

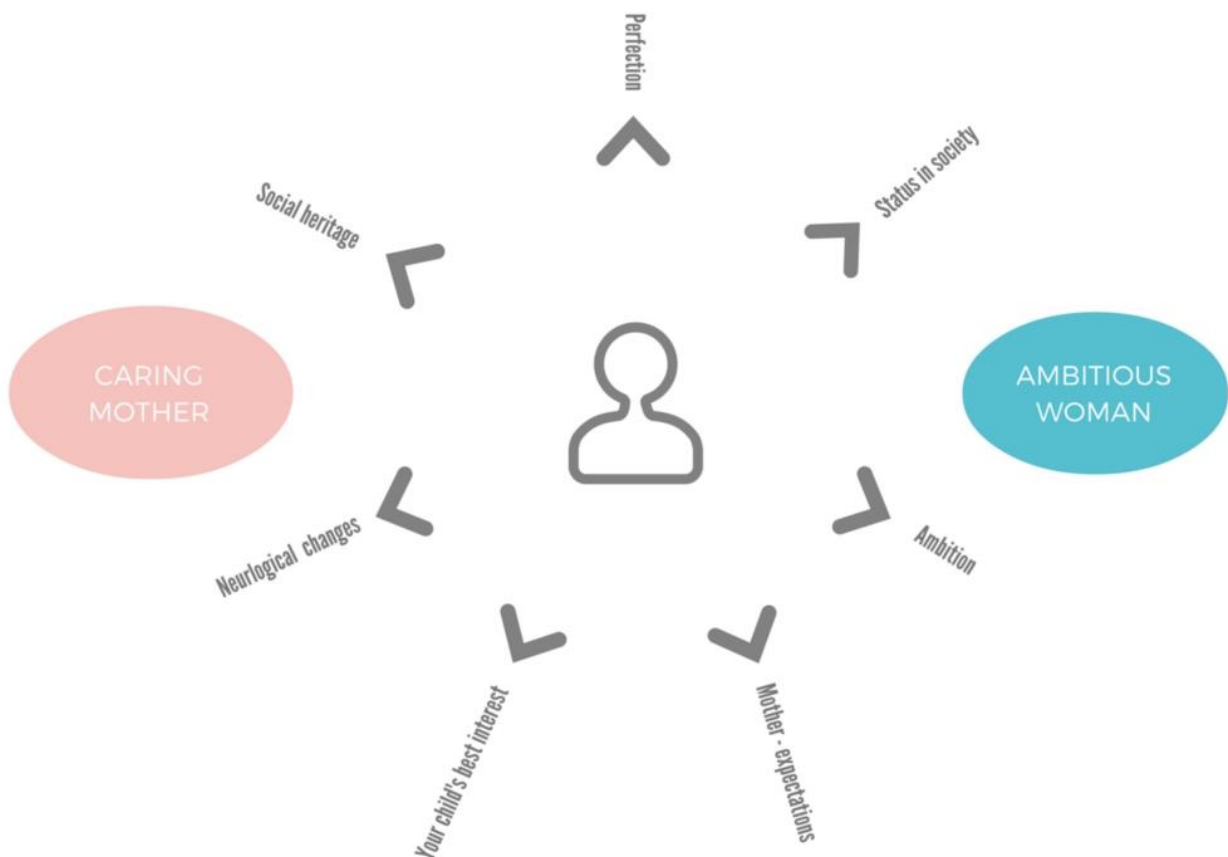
# MOTHERS WITH AMBITION

## *Seven insights that prepare you for the tug-of-war between work and home*

In my book **MOTHERS WITH AMBITION** (**AMBITIØSE MØDRE**), I present seven valuable insights that provide ambitious women with a basic understanding of why their everyday life is often full of stress. It draws a map of the array of opposite expectations they meet in their everyday life, once they become mothers, and what they can do to meet them in the best possible way.

The seven insights build on the most recent research in the western world (primarily the US and Scandinavia), and on interviews with experts and mothers with ambition. The book is a realistic yet kind helping hand to women that wish to embrace both roles as an independent, ambitious woman and a caring mother.

The seven insights are as follows in brief:



## **1. Women do not lose their ambitions when they have kids**

Research points towards the fact however, that men and women do see the concept of ambition differently. Calling yourself ambitious conflicts directly with the set of values pertaining to many women. At the same time, maternity leave provides mothers with a crash course of a source of meaning in life – family – that is very different from the career that has been most ambitious women's main identity so far. Men seldom have this opportunity to “dualise” their ambition-base, because they rarely get the opportunity to stay at home with their newborn for a longer period of time. This means that many mothers with ambition now obtain two “tracks of ambition” in their lives to which they want to devote their time, brain- and heart-space: family and work. This of course challenges the amount of space each track gets to take in women's heads and thus it may appear that women are a less ambitious than their equivalent male coworkers. In reality, however, mothers' career ambitions and aspirations, have seldomly changed a lot.

## **2. We need to be clear about our expectations to mum and dad at home and outside home**

We base our expectations to mothers and fathers on an old-fashioned set of family values. Although we are now in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fathers are still expected to be the provider for the family; mothers to be the caregiver. Research furthermore shows that these expectations are so deeply rooted in us, that we unconsciously reproduce them repeatedly, despite that we may apply very different, modern gender role ideals in our everyday lives. A mismatch between our own ideals and the expectations surrounding us may frustrate many ambitious mothers. Put simply, they are in doubt about whose expectations – their own or their surroundings' – they are actually trying to honor in their daily lives.

## **3. Our own mother is our first and foremost role model – whether we want it or not**

The “mummy-experience”, many women themselves had as kids i.e. how their own mother handled her role as a mum, and how the gender roles were defined during their own childhood, become a much-used framework of reference for many new mothers it appears. This means, that many women base their own motherhood on 30-year-old ideals, which are in many ways incompatible with these women's current reality. This is true in both the workplace and at home, where a young couple may have divided housekeeping task differently prior to becoming parents, but after becoming parents, many households suddenly change “in favour” of the new mother.

## **4. Your kids are messing with your brain!**

They are forgetting a very important biology-lesson in maternity class: Not only the body of a new mother gets a complete re-modelling during pregnancy and birth; so does the brain, assisted by the hormones that sprint around a new mother's body. The brain simply helps the new mother to launch headfirst into the task of being a mother. If women become aware of this and meet the neurological changes with open eyes, many ambitious women will more easily accept and work with and around the "mummy-feelings", that add to the feeling of being torn apart when becoming mothers.

### **5. Success comes from work achievements – at home you are just a mum...**

What broadly provides you with recognition and identity in today's society, is what you can achieve by leading an extroverted life, outside home. In the aftermath of the growing individualization of society, masculine values such as career and material success are primarily what provide you with status – not socially oriented values, such as solidarity and welfare. In today's society, you need to be able to manage on your own. This underlines the need to advance in the workplace. If you feel there is nothing to aspire towards at home, because you are not recognized for your achievements at home, neither mothers or fathers feel an aspiration to wind down for a few years to take care of the family.

### **6. Quit perfection! Now!**

Many women have an incredibly low self worth, and the collective female self-understanding seems to be substantially lower than the equivalent male self-understanding. For example, women often put together unrealistic role models with the best characteristics from ten different women, and we unconsciously mentally obliterate all potential excuses for not having it all. Resulting, we get the understanding that we must out-perform ourselves to be worthy of being loved. That of course puts us under a form of self-chosen pressure, because who is capable of being perfect 24/7?

### **7. If you thrive and prosper, odds are that your kid does the same**

Mothers often create a special connection with their kids, when they spend a long time on maternity leave and a number of days off sick with their little ones. This is why they are seemingly more so affected than the fathers if something troubles their children. However, this is actually true the other way around as well. Kids are often the mirrors of their parents. Hence, if women "sort out their own mess" and find peace in their own choices and priorities, odds are that their kids will be happier kids in balance as well.

These seven insights help ambitious women get an overview of the stress, that affects them. In my view, these seven intertwined factors affect women and how they see themselves and their

role in family and at work immensely. Getting an overview and understanding of these seven factors will help most ambitious women in coping and prioritizing both their heart- and mind-space in the future, thus making them both a better employee and a better mother at the same time. For this reason, I finish each chapter with an exercise that helps women understand each factor and finding their own point of view in relation to each factor.

However, getting this knowledge beyond the women and into both their workplaces and society in general, will make a larger difference. This is also why I am currently writing a second book that discusses the insights from a workplace point of view.

The current book was published a month ago in Danish. I am now looking for international partners to publish and utilize the book and its insights in English. Please send me a message, if you are interested in publishing the book and/or its insights.

Kind regards,

Lisbeth Odgaard Madsen  
Potential Company  
[lom@potentialco.dk](mailto:lom@potentialco.dk)

