success, namely goal pursuit and goal progress, and experiential and physiological measures of successful development.

Models of emotion-regulation and telic theories of well-being address the interface between motivation and emotion (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Diener et al., 1999; Kuhl, 2001). In line with different concepts of emotion-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Kuhl, 2001), it is expected that an engagement in everyday life activities that further personal goals is positively related with positive affect whereas both an inability to work on personal goals and activities that hinder goal pursuit are reflected by increased negative affect. I therefore assume that daily reports of affect quality vary on a moment-to-moment basis depending on the extent to which employed parents currently manage to pursue their work and family goals. This leads to the following hypothesis:

- 4a.** High goal pursuit is associated with positive affect qualities in daily life.

Following telic theories of well-being, it is assumed that goal achievements represent a major source of well-being (Brunstein & Maier, 2001; Diener et al., 1999). It is therefore expected that progress on work and family goals over the course of several weeks contributes to the subjective well-being in the employed parents of this sample. Hence, the following prediction is made:

- 4b.** High progress on work and family goals is associated with high levels of subjective well-being.

Due to the fact that measures of subjective well-being are vulnerable to response biases, cortisol was included as a physiological indicator of successful development. Based on the biopsychosocial model of stress by Frankenhaeuser (1991; 1994), goal pursuit is not only expected to be associated with positive affect but also to be related with decreased cortisol secretion. In contrast, involuntary inactivity or performances of activities hindering personal goals are proposed to lead to increased cortisol secretion. Because acute and prolonged activations of the HPA-axis have different health implications (McEwen & Seeman, 1999), the relationship between daily goal pursuit and cortisol secretion is examined at two levels of abstraction. It is expected that:

- 4c.** An engagement in activities furthering personal goals leads to low levels of cortisol whereas goal-blockage and an engagement in activities hindering personal goals leads to high levels of cortisol.
- 4d.** Continuous difficulties in goal pursuit are related to an increased overall cortisol secretion.

### **3.6. Summary**

The preceding chapter served to elaborate the specific research questions guiding this study on interpersonal contributions to the pursuit of work and family goals in employed parents. The respective hypotheses are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *Summary of Hypotheses*

<b>Hypotheses</b>
<p><b>1. Time-related characteristics of work and family goals and conflict and convergence in interpersonal goal relations:</b></p> <p><i>Actor effects:</i></p> <p>Within individuals, interpersonal goal conflict is positively related to time-intensity and negatively related to temporal flexibility in work and family goals (Hypothesis 1a).</p> <p>Within individuals, interpersonal goal convergence is negatively related to time-intensity and positively related to temporal flexibility in work and family goals (Hypothesis 1d).</p> <p><i>Partner effects:</i></p> <p>Between partners, interpersonal goal conflict is positively related to time-intensity and negatively related to temporal flexibility in work and family goals (Hypothesis 1b).</p> <p>Between partners, interpersonal goal convergence is negatively related to time-intensity and positively related to temporal flexibility in work and family goals (Hypothesis 1e).</p> <p><i>Compositional effects:</i></p> <p>At the couple-level, combinations of high time-intensity and low temporal flexibility in the goals of both partners are associated with high interpersonal goal conflict (Hypothesis 1c).</p> <p>At the couple-level, combinations of low time-intensity and high temporal flexibility in the goals of both partners are associated with high interpersonal goal convergence (Hypothesis 1f).</p>
<p><b>2. The quality of interpersonal goal relations and everyday goal pursuit as well as goal progress:</b></p> <p><i>Actor effects:</i></p> <p>Within individuals, high interpersonal goal convergence leads to increased goal pursuit and goal progress (Hypothesis 2a).</p> <p>Within individuals, high interpersonal goal conflict leads to decreased goal pursuit, high goal pursuit variability and little goal progress (Hypothesis 2d).</p> <p><i>Partner effects:</i></p> <p>Between partners, high interpersonal goal convergence leads to increased goal pursuit and goal progress (Hypothesis 2b).</p> <p>Between partners, high interpersonal goal conflict leads to decreased goal pursuit, high goal pursuit variability and little goal progress (Hypothesis 2e).</p> <p><i>Compositional effects:</i></p> <p>At the couple-level, combinations of high interpersonal goal convergence on the side of both partners lead to increased goal pursuit and goal progress (Hypothesis 2c).</p> <p>At the couple-level, combinations of high interpersonal goal conflict on the side of both partners lead to decreased goal pursuit, a high goal pursuit variability and little goal progress (Hypothesis 2f).</p>
<p><b>3. Access to grandparental childcare and goal pursuit in employed parents:</b></p> <p><i>Compositional effects:</i></p> <p>Couples with access to grandparental childcare are better able to manage the pursuit of their work and family goals than couples without this specific source of support (Hypothesis 3a).</p> <p>Access to grandparental childcare serves compensatory means for daily goal pursuit in the presence of interpersonal goal conflict (Hypothesis 3b).</p>

*(table continues)*



Table 3. (continued)

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**Hypotheses**

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**4. Goal pursuit and goal progress and differences in subjective and physiological well-being:***Actor effects:*

High goal pursuit is associated with positive affect qualities in daily life (Hypothesis 4a).

High progress on work and family goals is positively related with subjective well-being (Hypothesis 4b).

An engagement in activities furthering personal goals leads to low levels of cortisol whereas goal-blockage and an engagement in activities hindering personal goals leads to high levels of cortisol (Hypothesis 4c).

Continuous difficulties in goal pursuit lead to increased overall cortisol secretion (Hypothesis 4d).

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