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High-status female breadwinners and their partners
doing gender at home

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***She Brings Home the Bacon,
But Should He Cook It?***
***High-Status Female Breadwinners and Their Partners
Doing Gender at Home***

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Acknowledgements

Ik ben blij dat je hier bent

Ik ben blij dat je hier bent

Ik ben blij dat je hier bent

Ik ben blij dat je hier bent

- BLØF, featuring Geike Arnaert

The text translates “I am happy you are here”, which is the first thing I say to you... dear reader of my thesis. Luckily the song mentions this a few times in a row, so I can emphasise my happiness of presenting my work to you.

Besides welcoming the readers to this thesis, these lyrics from the popular Dutch band BLØF introduces the country that is at the centre of this work: the Netherlands. Also, as this thesis’ focus is on couples, it fits to make reference to the song that was played at the beginning of my own wedding ceremony, in presence and in thoughts of people who have also been with me through the process of this research.

To my husband,

As you already know, I have checked with the James Webb Space Telescope and you are the best husband in the universe! Thank you for your love, your support and your entertainment. Just the thought of you during my study, always brought a big smile to my face.

To my mother,

Although I did not mention you first, your support throughout my lifetime deserves my foremost gratitude. You have always taught me that I could do anything if I put my heart and my mind to it and encouraged me to do the same for this research. Thank you!

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Thank you that you have never doubted me, for always having my back, supporting my dreams and having the right words to keep me extra motivated. You are a blessing to me.

Let's keep tackling this game called life together.

To Sandy, for encouraging me to be the next in the family to undertake and complete PhD research, after you. I was in your acknowledgement page, but even if I wasn't, you belong in mine and I am thankful that you are the wonderful cousin that you are. To Astrid, for the many years of friendship, the intelligent talks on this subject and your helpful comments. To Liesbeth, for the long and plentiful conversations about my PhD process and for providing uplifting words throughout the years.

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Table of Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Symbols, Citation Signals and Abbreviations</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>vi</i>
Chapter 1: Setting the Scene	1
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Research Questions	9
1.3 Thesis Structure	10
Chapter 2: Contexts of Doing Gender	13
2.1 Conceptualising Doing Gender	14
2.1.1 <i>Feminisms and Doing Gender</i>	18
2.1.2 <i>Doing Gender in the Context of Domestic Work</i>	20
2.1.3 <i>Household Work and Gender Equality</i>	33
2.1.4 <i>Masculinities</i>	35
2.2 Doing Gender at Home	38
2.2.1 <i>Households in Welfare States</i>	40
2.2.2 <i>Intra-Household Relations and Dynamics</i>	45
2.2.3 <i>High-Income Female Breadwinner Households</i>	50
2.3 The Division between Home and Work	57
2.3.1 <i>Mobilisation of Women in the Workforce</i>	58
2.3.2 <i>Women’s Earnings in Times of Crisis</i>	58
2.3.3 <i>Current State of Women’s Home and Work life</i>	61
2.4 Doing Gender at Work	65
2.4.1 <i>Horizontal and Vertical Segregation</i>	68
2.4.2 <i>Effects of Gendered Work Segregation on Female Breadwinners</i>	70
2.5 Summary and Conclusion	74
Chapter 3: Researching with High-Status Female Breadwinners	77
3.1 Scope	78
3.2 Rationale for Research Design	84
3.3 Rationale for Semi-Structured Interviewing	86
3.4 Researching Sensitive Topics	89
3.5 Power Dynamics and Recruitment	92
3.6 Pilot Study and Interview Design	97
3.7 Participants	100
3.8 Research Setting	107
3.9 Data Collection	109
3.10 Data Analysis and Coding	111
3.11 Trustworthiness	117
3.12 Impact COVID-19 on Conducting Interviews	120
3.13 Ethical Considerations	122

3.14 Biases and Knowledge Claims	124
3.15 Summary and Conclusion.....	127
Chapter 4: Doing Gender in Domestic Work.....	129
4.1 Household Bargaining Frames: Sissi and Mitch.....	131
4.1.1 Economic Bargaining Resources	140
4.2 Distribution of Housework and Childcare: Lily and Peter.....	147
4.2.1 Clusters of Housework Tasks	149
4.2.2 Cooking and Cleaning.....	151
4.2.3 Gardening	153
4.2.4 Childcare.....	156
4.2.5 Leisure.....	162
4.3 Conflict Management in Housework: Lia and partner.....	169
4.3.1 Early Communication	174
4.3.2 Changing Household Model during Relationship	175
4.3.3 Men's Self-Confidence	177
4.3.4 Possible Conflict Resolutions.....	184
4.4 Conclusion	188
Chapter 5: Doing Gender in Financial Tasks	195
5.1 Financial Management Styles: Eva and Dre	196
5.2 Distribution of Finance: Margaret and Aart	205
5.3 Financial Conflict Management: Celina and Nathan.....	211
5.3.1 Possible Conflict Resolutions.....	219
5.4 Conclusion	223
Chapter 6: Effects of Family Policies and Cultural Practices on Households	227
6.1 Female Breadwinner Couples at Work: Sara and Gijs.....	230
6.2 Social Norms for Gendered Careers: Erma and partner	237
6.3 Conflict Between Work and Home: Mathilde and Hans	245
6.3.1 Possible Conflict Resolutions.....	251
6.4 Conclusion	261
Chapter 7: Conclusions	267
7.1 Discussion of Research Questions	269
7.1.1 Research Subquestion 1	269
7.1.2 Research Subquestion 2	273
7.1.3 Research Subquestion 3	277
7.1.4 Main Research Question	279
7.2 Limitations and Further Research.....	283
References	285
Appendix A.....	324
Appendix B.....	325
Appendix C.....	326
Appendix D.....	327

List of Figures

Figure 1: Distribution of earner-models across 20 countries.....	8
Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of a modern division of labour for households	24
Figure 3: Time spent on unpaid care work and paid work by gender and region.....	35
Figure 4: Proportion of breadwinner women by country and motherhood status	60
Figure 5: Coding Diagram	116
Figure 6: Subjects expressed in percentages that couples with children argue about	170

List of Tables

Table 1: Average time of housework by age in the Netherlands.....	30
Table 2: Working population, Q1 2022	69
Table 3: Participants overview.....	104

List of Symbols, Citation Signals and Abbreviations

- (...) omitted information of considerably low relevance.
- (x) omitted information potentially reveals the anonymity of a participant.
- et al. latin for “and others”; representing the remainder of authors of a certain work.
- ibid. latin for “in the same place”; consecutively cited quote is shortened at this place.
- i.e. latin (id est) for “that is”.
- INT: interviewer
- n.d. no date
- n.p. no page
- supra latin for “above”; referring to text that appeared earlier.

Abstract

This study focuses on how high-status female breadwinner households in the Netherlands are doing gender at home and argues that an investigation of both the gendered nature of home life and of work is needed to understand these households. The practical day-to-day management of this relatively new family structure is under-researched, resulting in a lack of knowledge about how these atypical households negotiate their home and working lives, and to what extent they conform to or challenge gender norms. In-depth interviews with 36 men and women were conducted to understand the intertwined gendered effects of work and home lives, addressing three key subquestions. Firstly, the research examines the phenomenon of “doing gender” in the context of domestic work, challenging prevailing economic frameworks and highlighting the disjuncture between theory and lived experiences. Secondly, it investigates the relationship between earnings, financial arrangements, and negotiations at home, revealing complex patterns of power dynamics and gendered expectations. Thirdly, it explores the impact of state-level family policies and cultural practices on gender dynamics, advocating for more inclusive policy frameworks and a feminist approach to policymaking. Addressing the main research question, this thesis underscores that regardless of a woman’s earnings, the societal pressure on her remains pronounced, especially within the context of domestic responsibilities, particularly when children are part of the household. The significance of financial arrangements emerges as a critical factor in understanding power dynamics within female breadwinner households, as evidenced by men’s reluctance to accept women’s financial contributions, reflecting the deeper societal norms at play. Additionally, the study highlights the significance of family policies and cultural practices in influencing gender dynamics, advocating for more inclusive policies and a feminist lens in policymaking to enable individuals to negotiate alternative family arrangements effectively. The conclusion underlines the tension between the woman’s financial contribution and the expectation for the man to take on domestic responsibilities, emphasising the ongoing pressure to conform to societal gender expectations even in unconventional partnerships.

Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

Bringing home the bacon is an idiom that refers to earning the main income that a household lives on. Broadly speaking, the tradition in most Western countries¹ was, until the 1960s, that men would go out to work while women were responsible for the home (Coontz, 2011; Dernberger & Pepin, 2020; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Janssens, 1997; Ruggles, 2015; VandenBroek & Van Molle, 2010). Over time, households across Europe have experienced a gradual change in this division of labour with the traditional male breadwinner model shifting to or being combined with a non-traditional household model, depending on the European country (Pfau-Effinger, 2004; 2007, Marks, 2006; Van Dongen, 2009). For example, Nordic countries have strived more than other countries to revolutionise households and to support female employment by adopting policies designed to support female employment and change the gender roles within the family (Gauthier et al., 2018, 10; Hakim, 2014; Møller et al., 2021; Sanandaji, 2018), but even in the Nordic countries “they are also far from a situation with complete gender equality, either in the public sphere or in the private sphere” (Gauthier et al., 2018, 10).

This study looks at the development of one non-traditional household model in particular: the female breadwinner model, in which the woman’s higher earning power creates an unequal financial relationship with her male partner. And although Nordic countries are often good choices for examining that model, not far away from this region and also located in North Western Europe² is a country that has been selected to look further into

¹ In this study the definition of Western countries is inspired by the United Nations’ list of regional groups of Member States, that categorises the United States as special member in the group Western European and other States. Australia, Canada and New Zealand are also featured in this group. Other regional groups are Latin American and Caribbean States, African States, Asia-Pacific States, and Eastern European States (UN, n.d.).

² North Western European countries can be demarcated in various ways, for example by including Northern France and excluding Southern France (Barnes & Barnes, 1994, 5; Lachmann, 2000, 189) or by excluding Austria (Blinkhorn, 2000, 57). This study considers the following countries to be considered as North Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

this type of household: the Netherlands. This country occupies a relatively high position in North Western Europe with a fourth place in the ranking of metropolitan regions after London, Paris and Rhine-Ruhr (Lopez-Carreiro et al., 2021; Randstad Region, 2019), is also a country that is placed in mid-table on the Women in Work Index regarding the position women on the labour market and thus surpasses countries such as Germany and France (PWC, 2022), but ultimately has the lowest proportion of female breadwinners among countries in North Western Europe (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2021). By putting a gender lens on the Dutch welfare state and its ambiguous work-care policy (Goijaerts, 2022), insights will be gained into the complexity of gender equality and the influence of social policy on gender dynamics. Focusing on the Netherlands serves as a valuable case for studying the interplay between the welfare state, societal norms and gender relations (Goossen, 2020; Pascall, 2012), in particular between female breadwinners and their partners.

Using in-depth interviews, I investigate how this “new” pattern of earning influences women’s roles and relationships within their household in the Netherlands. When it comes to female breadwinner households, there is no consistent evidence that breadwinning women refuse to follow a traditional role segregation with regard to household tasks (Oláh et al., 2014, 31). In fact, studies from around the world reveal that working women (including female breadwinners) still tend to do more in the household than men, see for example studies on Australia in the early 1990s and the mid 2000s Baxter & Hewitt, 2013; Bittman et al., 2003, the United States throughout the 1980s (Brines, 1994), the 1990s (Bittman et al., 2003; Coltrane, 2000) and the 2000s (Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010), and Germany from the late 1980s to the early 2000s (Grunow et al., 2012). This prompts the question of how breadwinning women negotiate their multiple responsibilities. Given that responsibility for housework, also known as “the second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989), may affect time for leisure and personal interests, and also the time a

woman has for other work-related activities such as attending network events, which can be important in professional careers. Often studies of working women focus on the workplace, but this study looks at how the first shift and the second shift relate to each other, by examining the home lives of female breadwinner couples in detail. The particular focus is on breadwinning women with high status due to their social or professional position which often comes with a highly demanding job.

The number of female breadwinners in Europe is not insignificant –almost a third of mothers with dependent children as well as between 20 and nearly 50 per cent of partnered women without children are the main breadwinners in their households (Cory & Stirling, 2015, 8; Klesment & Van Bavel, 2015, 20)– and this group should not be overlooked or misunderstood. This chapter sets the scene for how their households will be discussed. First, the background to female employment and female breadwinner households is provided to contextualise the discussion. I then outline my research questions and at the end of the chapter is a presentation of this thesis’ structure.

1.1 Background

The core area of interest in the female breadwinner households are gendered dynamics. Based on the notion of “doing gender”, which means creating and reinforcing gender differences between boys and girls and men and women (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 137), gender ideals³ and gender roles are explored at home and in relation to people’s roles in the workforce. This thesis contributes to the literature on household dynamics and on the relationship between home and work, explored in Chapter 2: Contexts of Doing Gender. The focus on households from high-income groups due to the women’s high-status positions casts a unique light on

³ Gender ideals can be defined as the cluster of characteristics, behaviour patterns, and values that members of a group think that a man or a woman should have, a set of cultural expectations (Hoffert, 2009, xix).

how paid work matters within households due to exposure of the challenges to conventional gender roles, the reshaping of power dynamics between couples, the allocation of resources, the influence of social perceptions, the issues of workforce diversity and the effectiveness of a country's social policies.

Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, households in Europe shifted away from the male breadwinner model, which had dominated since the industrial revolution, and much of the transformation was in women attaining part-time work outside the home (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015, 3; Lewis, 1999, 2; Van der Lippe & Van Dijk, 2002). Working part-time has become the norm among women with children in the Netherlands, Germany and Great Britain. In Nordic countries, the full-time housewife has essentially disappeared and part time employment, especially in Denmark, is primarily taken up by women as a temporary bridge between maternity leave and the return to a full-time work schedule. Southern Europe, although in some ways exemplifying a delayed transformation, has also shown strong growth in female employment in the last two decades. All of these developments indicate more possibilities for women in paid employment (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Eurostat, 2019a; Van der Lippe & Van Dijk, 2002).

While women's participation in the paid labour market varies across Europe, being high in the Northern countries⁴ and declining as one moves South⁵, female economic activity rates have increased constantly since the 1960s (Black et al., 2017; Pasqua, 2008) and cultural norms for family structure now include households in which the female is the main breadwinner.

⁴ Pasqua (2008, 162) divides European countries into three groups. The first group consists of countries with a very high percentage of female employment (more than 90 per cent) which are Denmark, Finland and Sweden. In the second group are countries with "middle" levels of female employment (60-80 per cent) which includes Austria, Belgium, France, German, Ireland, Portugal, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The lowest proportion of working women (below 60 per cent) are in the third group and includes all Southern European countries with the exception of Portugal.

⁵ See supra note 4.

This phenomenon has become the subject of various studies in which the effect of the female breadwinner model has been investigated among couples (Bertrand et al., 2015; Bowman, 2022; Brennan et al., 2001; Rogers & DeBoer, 2011; Winkler et al., 2005), and also specifically the romantic and sexual effects of this new household structure have been explored (Coughlin & Wade, 2012; Pierce et al., 2013). Many of these studies are based on data from the United States, and the issue of women out-earning their male partner has been scantily researched in European countries; we do not know how being the highest earner in the household influences the way women view their roles and relationships here.

There is rich research in the Global South on female-headed households, highlighting certain gender stereotypes and the risk of poverty due to gender norms (Chant, 2013; 2014; Datta & McIlwaine, 2000; Gehringer et al., 2015; Haregu et al., 2015; Klesment & Van de Bavel, 2015). Although significant, the relevance of the Global South literature is limited since it focuses on households without a male adult present, which differs from the context of my thesis. While that literature does demonstrate the risk of poverty is when women are the sole breadwinners, it provides less insight into intra-household relations and negotiations between adult partners.

The female breadwinner model is derived from a framework of earner-carer models that pertain to how countries organise their family policies and how welfare state institutions in those countries perceive and treat gender. In general: these models highlight the roles of women and mothers in society (Salin et al., 2018, 3) and assume a heterosexual nuclear family with the caveat that this is a simplification of the model. Studies of gender roles within households have widely identified three earner-carer models as significant in the Global North, namely a modified male breadwinner model, where the male works full-time and the female works part-time; an equal dual-earning model, with public childcare; and an intermediate model between these two. Some studies also include the traditional male

breadwinner model, where the male works full-time and the female does not work outside of the home (Salin et al., 2018, 3; see also: Korpi, 2000; Lewis, 1992; Misra et al., 2010; Pfau-Effinger, 2006; Sainsbury, 1994; Thévenon, 2011). While others argue that a pure male breadwinner model has never existed because women always engaged in the labour market to a certain degree (Lewis 2001, 153; Pennington & Westover, 1989), the male breadwinner model is acknowledged as the most accurate description of some countries' and some classes' social reality (Lewis, 2001, 153). Studies that classify additional models may include the relatively new female breadwinner model whereby the woman is the sole or main breadwinner (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2021; Salin et al., 2018). My research focuses on the traditional and modified versions of both the male and the female breadwinner model, see Figure 1 for examples of earner-models⁶, where the way the female breadwinner households compare to dual-income households can be described as follows:

In dual-income households, the breadwinner is the one with the more profitable and economically sound job. The other income earner, who may be working part-time or can afford to leave the workforce, is simply “earning”, but not necessarily a breadwinner. (Kagan, 2022)

In the Global North, the female breadwinner model has become more common in North Western Europe. North Western Europe is unique within Europe and North America because of its economic system, political structure and cultural traits (Hemerijck et al., 2009, 145). North Western Europe is a region that culturally shares the tendency towards secularism compared to “southern Europe and the United States, where religion and traditional morality still play a prominent role, even in politics” (ibid., 146). Also, North Western Europe is seen

⁶ In this figure, the “Pure female breadwinner” is when the woman is the only wage-earner. The “One-and-a-half female breadwinner” is when the woman works more than 30 hours per week and the man works less than 30 hours. “Dual earner” is when both members of the couple work a similar number of hours. “One-and-a-half male breadwinner” refers to the man working more than 30 hours and the woman works less than 30 hours. “Male breadwinner” concerns the man being the only wage-earner (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2019, 7).

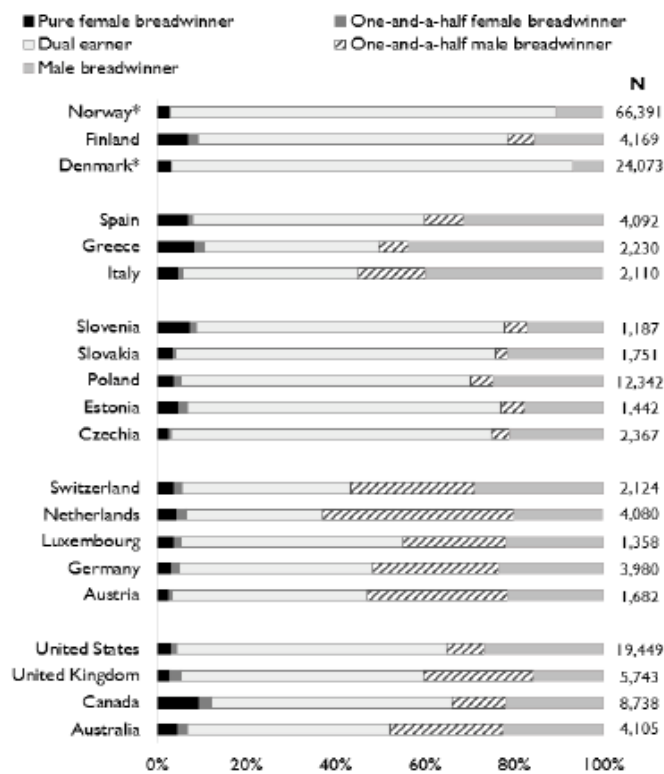
as the first industrialising region of the world (Rössner, 2017, 6), but it was not until the 20th century that these early-industrialised countries showed a radical change in female labour force participation (FLFP)⁷ rates (OWID, n.d.). Within North Western Europe, the Netherlands came from having the lowest FLFP rates at the beginning of the industrial revolution until the 1980s, towards rising to one of the highest rates –just below Switzerland and the Nordic countries– of FLFP during the last decade (ibid., n.d.). Simultaneously throughout the last decade, the Netherlands has been among the nations with the lowest proportions of women who are the highest earner in their households amongst North Western European countries (Klesment & Van Bavel, 2015; see also Figure 1 for “one-and-a-half male breadwinner” and “male breadwinner”, which shows that the Netherlands has the highest share of male breadwinners and has the lowest share of dual earners), but female breadwinners in this country are still on a rise (Vissers, 2018).

The Netherlands is a country that is well-suited for examination in this thesis due to its welfare state, which encourages careful consideration of gender issues. This is because of the distinct approach to social policy and its relevance for promoting gender equality (Arts & Gelissen, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Given that this country is widely regarded as a mix of two regimes, namely the social-democratic and conservative-corporatist (Arts & Gelissen, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Goijaerts, 2022), the Netherlands is a useful example for reflecting on how family policies and related cultural practices, particularly in the work-care dimension, play a role in how people do gender at home. As the concept of “doing gender” is a sociological theory implying that gender is not merely an inherent characteristic or biological trait, but rather a social construct that individuals actively perform and reinforce through their everyday actions and behaviours

⁷ International organisations such as World Bank, International Labour Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development measure the male and female labour force participation rate by the working-age population of males and females, referring to the ages 15 to 64 (ILO, 2020; OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2020.).

(West & Zimmerman, 1987), the context of female breadwinner couples presents an interesting case study due to the disruption of conventional gender division of labour, which equates domestic duties with women and the role of the breadwinner with males.

Figure 1: Distribution of earner-models across 20 countries⁸.



Source: Kowalewska & Vitali, 2021.

Narrowing the focus onto specific economic/class circumstances is also valuable to comprehend how financial resources play a role in negotiations between couples. For female breadwinner couples, studying class-specific work-family challenges and enablers in high-status households reveals how these women use their relative resources to negotiate unpaid work. This sheds light on the gendered interaction between income dynamics, division of labour, and relationship satisfaction (Dunatchik, 2023). Additionally, this thesis aims to

⁸ The total sum of the pure and dual versions of female breadwinning is the highest in Nordic countries. The Netherlands has the highest proportion of male breadwinners (see the legend in Figure 1 for “one-and-a-half male breadwinner” and “male breadwinner”), because of strong male-breadwinning norms and extensive part-time employment opportunities (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2020).

explore how family policies and related cultural practices impact how female breadwinners “do gender”. By considering gender equality as a key aspect of conceptualising doing gender, this thesis seeks to understand whether and how more equitable and fulfilling relationships can be developed, where household labour is shared based on individual preferences, abilities, and negotiated agreements rather than rigid gender norms.

1.2 Research Questions

The title *She Brings Home the Bacon, but Should He Cook It?* followed by the subtitle *High-Status Female Breadwinners and Their Partners Doing Gender at Home* suggests the idea that there are gendered dynamics in female breadwinner couples’ home lives. This study investigates this idea by exploring the challenges that these couples may experience in their home lives, in particular when it comes to domestic work and finances, and how/ if they make these challenges work for themselves. Therefore, the main research question of this study is: “How do Dutch female breadwinner households do gender at home?” Subsequently, directly connected to the main question are the sub questions:

- (1) What is “doing gender” in the context of domestic work for female breadwinner couples?
- (2) How do the earnings and financial arrangements of female breadwinners relate to negotiations at home?
- (3) How do state-level family policies and related cultural practices impact how female breadwinners are “doing gender” at home?

1.3 Thesis Structure

To address the main research question and its subquestions, the rest of this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2, Contexts of Doing Gender, presents the theoretical framework of the study and contains five sections. The first, Conceptualising Doing Gender, where the origin of the concept of doing gender is described, its relationship with feminist approaches and research on masculinities is addressed, and where the topic of gender equality unfolds that doing gender is prominent in housework and childcare. This is followed by the second section Doing Gender at Home, covering the “state of the art” in the literature by looking at intra-household relations and dynamics, and within that about female breadwinner households, by looking at, among other things, the influence of the Dutch welfare state and the specific context pertaining to high-income households. The third section explores the division between home and work, and provides the historical background of the gendered divide between home and workplace in Western countries. This gendered divide is an important context for the rise of female breadwinners in this part of the world, and important for the context of the current state of women’s home and work life in Western Countries; themes such as the COVID-19 crisis and the gender wage gap are not left untouched. In the fourth section, Doing Gender at Work, I examine the contemporary gendered context of work in the paid labour force to provide a better understanding of high-status breadwinning women’s work lives and how this influences their home lives. This chapter ends with a summary and conclusion.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology of this study including the background and position of the researcher. The work is built on approaches, methods and strategies, all reflecting the researcher’s view on ensuring that the results of the project are robust. The research strategy adopted allowed me to investigate the details of how breadwinning women

negotiate with their partners about their home lives, what the relationship is between home and work on their gendered household dynamics, and how work distinctively matters for breadwinning women in high-status positions. A qualitative interview method was selected that gives room to explore intra-household dynamics and gender relations. Through intensive networking and through referrals, a total of 36 participants (27 women and nine men) took part in the study.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the findings of study. Each chapter corresponds with the subquestions of this thesis and in each section of the chapters I focus on the story of a particular couple who took part in the research. Chapter 4, *Doing Gender in Domestic Work*, centres around a variety of female breadwinner couples to discuss Household Bargaining Frames, Distribution of Housework and Childcare, and Conflict Management in Housework. Chapter 5, *Doing Gender in Financial Tasks*, looks at the three sections Financial Management Styles, Distribution of Finance and Financial Conflict Management through a selection of female breadwinner couples. Chapter 6, *Effects of Family Policies and Cultural Practices on Households*, is also focused on several couples where women are the breadwinners, but then to illustrate the sections Female Breadwinner Couples at Work, Social Norms for Gendered Careers and Conflict Between Work and Home. These findings chapters demonstrate that when it comes to domestic work, doing gender takes precedence over the outcomes predicted by economic resource theories when we examine the home lives of female breadwinners. I found that rather than bargaining in simple economic terms, men and women tend to experience their tasks and time differently to each other. Regarding financial tasks, a larger earnings gap between the partners tends to come with more responsibilities for the breadwinning women; and the men in these non-conventional arrangements are more inclined to distance themselves from a sense of commonality on household income. Concerning the influence of paid work, it was only those couples which had a large gap in

labour market involvement between partners, i.e., where the women worked substantially longer hours, that saw the man to do more in the household. However, this chapter also shows how strongly social norms can weigh on gendered career paths, which leads to the fact that tackling social norms and continuing to go against the grain are tasks in themselves. This brings to the surface that choosing a non-conventional career path is not possible for everyone, as it comes with the costs of increased chance of relationship conflicts and burnout, given the complex links with the atypical home situation of female breadwinner couples.

Chapter 7, Discussion, closes this thesis by bringing the overall purpose together and answering the main question and subquestions of this study, that doing gender plays an important role in the intertwined interface between work and private life, but awareness and desires regarding doing gender among the participants unfortunately do not guarantee that constructive changes can be made for themselves.

Chapter 2: Contexts of Doing Gender

In the Netherlands there is a popular anti-emancipatory expression: “het enige recht van de vrouw is het aanrecht” [the only right of the woman is the right to the kitchen sink]. This expression refers to a predominant acceptance of traditional beliefs about gender roles, being: men as the breadwinners and women as homemakers (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Amott & Matthei, 1996; Barnett, 2004; Becker, 1981; Bertrand, 2011; Cunningham et al. 2005; Lewis & Ostner, 1994; Lewis, 1992; Pinho & Gaunt, 2021). As women have been entering the paid labour force in increasing numbers throughout the last decades, the male breadwinner model has given way to alternative family structures (Janssens, 1997; Lewis, 2001; Marks, 2006; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Vink et al., 2022), challenging the narrative of traditional labour division between men and women.

In exploring how female breadwinner households negotiate home life, this conceptual framework argues that to fully understand the gendered nature of life at home it is important to also understand the gendered nature of life at work. An approach which only examined gender at home would take female breadwinner couples out of context by not discussing the effects of work as well. It is also necessary to understand the history of the practical and ideological separation of “work” and “home”; an arrangement that underpins the gendering of both work and home life. I argue that these contexts—home, work, and history—shape the intra-household dynamics of female breadwinner households. I begin with a discussion of the concept “doing gender”, that I use throughout my study. The chapter is then organised to draw out the links between gender at work and home. Section 2, Doing Gender at Home presents the “state of the art” in extant research on household dynamics. I draw on the literature on welfare state regimes to illustrate how country-level matters influence household-level matters, by unfolding how the Dutch distinctive welfare regime and its ambiguous social policies contribute to shaping the lives of female breadwinner households.

This is followed by a discussion of the existing research on female breadwinner households in regard to intra-household dynamics and the specificities of high incomes in female breadwinner households, showing how paid work and home are not separate in the lives of these households. The next section *Divisions Between Home and Work* sheds light on the historical background of these households, starting from the division between home and public space during the industrial revolution and unfolding the rise of female breadwinner households that we know now. The following section, *Doing Gender at Work* explores in detail the ways that experiences of (breadwinning) women in society are distinctly related to how work is defined, both in the home and in the paid labour force. This is where “work” is explored and the extent to which there is a gendered nature of work in the home and in the paid labour force is illustrated. This section also discusses the biases and beliefs about women in high-status jobs to highlight additional challenges that high-status women have in paid employment. This chapter concludes by arguing that it is within intra-household dynamics that the above-described contexts come together, and it is only by understanding female breadwinner households within this broader context that their individual negotiations and challenges will be understood.

2.1 Conceptualising Doing Gender

When researching the division of household tasks, it may seem that there is only one process going on, namely performing housework and childcare. However, there is another process that is embedded in these tasks; the process of doing gender. Sociologist Sara Berk (1985) famously described the household as a “gender factory” and points out: “members ‘do’ gender, as they ‘do’ housework and child care”. She argues that the division of labour within the home provides for the joint production of household labour and gender; it is the mechanism by which both the material and symbolic products of the household are realised

(ibid., 201). The ways that gender is “done” within female breadwinner couples are best scrutinised by first exploring the concept of doing gender.

There are three ideas about how we “do” gender (Holmes, 2007, 51). The first is a dramaturgical approach in which we are all actors who understand that we want to give a good performance of masculinity and femininity. Gender is an illusion, according to social psychologist Erving Goffman (1979), because we follow “scripts” and use “displays” to make gender seem natural. While Goffman has identified fixed and assigned identities, these roles received criticism from scholars for maintaining static gender imbalances – lacking a dynamic and relational perspective on gender (Bury, 1997; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 1971; Rankin, 2009, 20; Wexler, 1984, 41-42). As Goffman believed that gender was not about “being” but “doing”, others such as sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman pointed out that we are held accountable to our displays being gender appropriate (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 135), leading to the second idea of how we “do” gender.

West and Zimmerman argued against the optional nature of Goffman’s concept and stated that “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expression of masculine and feminine ‘nature’” (ibid., 126). Their concept of doing gender involved distinguishing “gender” from “sex” (by chromosomal typing before birth and by genitalia at birth) and “sex category” (through application of the sex criteria in everyday life), as gender “is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category” (ibid., 127). They emphasised that gender is a social construct, but a third idea of how we “do” gender proposes that “sex” – not just “gender” – is also socially constructed.

According to philosopher Judith Butler, our social constructions are derived from

performative actions. She explains: “Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an ‘it’ to a ‘she’ or a ‘he’, and in that naming, the girl is ‘girded’ brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender” (Butler, 1993, 7), which means that assigning a sex through the statement “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl” is performative. Butler suggests “troubling” (1990) or “undoing” (2004) gender in the binary categories “feminine” or “masculine”, but critics argue that her attempts are not always successful or politically wise (Seidman, 1994; Holmes, 2007, 61) and deem her radical mind games as unrealistic because the reality is that our culture would still apply different standards to women than to men (Schwarz, 2017). Nevertheless, in order to challenge the ideas of how we “do” gender, it is useful to consider “undoing gender” through the work of Butler as well as others.

With regard to practices which might “undo gender”, psychologist Francine Deutsch (2007, 106) suggests that researchers should look at: 1) when and how social interactions become less gendered, 2) whether gender can be irrelevant in interaction, 3) whether gendered interactions always underwrite inequality, 4) how the institutional and interactional levels work together to produce change, and 5) interaction as the site of change, all of which are helpful key points for exploring intra-household dynamics. A practice of undoing gender that is relevant to intra-household dynamics comes from professor of Leadership and Organisation Elisabeth Kelan (2018), who speaks on men in organisations and describes that undoing gender at work would be for men “to show vulnerability and to signal other responsibilities in life beyond work” (ibid., 24), but with this, undoing gender at home remains underexposed.

Although the fact that gender is “done” and the ways in which is it done are now widely used, debated and adapted within the social sciences (Keyes, 2018, 2), in this thesis, “undoing gender” refers to a process or state of mind that recognises that gendered constructs

are deeply embedded in our cultural, social and individual experiences. This means that gender cannot be disregarded, but entails renegotiating or remaking gender in the face of its pervasive nature which means working towards a concept of gender that dismantles harmful stereotypes, and advocating for social, cultural, and institutional changes that promote equality and justice. Therefore, “undoing gender” need not necessarily imply erasing or ignoring the existence of gender but rather aims to critically examine and redefine its meaning. For example, in studies of work and organisation there are myriad discussions about how gender can be both “done” and “undone” in the workplace (Kelan, 2010), such as encouraging applicants of all genders to apply for positions in order to challenge traditional gender stereotypes in job roles (Gaucher et al., 2011), promoting gender diversity in leadership roles to help redefine its traditional notions associated with masculinity (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and providing flexible work arrangements like remote work or flexible hours to refute the assumption that certain jobs or tasks are inherently tied to a particular gender (Bailyn, 2015). However, much remains to be discovered about how gender is confronted and dismantled in the domestic sphere in relation to work and evolving socio-economic conditions.

While the concept of doing gender has often been used in the context of gendered constructions and conflicted nature of sex and gender either at work or at home, the close proximity between work and home regarding doing gender in the context of gender inequalities is usually overlooked. Hence, this thesis seeks to contribute to the conceptualisation of doing gender at home, while recognising the interplay of gendered relations at work and in broader contexts, which is evident in studying female breadwinner households with their altered gendered income structures. In this endeavour, it is important to acknowledge that feminist social research into gender has expanded to include the nature of masculinities and the socially constructed, gendered lives of men. This is especially true

given that women's lives and experiences have traditionally been the main focus of feminist approaches.

2.1.1 Feminisms and Doing Gender

Feminist approaches guide and inform feminist social research (Ramazanoğlu, 2002) which, in turn, provides empirical evidence and insights to advance goals of and advocate for change in feminist movements (Collins, 1990), as they collectively work towards gender equality and oppose societal patriarchal norms (Beasley, 1999; Huyssen, 1986; Suk, 2010, 5; Zerilli, 2005). Within feminist thinking, the concept of doing gender is suited to address complexities by recognising gender as a social construct shaped by cultural norms, expectations, and practises. As feminist movements continue to develop and evolve, internal divisions and inequalities between women may arise; this is where the concept of doing gender has the potential to promote inclusivity, dialogue, and critical self-reflection among women, empowering them to understand privileges and disadvantages while fostering empathy and solidarity.

A relatively new, increasingly dominant form of feminism has been embraced by high-powered women such as Hillary Clinton, Kamala Harris, Ivanka Trump, Megyn Kelly, and Sheryl Sandberg (Rahali, 2021, 22; Rottenberg, 2018), of which the last-mentioned person coined the Lean In⁹ ethos; an appeal to women's individual responsibility to pursue leadership roles, but ignoring broader systemic and structural barriers to redress the unjust division of labour between men and women. It is a form of individual empowerment that is highly relevant and that speaks directly to women who are high earners and in prominent positions (such as the female breadwinners in this study). However, this neoliberal feminist movement, which posits that gender equality is best achieved when women rise to positions

⁹ Named after Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead* (2013) about gender and career management.

of power within the capitalist state and economy, is described by feminist theorist bell hooks¹⁰ (2013) as “faux feminism” and as a tarnishing of the name feminism by Nancy Fraser who also argued that feminism should be about overthrowing corporate power, not putting on a female face (Arruzza et al., 2019; Fraser, 2022; Martinez, 2019). This new feminist ideal creates a split between women, given that there are those who serve as the unacknowledged care workers to enable professional women in striving towards “balance” in their lives, neoliberal feminism helps to (re)produce and legitimise the exploitation of these “other” female subjects (Rottenberg, 2019, 1079), which then results in, on the one hand, “worthy capital-enhancing women” and, on the other hand, “the ‘unworthy’ disposable female ‘other’ who performs much of the domestic and care work” (Rottenberg, 2018, 20). Not surprisingly, then, this split is occurring along racial, class, and citizen-immigrant lines (ibid). Indeed, this form of feminism demonstrates prioritising the individual experiences without regard to broader structural inequalities and its lack of intersectional analysis (Grace, 2022, 25; hooks, 2013), while it is possible to cover a broader and more inclusive spectrum. In this study, the aim is to delve deeper into the home lives of high-status women who might be seen as exemplifying the “Lean In” ethos. By doing so, light is shed on how much these women rely on the other people’s care work, which may often go unacknowledged, as well as the ways in which they defy gender roles for the greater good.

The ongoing discussion about women’s work has seen significant contributions from a number of feminists whose attention have spanned a wide range of topics, including labour, the home, social reproduction, and care¹¹. As the literature of feminist social science has

¹⁰ Her preference was to have her first and last name written with all lowercase letters.

¹¹ Such as: Federici (2004) on women’s work and reproductive labour; Folbre (2001) on the economic value of care work and the need for its recognition and redistribution; Weeks (2011) on wages for housework and the politics of work; Mies (1986) on the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, emphasising the exploitation of women’s unpaid labour within global production systems; Parreñas (2001) on the exploitation and precariousness faced by domestic workers in different contexts; and Hochschild & Machung (1989) on the “second shift” that depicts how working women struggle to balance careers with household and childcare responsibilities.

developed, it is enriched by ongoing research and the emergence of fresh perspectives, all participating in this crucial dialogue, but the doing gender concept provides a substantial enhancement to feminist approaches: it recognises the intersectionality of gender with other categories such as race and class, underlines that gender is a social construct requiring collective action and social change, and it is not solely based on an individual choice but influenced by social structures, norms and power dynamics. Applying the concept of doing gender is not so much to resolve apparent issues within competing feminist approaches, but to provide a more nuanced and complex analysis of gender dynamics. Given my understanding of gender dynamics, which includes the idea of doing gender where gender is actively performed, neoliberal feminism may appeal to career-minded women and be an influence on high-status female breadwinners. Taking this into consideration, this thesis is able to provide insights into the lives of women who are “successful” in terms of leaning in, but for whom there are limits to the gains that feminism has meant for them at home. Given that domestic work is a display for both men and women to express preconceived notions about masculinity and femininity, the next subsection takes a closer look at how couples do gender in this context.

2.1.2 Doing Gender in the Context of Domestic Work

Domestic work is generally considered to be childcare plus housework, although some studies do not discern domestic work from housework. As domestic work is central to doing gender, the avoiding (or doing) of domestic work may be an important way for men and women to demonstrate or challenge conventional masculinity and femininity (Bünning, 2020; Carlson et al., 2018, 4-5; see also: Tichenor, 2005). Housework, according to feminist theorists, plays a significant role in gender relations, perpetuating disparities and restricting women’s prospects for progress on both a personal and professional level. In order to achieve

gender parity and promote a more inclusive society, they emphasise the necessity to contest and modify the way that work is divided up in the home (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; hooks, 2000; Oakley, 1974).

Housework often includes cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, laundry, and repairs, snow removal, taking out the garbage and yard work (Asare, 2019, 9; see also: Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Bianchi et al., 2000; Cunningham, 2007). Housework that is classified as occasional or irregular, such as gardening, has been found to be time flexible, voluntary and more enjoyable than housework that is classified as routine, which is more time consuming, burdensome, repetitive and never-ending. Most studies on the division of household labour have focused on routine housework (for instance: cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping and laundry) and indicate that women do more than men (Asare, 2019, 10; see also: Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Bianchi et al., 2000; Coltrane, 2000; Cunningham, 2007; Gupta & Ash, 2008; Pinto & Coltrane, 2009).

Although childcare is can be categorised as a separate activity from housework (Asare, 2019, 10; see also: Coltrane and Adams, 2001), researchers try to capture the diffuse nature of childcare as it is often combined with other household activities, as an example: “cooking while a child is playing in another room” (OECD, 2011, 18) by measuring active and passive childcare. Also, there are different types of childcare activities: physical care and supervision of a child, educational and recreational childcare, and transporting a child¹². Mothers tend to be predominantly occupied with physical childcare and supervision while fathers spend more time in educational and recreational activities. Considering this distinction in childcare activities, the result is still that overall mothers spend more time in childcare than

¹² This OECD study explains the distinction as follows: 1) physical care, such as meeting the basic needs of children, including dressing and feeding children, changing diapers, providing medical care for children, and supervising children; 2) educational and recreational childcare, such as helping children with their homework, reading to children, and playing games with children; and 3) travel related to any of the two other categories, e.g. driving a child to school, to a doctor or to sport activities (2011, 20).

fathers do. (Doepke et al., 2022; OECD, 2011, 20)

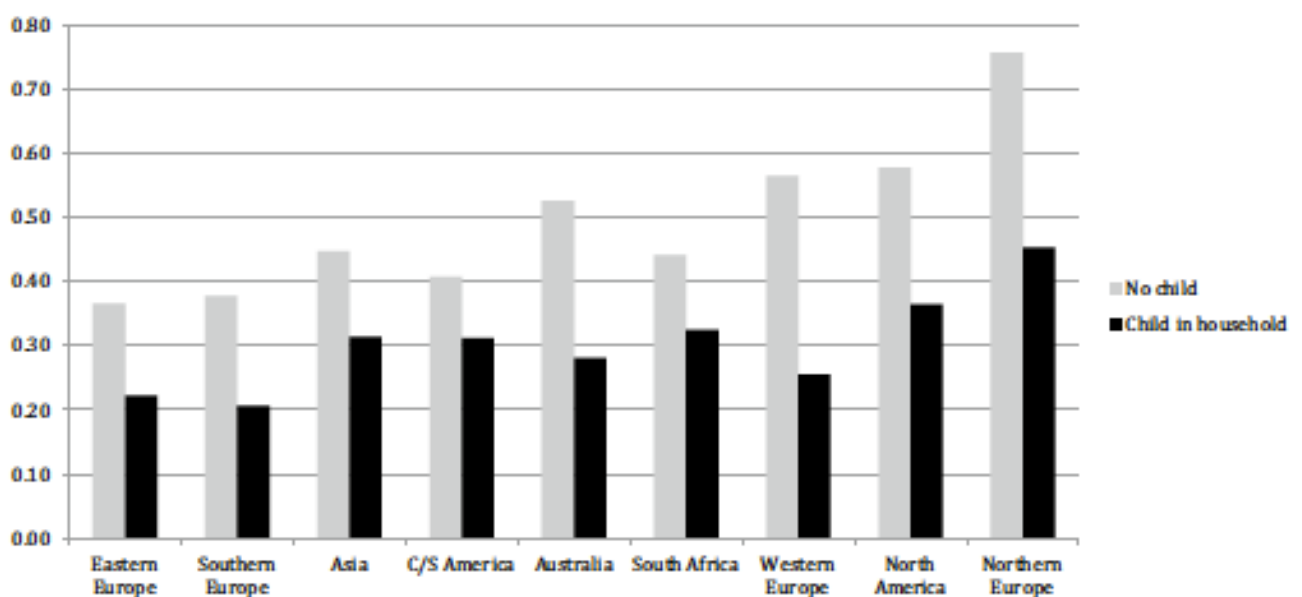
As housework is symbolically “women’s work” (Asare, 2019, 6; see also: Goldberg, 2013) and women are dominant in childcare, the household is a place where gender is constructed, hence “men sometimes do not engage in what they view as feminine activities such as housework because of their perceptions about how they should express their masculinity” (Asare, 2019, 6; see also: Penha, 2006). Therefore, the construction of gender in households is discussed by the following effects: household composition, outsourcing, couple’s intimacy, social class and also age, generations and lifecycle stages. By paying attention to these effects in the light of gender and domestic work, the awareness of the influences on doing gender at home increases and insights are given into how to further investigate domestic work within Dutch female breadwinner households.

Gender is not just “done” between partners but it happens in the context of households and families, so it is good to first highlight an effect that underlies this, namely the effect of household composition. Ultimately, it will become apparent that the arrival of children plays an important role in doing gender at home, but even without considering children, there is a difference between men and women given the composition of households. For both men and women, the change of household composition of one person to a partnered couple comes with an increase of household chores. Longitudinal research from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States reveals that partnered men and women consistently devote between two to five times more time to household labour than comparable single individuals do (Borra et al., 2017). However, a study in the United States concludes that for women, having a male partner in her household can increase her time on household chores by seven hours per week (Stafford, 2008). In this context, another study using data from not only the United States but also the United Kingdom and Germany reveals that “women whose working hours exceed those of their male partners report lower life satisfaction on average” possibly because of the

underlying mechanism that despite her long working hours “women do not spend significantly less time doing household chores” which leads to these women “likely to perceive this unequal division of labour as unfair” (Flèche et al., 2020). A study by Grunow and colleagues (2012) shows that childbirth is the event most likely to trigger a more traditional division of housework and a study of Roeter (2019, 25) found that women tend to feel more responsible for the organisation of the household and the care of children than men (see also: Portegijs & Van Brakel, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Wiesmann et al., 2008). In addition, women work fewer hours than men during their life phase with children, which gives women more time for care tasks. This suggests that gender is the key predictor of who spends more time on household duties regardless of the household composition, and the figures confirm this: Dutch partnered women with at least one child spend more than ten hours a week more than partnered women without children on taking care of the household and others. The difference is much smaller for men: those who live with a partner and have children spend two hours more on caring tasks than partnered men who do not have children. However, even without responsibilities for a child or a partner, women spend more time on caring tasks. The difference between single Dutch men and single Dutch women is five hours per week (Roeters, 2019, 33). Other studies have found that regarding men and women with children, both married and cohabiting mothers do more housework than single mothers who were never married or are divorced, but all mothers devote about the same time to providing childcare. Compared to fathers, mothers generally do more housework as well as childcare (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Pepin et al., 2018, 13), which underscores the persistence of gendered behaviour in the household. Considering on country-level that “policy and the broader sociocultural context shape and contribute to a traditional share of child care and housework between couples” (Olsson, 2021, 30; see also: DeRose et al., 2019 and Figure 3 for data on 35 countries, including the Netherlands) and on individual

level the persistent inequal division of labour between men and women, there are several studies and theories that provide explanations for why the prediction of a modern division of labour for households with children is lower. Rhoads & Rhoads, (2012) examined childcare and suggested that women do more of this activity because they enjoy doing it more than men, while McGinn & Oh, (2017, 85) found that “women, unsurprisingly, enjoy childcare activities more than housework”. At the same time, it is also challenging to disentangle how cultural and economic pressures or biological hard-wiring affect men and women (Parker-Pope, 2012). A Dutch study that found women to have more favourable attitudes towards childcare, cleaning and cooking, notes: “whereas the Netherlands outscores many other countries on egalitarian gender ideology, it is low in the rankings when it comes to gender equality in actual behavior” (Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009, 527-528). In both childcare and housework, we find that women do more than men and that women have more positive attitudes towards these tasks compared to men. It is worth exploring among female breadwinner households how these gendered attitudes have developed during the change of household composition and, if applicable, with the arrival of children.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of a modern division of labour for households



Source: DeRose et al., 2019

Outsourcing is a second effect that relates to doing gender at home, in particular with regard to the domestic work done by women. As women employ other women for domestic work, gender norms are left unchallenged. Domestic work can be outsourced to public or private childcare services and other forms of service such as cleaning, although the use of these services can clash with cultural codes and expectations, especially around childcare.

According to Belle Derks (2019), there is a strong maternity ideology in the Netherlands: the idea that mothers should be devoted to their children and always available, so that childcare should be outsourced as little as possible. Fathers are only assigned a supporting role in this ideology. On average, women's paid work hours in the Netherlands are 26.2 a week, compared to 35.4 a week for men. These average hours are relatively low because more women and men work part-time in the Netherlands than anywhere else in the European Union (CBS, 2022a), which is due to the dominance of the traditional model – the male breadwinner and the female carer – in the Netherlands (Veelen, 2020). The Dutch have seen the ideal working hours for mothers as a maximum of three days, while for fathers it is four to five days. In addition, 32 per cent of mothers and 42 per cent of fathers with young children believe that a woman is more suitable for raising small children than a man. Only a minority of the Dutch think that outsourcing the care for young children is good, and even then, only for one or two days a week (Derks, 2019; see also: Van Engen et al., 2009). In addition to public childcare services, there are also babysitting services that fall under the private home services market. Another form of service in the private home market is cleaning, which more than 700,000 Dutch households use (Bouwens, 2014, 6). Many domestic workers are women of migrant background,¹³ those who hire them are mainly

¹³ Afro-Surinamese women are among the first of these workers; as post-colonial migrants they came to their former colonising country (i.e., the Netherlands), where they became domestic and care workers. Afro-Surinamese people commonly refer to those who are descendants of West African people that the Dutch enslaved and traded to Suriname (then called Dutch Guyana) to work on sugar, coffee, cocoa, and cotton plantations (Marchetti, 2015, 138; see also: Lier, 1971).

privileged western women (Botman, 2011, 115-116; Marchetti, 2015), and those who pay for this service are mostly women (Ruppanner and Maume 2016, 17; see also: De Ruijter et al., 2006; Treas & de Ruijter, 2008). This suggests it is irrelevant to men whether or not household chores are outsourced, since they were not going to do their share of the work either way. Not wanting or liking to do the housework are important motives for outsourcing (Botman, 2011, 141; Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009) and research indicates that when the man dislikes housework, the woman compensates by doing more chores. When the woman dislikes housework—depending on what tasks, such as cleaning, laundry, ironing, and grocery shopping, are being performed—there is no compensation, except for the decision to hire a domestic worker (Stratton, 2012). Thus, outsourcing can be a bridge between couples' dislikes, but since the outsourced work is mostly done by female domestic workers—meaning that this is a moving of chores between women—the gendered effect of outsourcing for these couples is that they negotiate their gender roles without challenging gendered expectations.

A third factor to take into account in doing gender in domestic tasks concerns the intimacy between couples. As the nature of doing gender at home relates to the quality of the intra-household dynamics between couples, helping each other in domestic work becomes intertwined with intimacy. Previous research from the United States found that women would find a man doing housework less attractive and the risk that egalitarianism would lead to emasculation and ultimately reduced sexual libido in men (Cornwell & Laumann, 2011). A study based on data from the late 1980s and early 1990s among 4,500 couples found that men who participate more in the housework typically done by women have sex less often. Since these researchers collected the data approximately 20 years prior to the time of writing (Kornich et al., 2013), the findings of a more recent study in this area are likely more representative of current attitudes. Carlson and colleagues looked at data from 2006 and

concluded that “equal sharing of housework is more positively related to sexual intimacy and relationship satisfaction among more recent cohorts” (2018, 1). When a survey of more than 2,000 married men and women shows that “happy sexual relationship” is the second most important factor, after “faithfulness”, in a successful marriage, and “sharing household chores” is the third factor (Taylor et al., 2007), this indicates that the relationship between intimacy and housework should not be overlooked whereby this study is not limited to extending intimacy to a broader understanding, namely “an interpersonal process evolving from interactions over time and that spending time together facilitates intimate interactions” (Milek & Butler, 2015, 831).

A fourth gendered effect on domestic work is social class, which comes from the idea that the relationship between household responsibilities and gender is not uniform across society. As with most other areas of life, social class affects the ways that gender roles are “done”. Although “social class is a multifaceted construct relating to individual’s economic, social, and cultural resources” (Dunatchik, 2023, 231), the focus is on the role of income, an essential factor that influences economic power and financial interdependence, which can be directly leveraged to the second gendered effect on domestic work mentioned above, namely outsourcing unpaid work. A Dutch study states that men in the lower classes do more unpaid domestic work if their female partner earns a relatively high income. The low income of the low-class male breadwinners, coupled with income insecurity of the household as a whole, appears to be driving men to do more in the household, freeing up time for women to supplement the family income. In the upper-class households, men who earn relatively high incomes tend to reduce their contribution to the housework. The higher family income makes it possible to hire a domestic worker and the higher income of the man is used to do less domestic work himself (Sent & Staveren, 2020). According to McGinn and Oh, “economic resources and social mores make it possible and socially desirable for middle- and upper-

class women to live up to the expectations of intensive mothering without sacrificing their family's financial stability" (2017, 85), while "lower class women with less lucrative and less stable job prospects face social pressure to remain in the workforce while patching together low-cost options for caregiving" (ibid., 85). This also indicates that both the outsourcing, discussed in more detail above, and the performing of household tasks, are related to the social class of the partners within a household. At the household level, the most common measures of social class are based on household wealth and total income (ibid., 84, see also: Kraus et al., 2012). A study of 33 countries, including the Netherlands, outlines that in most countries, people with a low income do more housework than those with a high income, with the differences being even greater with regard to the domestic working hours of women. The researcher argues that: "the findings remind us that gender inequalities are often conditioned by economic inequalities" (Heisig, 2011, 93). Despite this statement, which mainly focuses on income inequality in society, I draw a cautious conclusion based on the above-mentioned studies, namely that the persistence of the traditional division of roles in domestic work seems to be most pronounced amongst higher income households, but that the valuation of household income as a measure of the classification shows that the members of households with a low income do more in the household because they cannot do differently due to financial challenges.

A fifth, and last effect on doing gender discussed, involves looking at expectations and performance of gender roles based on age, generation and lifecycle stage to which men and women belong. From the idea or aspiration that gender roles are blurring among younger generations, comes the outlook that each generation should become more gender neutral. If it turns out that this is not the case, then other factors could have a greater influence, such as the lifecycle and changes that people experience differently from each other within a generation, for example whether or not they have children. An international study conducted by

demographer Joan García Román and sociologist Pablo Garcia (2022) on time-use across age groups, covered a period of ten years to examine gender differences. Their study found that gender differences in time-use are smaller in personal care, sleeping and meals, and leisure time. The largest gender differences are in paid work activities, housework and childcare. For men, housework time increases with age, but at all ages, women spend more time in housework than men. The time in housework for women goes up to middle adulthood, and then the pattern varies on national levels. In Anglo-Saxon and Western European countries, women's time in housework moderately increases for older adults. Narrowing in on the Netherlands, see Table 1, the housework time for women is as follows: 105 daily minutes for 18- to 29-year-olds, 185 daily minutes for 30- to 44-year-olds, 212 daily minutes for 45- to 64-year-olds and 226 daily minutes for those aged 65 or older, showing that the increase in time is less strong for Dutch women from their middle ages. Regarding childcare, the middle age is a turning point for women in most countries, also for those in the Netherlands: up to the ages 30 to 44, the time in childcare progressively increases and then progressively decreases; this can be explained by the thought that women in later life phases generally have children who have grown to be less dependent.

Table 1: Average time of housework by age in the Netherlands

Age	Activity	Men	Women
18-29	Housework	53	105
	Childcare	6	29
30-44	Housework	91	185
	Childcare	40	76
45-64	Housework	106	212
	Childcare	11	22
65+	Housework	152	226
	Childcare	10	14

Source: García Román & Garcia, 2022

A study among Dutch young adults up to 35 years reveals that they share their tasks as traditionally as over-35-year-olds. Men work more and take on significantly fewer care and household tasks than women (Meester, 2020a; Vollebregt, 2020). This does not appear to be much different than a few decades ago: the Dutch Central Bureau of Statics compared people who are aged in their thirties in the 1980s with those in the year 2010. That study demonstrates that mothers have started working more, but fathers have hardly worked less (CBS, 2020). The ones who are in their thirties today, also have childcare and housekeeping mainly as the responsibility of women (Meester, 2020a; Vollebregt, 2020). Yet another Dutch

study targeting young adults up to the age of 35 indicates that the stronger the gender role views of young adult men, the smaller their share in the household. And if these men do tasks in the household, the gender stereotypes come to the surface in the kind of tasks they do: young men perform occasional tasks that are more associated with masculine characteristics, such as jobs in and around the house or the repair of the car. Young women invariably do more housework and are more likely to take responsibility for care tasks than men, regardless of their views and whether they have a paid job or not. Also, young women with traditional ideas about motherhood do more in the household and the care of children than women with more egalitarian views (Thijs et al., 2022). This could be the case among female breadwinners too; applying to young adults and perhaps even beyond the three life stages of their adulthood. As over time women have slowly gained more women equality, we would expect different attitudes and behaviours between the generations Baby boom and Generation X, but studies show that stereotyping roles among young adults also prevailed in earlier cohorts. Generational differences seem to be overlain by lifecycles and changes within cohort experience, which could be essential to take into account whilst exploring female breadwinner households.

Exploration of the gendered division of domestic work illustrates how in practice a variety of effects are intertwined in this division. The five effects discussed above are anything but exhaustive. For example, the following effects may also apply: cohabitation and marriage (Asare, 2019; Braun et al., 2008; Dominguez Folgueras, 2012; Doorten, 2008; Kandil & Périvier, 2021; Oomes, 2007; Pepin et al., 2018; Ruppanner & Maume, 2016; Sassler & Miller, 2011; Van Berkum & Janssen, 2011), ethnicity and migration (Kan and Laurie, 2018; Lafeber, 2016), and educational attainment (Canzio, 2021; Ely et al., 2014; Ruppanner & Maume, 2016; Sullivan, 2011; Van den Brakel et al., 2020; Vogl & Baur, 2018). Each and any effect may be important to the bigger picture of “doing” gender at home.

For this study, I have chosen to focus in greatest detail on the effects which appear most significant and also under-researched in the Dutch context. According to the literature, gender norms' persistence, the absence of family-friendly laws, and the unequal distribution of labour between men and women are the biggest obstacles to a gender revolution (e.g., DeRose et al., 2019), not the existence of children. Women are typically responsible for taking care of the home, and the additional responsibilities that come with having children might impede efforts to achieve gender equality. For this reason, the effect of household composition falls within the selection. The literature also indicates that the persistence of the traditional division of roles in domestic work is more pronounced amongst the upper class, even though low-income households do more in the household because they cannot do otherwise due to financial challenges; it is therefore useful to attend to social class and income for further study, which also led to focusing on high-status women in this research. Finally, the literature illustrates that women who can afford domestic workers use their own gender roles without questioning expectations; as most domestic workers are women, this is a moving of tasks between women and thus expectations remain unchallenged; the effect of outsourcing is therefore also included in the selection for this study. These effects seen together (i.e., household composition, social class, outsourcing and also intimacy) ultimately form the basis for further research into doing gender in the context of domestic work, which bridges the knowledge gap in the ways that female breadwinner couples "do" (or do not do) gender at home and that allows me to not only grasp these couples' experiences of doing gender, but also to understand what steps can be taken to solve or prevent the challenges faced by these female breadwinner households.

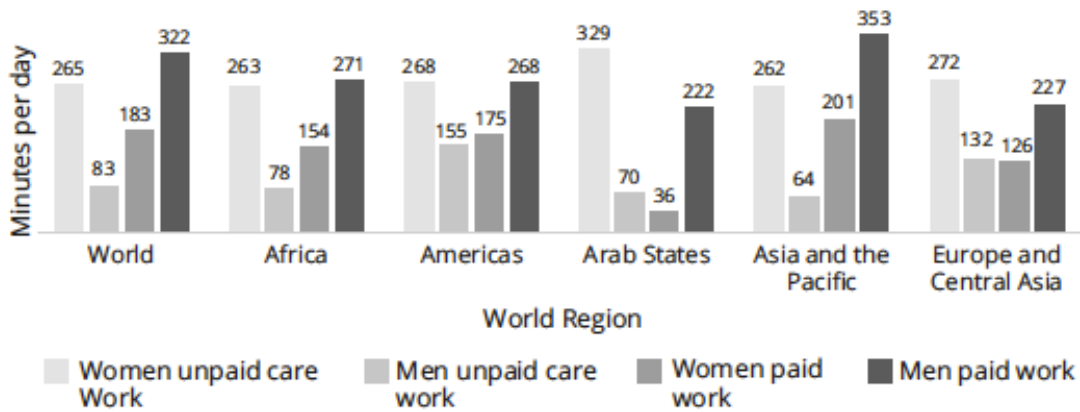
2.1.3 Household Work and Gender Equality

The equality of gender is a key topic in conceptualising doing gender, especially in the context of domestic activities. Feminist scholars have extensively discussed the significance of housework and its impact on gender equality through asserting that women's unequal share of domestic duties not only hinders their ability to advance personally and professionally but also upholds patriarchal norms and power dynamics within households (Oakley, 1974; Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

As literature refers to typical “womanly and manly conduct” (Costa, 2018, 5; see also: Beer, 1983, 70-89; Schneider, 2012, 1031; West & Zimmerman, 1987, 144), a general proposition is that performing domestic activities is essential for women to produce femininity while men avoid housework to produce masculinity (Schneider, 2012, 1031). Women spend more time on female-typed tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing and shopping, while men do more of the housework that is male-typed such as home repair and lawn care (ibid., 1031), where it is disputable whether this is based on cause, i.e., derived from the premise of women as nurturers, and linked to the physical strength and technical know-how of men (Brynin & Perales, 2016), or based on effect, i.e., derived from the gender construction that women do these tasks more and have become “just better at this stuff” (Hackman, 2015). Evidence of such patterns of housework can be found throughout the last decade in Western societies: there is a substantial gender gap which is clear along the lines of male-typed and female-typed tasks (Schneider, 2012, 1031; see also Bianchi et al., 2000; Schneider, 2011) and although men have increased and women have reduced their housework hours since the 1960s (Gershuny, 2018), women – including female breadwinners– do more in the household than men (Baxter & Hewitt, 2013; Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Coltrane, 2000; Grunow et al., 2012; Koster et al., 2022; Richardson & Robinson, 2020; see Figure 3 for a global overview of the time that men and

women spend on unpaid care work and paid work by region). Research indicates that women serving as primary breadwinners tend to engage in a greater amount of domestic work compared to their male counterparts, yet their overall time spent on household chores remains lower than that of women who are not primary breadwinners. Moreover, when examining couples with at-home fathers and breadwinning partners, it is observed that these fathers, while not matching the domestic workload of at-home mothers, still contribute more to housework than men in conventional employment roles. These patterns align with the time-availability perspective, suggesting that increased participation in the labour market is associated with reduced involvement in domestic duties (Bianchi & Milkie, 2011; Bünning, 2020; Carlson et al., 2018; Chesley & Flood, 2017; Gough & Killewald, 2010; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Pepin et al., 2018; Sayer, 2005; see also note 17). In connection with this, it should be borne in mind that women are more likely than men to do housework and care work out of obligation, rather than by choice, and are therefore more likely than men with a similar workload to find domestic chores unpleasant and disempowering (Kroska, 2003, 472; Stratton, 2012), where the performance of domestic chores like cleaning, washing, ironing, and grocery shopping affects the experience (Stratton, 2012, 607), and the distribution of housework is less gender-equal than childcare (Zamberlan et al., 2021, 2) due to the difference in rewards between the two (Craig & Mullan, 2011). Deutsch and colleagues (1993) noted that housework consists of more displeasing activities, while childcare is more likely to be seen enjoyable and gives parents additional benefits in terms of self-identity, self-esteem and well-being (Coltrane, 2000; Sullivan, 2013). Moreover, the costs of putting off housework chores and childcare also differ (Deutsch et al., 1993).

Figure 3: Time spent on unpaid care work and paid work by gender and region



Source: Richardson & Robinson, 2020.

Taking into consideration the perspective of gender equality, it becomes clear that more research is necessary to understand the experiences of female breadwinners within the context of domestic chores and what doing gender with their partner looks like. Thus far, the sections of this chapter have established some key points: the importance of the doing gender approach which posits that gender is actively constructed through social interactions, feminist thought that influences my thinking and possibly that of participants, the significance of gender equality extending to household dynamics, and the importance of housework as a site for negotiation of this gender equality. To comprehend how conventional gender norms affect men’s perspectives of domestic work and their involvement in attaining gender equality within home settings, it is imperative to go deeper by investigating masculinities.

2.1.4 Masculinities

While feminist approaches aid to understand gendered performance of domestic work, as these approaches have largely been focused on studying the lives and experiences of women, there has been a recent expansion in their investigation of gender that unpacks the nature of masculinities and men’s socially constructed gendered lives. Masculinities come with privileges and, in many societies, with freedoms denied to most women; such privileges,

however, impose burdens (Foreman, 1999, 4) which, within masculinities, are mainly reflected in the hegemonic male ideal. Hegemonic masculinity embodies qualities such as being strong, successful, capable, unemotional, and in control (Connell, 2003), is “constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities, and closely connected to the institution of marriage” (Connell, 1997, 186), and has “the ability to impose a particular definition on other kinds of masculinity” (Carrigan et al., 1985, 592). Literature demonstrates that breadwinning fundamentally connects men’s earnings to their masculine identity (Connell, 1987; Demantas & Myers, 2015; 2016, 1120), cutting across job sectors (Cha & Thébaud, 2009), social classes (Lane, 2011), ethnic groups (Diemer, 2002), cultures (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004; Dreby, 2010; Smith, 2005), and is pervasive in countries around the world (Thébaud, 2010; Hoang & Yeoh, 2011). This thesis offers the opportunity to shed light on the perception of men who are not the primary breadwinners, involving a feminist approach that emphasises the importance of supporting men’s well-being and mental health.

A number of studies have examined the interplay between masculine identities and fatherhood. Fatherhood is understood as central to masculinity because of cultural and societal norms that reinforce specific male expectations. In a Swedish study about the different expectations about their future as a parent, one of 11 fathers-to-be said: “It feels like fathers should be masculine, cutting down trees in forest. Fathers should hunt moose with their bare hands, wearing a loincloth of animal skins” (Asenhed et al., 2013, 1314), describing the heightened societal expectations to be the provider and protector. In a Canadian study of seven men about their experience of masculinity in their transition to first fatherhood, one participant stated:

In the traditional sense, man is a protector and not just to family but of the community and people around them. With that comes things like aggression and anger. On the other side of it you have to also be approachable and emotional but emotions are kind

of looked down on by a lot of men. Through fatherhood I've learned that traditional thing where men hold emotions in that is something that I have had to rely on in certain stages just to be strong for the family but you have to know how to communicate that and how to debrief it at the end and stuff. (Larsen, 2021, 138-139)

Both quotes show how the standard is set for how men should think, behave and present themselves. This brings to the fore the ways that rigid gender roles can harm individuals of both genders. For men, it is the destructive aspects of masculine behaviour that are perpetuated within patriarchal systems that ultimately lead to toxic masculinity (Kupers & Rochlen, 2005). When it comes to parenting, hegemonic masculinities have played a more subordinate role than that of femininity, as idealised domesticity goes hand in hand with hegemonic femininities¹⁴, where mothers prioritise children's needs and child-raising above all else (Williamson et al., 2023; see also: section Intra-Household Relations and Dynamics on the transition to parenthood). In Kupers & Rochlen's study, moments of exclusion were believed to be particularly detrimental in their transition to fatherhood. This suggests that the experience of fathers who may feel that inclusion have gone beyond the hegemonic masculine traditions is worthy of further investigation; female breadwinner households provide a space for this exploration through gender arrangements that contest hegemonic gender roles. Moreover, Kupers and Rochlen (2005) found that, although fathers experienced a deepening of emotion in fatherhood incongruent with historically dominant masculinities, it was also true that "breadwinning remained a prominent part of the father role for the fathers" (Larsen, 2021, 150).

It is plausible that influences of hegemonic male ideals form the basis of current negotiations within households, resulting in gender inequality. This therefore requires a

¹⁴ According to Charlebois (1978), "hegemonic femininities are those that form a complementary and subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity and in doing so legitimize a hierarchical relationship between men and women".

renegotiation of how couples do gender, in which it is useful to compare the expectations of outcome based on negotiation theories (see more about bargaining and resource theories in section 2.2.3 High-Income and Female Breadwinner Households) with the actual outcomes in practise based on this thesis' findings, involving the experience of men from their role as carer and of women as the main provider at home. The next section looks at the gendered intra-household relations and dynamics, particularly focusing on the influence of welfare states and on high-income households.

2.2 Doing Gender at Home

With the aim of contributing to knowledge about gendered household dynamics, this section covers the “state of the art” in the literature on intra-household dynamics and within that about female breadwinner households more specifically. I start with discussing the welfare state of the Netherlands and its classification within different welfare regimes as a mixture of the social-democratic and corporatist/continental types. This is to pinpoint the tensions within the Dutch welfare state regarding work-care policies, specifically the expectation for women to increase labour force participation while also providing unpaid care work. By demonstrating how a feminist analysis of the welfare state helps to understand gender dynamics both at the micro and macro levels, the first subsection also brings attention to the need for research on female breadwinner households in the Dutch context and the challenges they face in negotiating gender roles. The existing studies on female breadwinner households shed light on gender ideals but overlook the practical aspects of household management. Qualitative research provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between gender relations, welfare states, and individuals' lives.

The second subsection explores gender dynamics within households and their interactions between men and women, focusing on the influence of sociocultural ideas and power dynamics. It highlights the evolving nature of household relationships and how gendered behaviours and expectations are transmitted, particularly in parent-child relationships. Cultural and institutional factors, such as women's part-time work, primary caregiver roles, and domestic work, contribute to gender dynamics. Intensive mothering and the challenge of involved fatherhood are also discussed, emphasising the unequal distribution of responsibilities and the influence of parents' class privilege.

The third subsection takes a closer look at class privilege by discussing challenges that high-income female breadwinners encounter; here it becomes apparent that class matters. Many women, due to the division of gendered labour at home, often find themselves in a situation where they either endure unhappiness, adjust their beliefs, or, particularly after having children, adopt an approach that leads to women withdrawing from the workforce and compromising their careers. However, female breadwinners are a distinct group of individuals who have resisted this pattern, which subsequently influences divorce rates and the quality of relationships, reinforcing the notion that this specific group of breadwinners holds a unique position characterised by their elevated social status. Thus, studying the experiences and decisions of these high-income female breadwinners provides valuable observations into the intricacies of gender dynamics and class privilege in contemporary society.

2.2.1 Households in Welfare States

From the idea that “scholars often assume that policies fall harmoniously under the umbrella of one policy paradigm” (Goijaerts, 2022, 1403) it is interesting to consider “that policies of the Dutch state conflict on the work-care dimension of the welfare state” (ibid). Before these policies are further explained and how they shape cultural expectations, gender (in)equalities, and home lives, the welfare state of the Netherlands deserves more attention, as “the Dutch welfare state is a product of different foreign influences” (Engbersen et al., 1993, 38). This welfare state is regarded as a mixture of developed welfare state regimes distinguished by the Danish sociologist Esping-Andersen, classified according to geographical origin (Arts & Gelissen, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). One of the welfare state types is the social-democratic, with Denmark, Finland and Sweden being characterised as archetypal of this regime, which has an extensive social security system with relatively high, fairly universally accessible benefits, where the amount of government aid does not depend on someone’s income or assets. In this type, everyone, including women, is encouraged to participate in the labour market, because only in this way can the solidarity-based care system be maintained at a high level. Citizens pay high contributions and taxes, resulting in good arrangements for parental leave and high labour market participation (Arts & Gelissen, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990). The Netherlands is categorised as social-democratic, due in part to generous social assistance, public pensions and extensive publicly funded long-term care provision to elderly or ill people (Goijaerts, 2022, 1406). Another welfare state type is the corporatist/continental, which can be found in France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and Austria, among others, is based on social benefits and subsidies that depend on income. This type has a relatively high level of facilities, but the allocation of rights is more selective than in the social-democratic type. Relatively few women and older men are employed because of the historical tradition of Roman Catholic social policy. In this

type, people mainly receive help from the government when all other resources of the family have been exhausted (Arts & Gelissen, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990). The Netherlands has been categorised as conservative–corporatist, among others because of its strong male-breadwinner model (Goijaerts, 2022, 1406). A third type is the liberal/Anglo-Saxon welfare state, of which the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Ireland are typical examples. This type has a particular emphasis on liberalism and the primacy of the market (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Depending on the extent to which market forces are actively or passively stimulated by the state, and less security and protection is offered, it can be said that the Dutch welfare regime has shifted towards a more liberal welfare policy, based on the Anglo-Saxon system (Euwals & Muselaers, 2016; Oorschot, 2006). The Netherlands can align itself under these separate welfare regimes and has also been regarded as a hybrid state with liberal, conservative and social-democratic characteristics (Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011, 9; Kleppe, 2016, 4; Goodin, 2001, 15). However, the Dutch welfare state is generally labelled as a mixture of the social-democratic and corporatist/continental types (Arts & Gelissen, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Goijaerts, 2022), and it is the combination of these two types that complicates the consistency of policies on the work-care dimension of the Dutch welfare state and that makes it a particularly interesting context in which to investigate the negotiation of gendered responsibilities.

Social policies aim to “promote employment, improve living and working conditions, provide adequate social protection and combat social exclusion” (Eurofound, 2023) and the Dutch government has implemented work-family policies such as “increasing investments in childcare and expanding leave regulations” (Goijaerts, 2022, 1403). With this, the Dutch government aims to increase women’s participation in paid work which also raises income through taxes. In the 1970s, the Netherlands still had the lowest female labour force participation in Europe (OWID, n.d., see also: section Background in chapter 1), which

became unsustainable, making it necessary to increase the size of the tax-paying population (Goijaerts, 2022; Hemerijck, 2018). The state simultaneously wants to reduce health and social care costs by encouraging citizens to take care of their loved ones themselves as much as possible instead of employing professional help, such as through the policy objective of the “(Wlz) Wet langdurige zorg”, which is the Dutch long-term care act that acknowledges and encourages the critical contribution that informal caregivers—such as family members—make to the care of those close to them (Rijksoverheid, 2023). These unpaid caring responsibilities mainly fall on women (Goijaerts, 2022). Hence, there is a contradiction that Dutch women are expected (by the government) to work more in the labour force and also to provide more informal care. The tension between the call for more paid labour participation and more unpaid care is signalled in feminist literature on the welfare state (Ciccia, & Sainsbury, 2018; Holst, 2005; Lewis, 1997; Sainsbury, 1999), criticising Esping-Andersen’s 1990’s work because it “largely ignores (care provision by) women”, consequently that “ignorance of the unpaid care work provided by women leads to a secondary citizenship for these women who do not earn an income and therefore have no appeal to rights connected to having an income” (Goijaerts, 2022, 1406) and that encouraging women’s labour force participation in a way that is valued primarily for economic reasons and not for the goal of women’s emancipation in itself, delegitimises women’s caring responsibilities as valuable activities in their own right (Ciccia, & Sainsbury, 2018; Goijaerts, 2022; Saraceno, 2017). In other words, “until the value of unpaid caring work done by women is included, welfare states typology will be incomplete” (Çetinkaya, 2019, 6). Policymakers must identify the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work that falls on women and incorporate measures that advance gender equality in welfare policies in order to achieve this change towards a more inclusive approach. Additionally, evaluating how feminist principles work in a mixed

welfare state like the Netherlands can provide important insights into the opportunities and obstacles that may arise when advancing gender-sensitive policies on a larger scale.

Feminist critiques expand our understanding of care and how welfare regimes relate to it, but looking at the conflicting demands on women to both engage in paid work and unpaid work also highlights divisions among feminists. Ciccio & Sainsbury (2018) have argued that amongst feminists who emphasise independence, women's access to paid work is seen as the key to emancipation. For them, care was problematic because "it put a brake on women's labour market participation and reinforced the traditional division of labour in the family" (Ciccio, & Sainsbury, 2018, 103). There seems to be a shift in the balance of this debate due to the current emphasis in many Western countries on labour participation by both men and women (Fraser, 1994; Goijaerts, 2022; Lister, 1997; Siim, 2000), but there is ample ground to be won in combining care and paid work on equal grounds that can advance gender equality to the extent that they incorporate differences in and between women, and the intersection with class, ethnicity, age and other social relations of inequality (Ciccio, & Sainsbury, 2018, 103).

By applying a more feminist approach to examining the welfare state, there is a better view of gender relations at both micro and macro level. By illustration: at the micro level, a female breadwinner's income may enhance her bargaining power in household decisions (see more on bargaining theories in section 2.2.3 High-Income and Female Breadwinner Households) and also allows her to exit an unhappy relationship; at the macro level, the policies that affect the production and reproduction of lives may alter the gendered distribution of work for the female breadwinner as well as the bargaining power in her family (Ciccio, & Sainsbury, 2018; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2010). Thus, this thesis offers insights into the complexities and inequalities experienced by individuals to gain more comprehensive

understanding on the ways which social policies, as well as individual choices and biographies shape gender dynamics at home.

Along with the influence of welfare state regimes, female breadwinner couples' home lives are affected by more personal, emotional and practical challenges that exist within a broader social policy context. Studies of female breadwinners in the United States have particularly highlighted the effects on health and well-being for these couples. However, the United States is regarded as a liberal welfare state which focuses on individualism, independence, and market-based solutions to social problems. This type tends to provide little assistance with family care and work-life balance, leaving it up to the individual to manage their gender roles and family structures (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Therefore, as they negotiate and redefine traditional gender roles within their households, female breadwinners in the United States might encounter unique emotional and practical challenges. That being said, one of the studies is from psychologists who found that out-earned men are more likely to describe having a poor-quality romantic relationship (Coughlin & Wade, 2012) and another by sociologists discovered that violating cultural expectations, such as the masculine ideal of male breadwinning, is associated with older men's poorer health (Springer et al., 2017). A study in the area of communications, shows that ambition, control, guilt, independence, pressure, resentment and worry are all experienced by women who are breadwinners (Meisenbach, 2010). Sociologist Noelle Chesley (2011) found that breadwinning women feel pressure to spend time with their children because of comparisons with the man's involvement in childcare. The existing studies of female breadwinner households are insightful regarding views on gender ideals by the partners. Nevertheless, an under-researched aspect is how couples in this relatively new family structure work out their practical day-to-day management of the household (Oláh et al., 2014, 31) and how this informs or responds to policy development. Additional qualitative research offers valuable

insights into the complex interplay between gender relations and welfare states, casting light on the experiences, power dynamics and social processes that shape individuals' lives behind closed doors.

2.2.2 Intra-Household Relations and Dynamics

Gender dynamics can be defined as the interactions and relationships between and among men and women (EIGE, n.d.b). “Gender dynamics are informed by sociocultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Depending upon how they are manifested, gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms” (ibid.). In order to understand these dynamics within households, it is useful to discuss who are considered as household members and then to examine the dynamics among them.

A household is a residential unit and can refer to both family/kin and non-family/non-kin who share a common residence (Gumoi, 2010, 23; Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). In this study, the phrase “family” could be sufficient in the case of nuclear families (i.e., married or cohabiting couples with one or more children) in reference to households, were it not that “family” is open to other interpretations. For instance, when asking a childless couple about the family, the couple might not think of each other but of their parents, siblings, nephews or nieces. Using the phrase “household” is more suitable for focussing on married and cohabiting partners –with or without children– who live together rather than any other arrangement such as living apart together. Nevertheless, in this study “family” matters in a different (grammatical) way when it comes to households.

A key aspect of intra-household relations is the way that people “do family”, as the concept of household is an evolving set of relationships rather than a determinate set of people (Barber, 1993, 27). This is in line with the shift in sociology to the idea that “family” is understood as processes of family life, family practices, “doing family” or “displaying

family” (Finch, 2007) rather than as a unit, institution or object (Carter, 2019, 1). Similar to gender, family can be regarded as an adjective rather than a noun. The processes and performances of doing family can be seen in parent-child relationships, namely that on the one hand, children imitate and model the feminine and masculine behaviour of their mothers and fathers. On the other hand, parents reinforce and/or punish gender-typed behaviour in children, for example by creating a highly gendered environment for the children by the toys, clothes, activities and chores they choose for them, the books or media they show their children, and even by the names they give their children; this process is also known as “channelling or shaping” children’s gender development (Endendijk et al., 2018, 886). In addition, parents can give their children direct gender-related instructions, by how they talk to their children about gender, for instance by making evaluative comments about gender-typical and atypical behaviour (e.g., “Look, these girls are having fun baking cookies”). Moreover, parents may react differently (reward, punishment) to the same behaviour in boys and girls, or when parents use different parenting practices with boys and girls (ibid., 886). The behaviour of mothers and fathers is also a source of imitation and modelling for children to learn how males and females act, leading to the predominant gender dynamics in households, in which cultural and institutional influences also play a role. In contemporary Dutch households women are more likely to work part-time than men, mothers are more likely to be the primary caregiver of young children and mothers perform more domestic work than fathers – regardless of the employment status of mothers (Endendijk et al., 2018, 885). Having said this, it is important to realise that parenthood also comes from imitation and modelling parenting behaviour to guide their own actions, which can especially apply to first-time parents who may have limited prior experience with caring for infants or children.

The transition to parenthood can play a significant part in the division of household work due to “the demands of having a new baby in the family” (Katz-Wise et al., 2010, 18).

As “the presence of children can dramatically shift patterns of paid and unpaid work” (Van der Vleuten et al., 2021, 161), there are specific expectations and pressures on both mothers and fathers that may underlie this. For women, the intensive mothering ideology¹⁵ must be taken into account and is especially relevant to middle- and upper-class professionals. This is illustrated below by a mother, interviewed by Williamson et al (2023), who is able to articulate what she has internalised:

It’s really been drilled into me on that side of the family that it’s really important to be a great wife and be a great mother and be a great housekeeper. And since I was little, [my mother] would talk about when you have kids, it’s important to do this and that and the other. But then at the same time, my dad has always really drilled into me, it’s really important that you get a good job, and you make good money. So, I feel like I’ve always had both in mind or expected, I guess, from a family point of view, that you need to somehow be an amazing careerwoman, but also an amazing parent. And it’s just trying to figure out how to integrate both of them without necessarily driving myself into complete exhaustion. (Williamson et al., 2023, 105)

This narration highlights expectations on women to excel in multiple fields, including careers and motherhood, which can create pressure to adhere to the intensive mothering ideology¹⁶. Although the direct correlation between the transition to parenthood and the constraint of intensive motherhood ideology to middle- and upper-class professional women is not evident, the conjunction of these expectations with their financial resources to support this costly approach to parenting (Hays, 1998) makes this ideology more likely to be applicable among these women. Also, “scholarship on social reproduction shows that class is reproduced through mothering” (O’Reilly & Ruddick, 2009), which ensures that for middle-class parents,

¹⁵ Coined by Hays (1998), intensive mothering characterises parenting as a child-centred, emotionally absorbing, and labour-intensive that mothers should be primarily responsible for best completed by women as they are the “expert” caregivers.

¹⁶ See supra note 15.

“their children do pass the tests, go to the ‘best’ schools, make the connections that their parents want for them and which keep them in their social class” (ibid). One study in particular, that explored the perception of intensive motherhood (IM) among French mothers, can be extended to the Netherlands, where there is also a relatively high level of facilities (these countries share a welfare state type, namely corporatist/continental; see the section on Households in Welfare States) and implied: “living in a country—France—providing high financial support to families (Cleiss, 2022), corroborates the claim that only privileged mothers are able to practice IM” (Verniers et al., 2022, 11). Therefore, “IM may constitute a means of protecting the upper class’ distinctiveness” (ibid), but that study also emphasised that “this does not by any means entail that less affluent mothers escape pressure to conform to IM standards, a pressure that results in an even greater burden for single-parent, precarious families, especially when living in less generous countries” (ibid).

In the realm of intra-household relations and dynamics, the discussion of intensive mothering ideology paves the way to understand intricate interactions between parents within households; in doing so, it is equally imperative to pay sufficient attention to fatherhood as well. The fatherhood discussion is closely related to intensive mothering and the so-called “gatekeeping”, which refers to conduct singularly associated with mothers who are “assuming primary responsibility for childrearing”, potentially resulting in negative practices such as “criticizing the father’s parenting behaviour” or in other ways restricting or reducing male partner involvement (Cannon et al., 2008, 502; Hauser, 2012; Miller, 2018, 27), but negative practices of fathers should not be overlooked. These practices of fathers may involve self-blocking through forms of resistance in performing housework and childcare; specifically silent bargains, alongside tactics such as inertia and “strategic incompetence” might be employed to not only resist changing the domestic division of labour, but to avoid more overt (potentially confrontational) bargaining too (Garcia & Tomlinson, 2021; Miller,

2018), hindering constructive changes regarding gender-specific division in parenting responsibilities. This does not alter the fact that there are fathers who are more domestically involved, or as sociologist Gayle Kaufman refers to as “superdads” who “deliberately adjust their work lives to fit their family lives” (2013, 77). Kaufman recognises in her work that “some readers may be incredulous at the coronation of superdads over moms who do the same thing” (ibid), but Kaufman attempts to hold the term as a symbolic and political acknowledgement of how much the father’s efforts matter, especially in view of structural constraints placed on men wanting to be active fathers (Doucet, 2014, 784).

For men who desire a more intimate and involved fatherhood, as for the women discussed above, class privilege is at play for those who have the option of choosing to work flexibility (Doucet, 2014, 784). Kaufman (2013, 22) comments that: “in determining father’s strategies, as professional men are better able to take advantage of flexible work arrangements while working-class men more often use shift work to balance work and family demands” and “working-class and lower-middle class men have fewer options when it comes to balancing work and family” (ibid, 18), making it useful to further elaborate on how a couple’s class relates to the division of housework in the next section.

While societal attitudes and practices have evolved, and there is now a growing recognition of the importance of shared responsibilities and gender equality within households, it is worth remembering that in response to the arrival of a child that parents through imitation and modelling may quickly adopt gendered practices, and as perceptions of competence are gradually acquired by both parents, they then tend to be further sharpened (Miller, 2018, 29), upholding the current gender inequalities within homes and potentially passing them down to the next generations. Moreover, when people have children, social norms and practicalities related to childcare provision also come into play, influenced by the prevailing welfare regime. The options and choices available to parents in terms of childcare

support and services can vary depending on the types of welfare systems. Parents may have more opportunities to balance work and family responsibilities in countries with extensive social welfare programmes and accessible childcare provisions, promoting gender equality within households. On the other hand, in societies with limited state support and a reliance on conventional gender roles, the responsibility of childcare frequently falls disproportionately on women, reinforcing gender inequalities within homes and maintaining these patterns for future generations. Therefore, the relevance of welfare regimes, discussed in the previous subsection, should not be overlooked when examining intra-household relations and dynamics and the impact of having children on gender roles.

2.2.3 High-Income Female Breadwinner Households

A focus on female breadwinner households who are not struggling in economic terms, gives scope to investigate in detail the negotiations of home life between partners and the effects of this demanding, high paid work. The ability to generate a high income comes with the potential to have a high-status career, both of which could influence the negotiation of home life between partners. For this reason, I focus here on gender-specific work-family challenges faced by high-income professionals, highlighting the interplay between income dynamics, labour division, and relationship satisfaction. I then outline that if the negotiations between partners do not result in a satisfactory relationship, the alternative for the person with the highest economic resources (i.e., the woman who out-earns her partner) is to leave. By discussing the likelihood of divorce for female breadwinner couples, I unfold that although literature often shows that a prevalent approach to gender-specific work-family challenges is the setback for women's careers, that it is imperative to take divorce into account as a possible approach to addressing these challenges. Thus, it should not be overlooked that the work lives and home lives of female breadwinner couples interact, as this subsection

demonstrates that these couples do this in specific ways which vary by class.

In exploring how couples do gender at home, the premise is the existence of class-specific work-family challenges. Regarding work, high-income professionals are more likely to face a workplace culture that rewards long hours of (unpaid additional) work. This usually concerns managerial positions and systematically disadvantages female employees, who are also expected to take primary responsibilities in unpaid domestic work at home (Chung & Van der Horst, 2020, 516; Dunatchik, 2023). However, this tension between work and home life is different from what low-income households tend to deal with. Low-paid workers are “less likely to have control over their schedules or have the ability to change their work hours to accommodate family responsibilities” (Dunatchik, 2023, 232). While high-income women more often encounter workplace cultures of overwork, they also have more access to work-family policies (despite statutory rights that are equal for all, requests are typically more often granted for people who are salaried, college graduates, and occupations that require high levels of training and education), giving them more flexibility in time and location to organise their lives (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018; Dunatchik, 2023; O’Brien et al., 2017). Also, given that on one hand, high-income women are more likely to draw on their relative resources to bargain out of unpaid work at home (Dunatchik, 2023, 242), and on the other hand, constraints on low-income couples may effectively “discount” the bargaining power that individuals are theorised to derive from their relative resources (ibid., 230), meaning that women with high incomes are more likely to negotiate on their own behalf and steer clear of doing unpaid work at home, while the limitations and restrictions of low-income couples tends to lessen the influence of personal strengths on their capacity to negotiate within the relationship. The classed barriers and facilitators among high-status households allow for an examination of the gendered interplay between income dynamics (relative resources), division of labour and relationship satisfaction.

Research that has considered the effects of women's high-status careers on relationship stability suggests that these women have negative feelings towards their partner's lower job status and have decreased relationship satisfaction (Byrne & Barling, 2017a), but that the effect on their relationship satisfaction would not occur if the women felt that the men helped with domestic responsibilities or childcare (Byrne & Barling, 2017b). Previous qualitative research indicates that couples, especially women, must use strong communication and negotiation skills to achieve more equal-sharing domestic arrangements (Sassler & Miller, 2017), but a better understanding is needed of theories regarding communication and negotiation to reach the desired outcomes. The classic qualitative work on gender and marital power argues that men only contribute to equal distribution of housework if women's communication styles are direct and open (Komter, 1989) and more recent work among cohabiting couples yielded similar results (Miller & Carlson, 2016). However, this research found that couples who strive for the most equality did not arrive at their intended division of labour seamlessly, nor were the most equal among them always without conflict (Carlson, 2020, 5; Miller & Carlson, 2016).

When communication and negotiation are not successful, confrontations over household chores have the potential to cause great dissatisfaction and even to end relationships. This female breadwinner comments:

We argued so much (...) that [was] almost the end of our relationship for a while, that I was really cross with him because I worked so much and he did none, or very few, of the household chores. (...) That was an absolute catastrophe, so a cleaning lady comes in every 2 weeks. (...) she has been coming in for 3 years now. (Jurczyk et al., 2019, 1740)

This quote exemplifies how crucial the division of household tasks is for people and how (in)action can cause a partner to feel, because of its immediate effect on the dynamics and

well-being of the relationship. There are theories suggesting that in order to negotiate a more satisfactory relationship, the partner who has more (financial) resources is the one who can create a better outcome for him or herself and is also the one who may initiate a breakup if there is a failure in achieving the desired outcome (Snijders et al., 2022; Goodwin et al., 2009). These theories can be traced back to two concepts: one is based in sociology (exchange theory) and the other in economics (bargaining theory). Social exchange theory relies on people responding to each other in similar ways, so to kindness with similar levels of benevolence and to harm with indifference or forms of retaliation. When the rewards are greater than the costs of the relationship, the result will be that the actor stays in the relationship, i.e., continues this relationship. In turn, when the costs exceed the rewards, in any kind of relationship (e.g., friendly, professional, romantic, or economic), the actor will break the relationship (Snijders et al., 2022, 66). Economic bargaining theory is about “situations in which economic actors could benefit from coming to an agreement but may disagree about how to divide up the benefit they gain” (Goodwin et al., 2009, 398). Thus, these two theories can also be applied to couples’ relationships (on sociologists’ application of exchange theory to couple households, see Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Cherlin, 2000; Heer, 1963; Molm & Cook, 1995; on economists’ applications, see Lundberg & Pollak, 2000; Lundberg et al., 1997; Manser & Brown, 1980; McElroy, 1990). The implication of this exchange/bargaining perspective is that resources empower a partner to exercise either “voice”, i.e., bargaining, or “exit”, i.e., divorce (England & Kilbourne, 1990; Gershuny et al., 2005; Hirschman, 1970; Sayer et al., 2011, 4; Yefet, 2020, 803), with the idea behind the latter—that the partner with more resources is more likely to initiate the end of a relationship—is that “resources that are portable if one leaves the marriage create better alternatives outside the current marriage, such as the ability to support oneself and one’s children” (Sayer et al., 2011, 4). This is reflected in the experience of female breadwinners in

previous studies, such as a respondent in a study by Sanchez Mira, who stated: “I never want to stop working, because you always have the freedom to say: ‘look, I’m sick of you and I am leaving” (Sánchez-Mira, 2021,10). Similarly, Meisenbach (2010, 10) was told: “if something happened in the relationship (...) I know I could take care of myself.” Despite further economic rationalisation of bargaining resources—such as time availability approach¹⁷, the relative resources approach¹⁸ and the absolute resources approach¹⁹— they are not the best reflection of practice due to the complexity of human behaviour and the fact that, as the cited studies demonstrate, people are not always driven by strict economic rationality. Similarly, a British study among full-time working women and their partners found that almost all women, regardless of their relative and absolute income, stated that household chores should be shared (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015), although many of the women in that study qualified their explanations with a reasoning that also reflected both relative resources and available time as explanations for household division of labour. For instance: a woman who earns 60 per cent or more of total household income and is mainly responsible for the household, says: “I think it depends on what your paid working arrangements are. We divide them up according to how much time each of us has because of our outside-the-house responsibilities, and I’m very comfortable with what we do” (ibid., 28-29). Men, too, reported almost with one accord that “housework should be shared, with similar qualifications regarding time availability”, however and importantly, the authors found that, “despite the widespread support for sharing, respondents’ behaviour tended to comply with more traditional patterns of domestic labour” (ibid., 29). Theories suggest that housework should be divided along

¹⁷ The time availability approach states that time, as a resource, spent on the labour market comes at the expense of time at home (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021; see also Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Coverman, 1985; Foster & Stratton, 2018; Hook, 2004; Van Tienoven et al., 2023).

¹⁸ The relative resources argument is based on the idea that the one who has more resources relative to the other can bargain oneself out of household labour (Kolpashnikova, 2018; see also: Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000; Van Tienoven et al., 2023).

¹⁹ The absolute resources perspective implies that individual resources allow partners in the household to outsource their own share of housework (Gupta, 2007; Killewald & Gough, 2010).

economically rational or predictable lines but gender norms trump this rationality when we look at what happens on the ground – even amongst people who express a desire for equality. In order to understand this, we need a feminist take on the importance of gender to work and housework.

The most effective way to understand what happens within households, is through feminist inquiry which shows that gender needs to be taken into account in any analysis of the domestic distribution of unpaid work and care (Risman et al., 2018, 379). Feminist authors and critics show that gender roles within households are an important factor in the ways that individuals “do gender” to meet social norms and expectations (e.g., Greenstein, 2000; Marx Ferree, 1990; West & Zimmerman). The doing gender approach has been treated as a competitive explanation to relative resources –i.e., a partner’s income relative to the couple’s total income, which may indicate bargaining power within a relationship– when it comes to gender division of work (Dunatchik, 2023), but “the explanatory significance of relative resource and ‘doing gender’ approaches may be interactive, rather than mutually exclusive” (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015, 25). With the doing gender perspective, the prediction of the bargaining/exchange theory makes more sense, because then there is recognition for the role of power dynamics, social expectations, and cultural norms in shaping gendered behaviour and decision-making within relationships. There are many possible outcomes of the gendered division of household labour, with probably the most common ones being: disgruntlement with and adjustment to the gendered division, men’s resistance to taking on more responsibilities (not so much because of the tasks but because the tasks are perceived as feminine and can therefore be stigmatising for them) and women reducing their commitment to paid work (Ellemers, 2018; Koster et al., 2022). Existing research shows that a prevalent approach to responding to gender inequalities at home, is the setback for women’s careers, such as career interruptions to temporarily manage child

bearing and rearing (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Gronau, 1973; Mincer & Ofek, 1982; Weiss & Gronau, 1981), part-time employment to accommodate their domestic duties (Blair-Loy, 2003; Epstein et al., 1999; Spain & Bianchi, 1996; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004) or opting out of the work force all together (Belkin, 2003; Jones, 2012), but it is essential to also consider another potential approach to addressing this inequality, namely: divorce.

While it is not known to what extent dissatisfaction with domestic work is the reason for Dutch married and cohabiting partners to separate, studies of households in Germany, Sweden and the United States reveal that unequal distribution of domestic work is associated with greater marital conflict, deterioration in the quality of the relationship and a higher risk of divorce (Cooke, 2006; Ruppanner & Maume, 2016, 4; see also: Greenstein, 1995; Piña & Bengtson, 1993; Oláh & Gähler, 2014). Although studies show correlations and hints at possible cause for conflicts in female breadwinner households that may lead to divorce (Bertrand et al., 2015; Coop Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Folke & Rickne, 2020; Kleine, 2019; Munsch, 2015; Scott et al., 2013; Teachman, 2010), we do not know what it feels like for these couples, what the steps are along the way to these problems, how these problems might be overcome or might not even arise. This study aims to close this knowledge gap by investigating the experience and the needs of female breadwinner couples at home with the expectation that the concept of (un)doing gender provides insights and explanations.

This section makes a theoretical contribution to the field of household dynamics by analysing existing literature on gendered household dynamics, particularly within the context of female breadwinner households in the Netherlands and offering a feminist analysis that illuminates the intricate connections between gender relations, welfare regimes, and individuals' lives. By examining the tensions within the Dutch welfare state and the challenges faced by women in negotiating gender roles, this section expands our understanding of the complex interplay between societal structures and individual agency. It

emphasises the influence of sociocultural ideas, power dynamics, and class privilege on shaping gender dynamics within households. The discussion of the specific challenges faced by high-income female breadwinners adds a nuanced perspective to the existing literature, highlighting the importance of considering the intersections of gender, class, and household dynamics. By putting the spotlight on the impact of individual choices on relationship quality and the potential for divorce, this section underscores the relevance and practical implications of studying gendered household dynamics. It not only provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals within these households but also offers a foundation for further exploration of how gender is “done” at home and its implications for gender roles and expectations, which is discussed in the next section.

2.3 The Division between Home and Work

In order to get a better understanding of the current nature of work for female breadwinners – especially concerning work within the household– a historical background provides a framework of significant developments for breadwinning women in the Western society. This section looks at the division between home and public space during the industrial revolution, then examines how women were mobilised in the workforce during the First and Second World Wars, it then moves on towards the period of the global economic crisis when women became temporary breadwinners. At the end of this section there is a discussion of a few developments in history that shaped the current presumed secondary role of women in the labour force and how this affects the wages of working women in general and female breadwinners in particular. These movements through historical trends show that female breadwinners are not just a novel demographic group, but that they upend and challenge longstanding ideologies about nature and roles of men and women.

2.3.1 Mobilisation of Women in the Workforce

Over time, there have been significant changes to the traditional male breadwinner model, which is based on gender stereotypes and the division of private and public space (Barnett, 2004; Brussino & McBrien, 2022, 10; Kirp, 1986). The division of labour brought about by the industrial revolution saw men working for pay and women becoming associated with domesticity (Goloboy & Mancall, 2008). However, as a result of their replacement of men in factories during wartime, women gradually entered the workforce (Bureau of Employment Security, 1942, 4; CBS, 2019; CBS, 2022e; Roantree & Vira, 2018). Changes in societal norms as a result of these events gave women new social and economic opportunities as well as higher educational attainment (DeCicca & Krashinsky, 2016; Mukherji, 1997, Tropf & Mandemakers, 2017; Wilde, 2019).

The division of labour between men and women has changed recently, moving towards dual-earner and part-time carer models (Bowman, 2022; Kotowska & Matysiak, 2008; Van Dongen, 2009). The historical setting emphasises how developments around the globe affect gender roles in families. For instance, the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted work patterns and home lives in various ways for individual couples. Overall, these shifts demonstrate how gender roles and relationships are evolving, with more women becoming breadwinners and contributing significantly to the workforce.

2.3.2 Women's Earnings in Times of Crisis

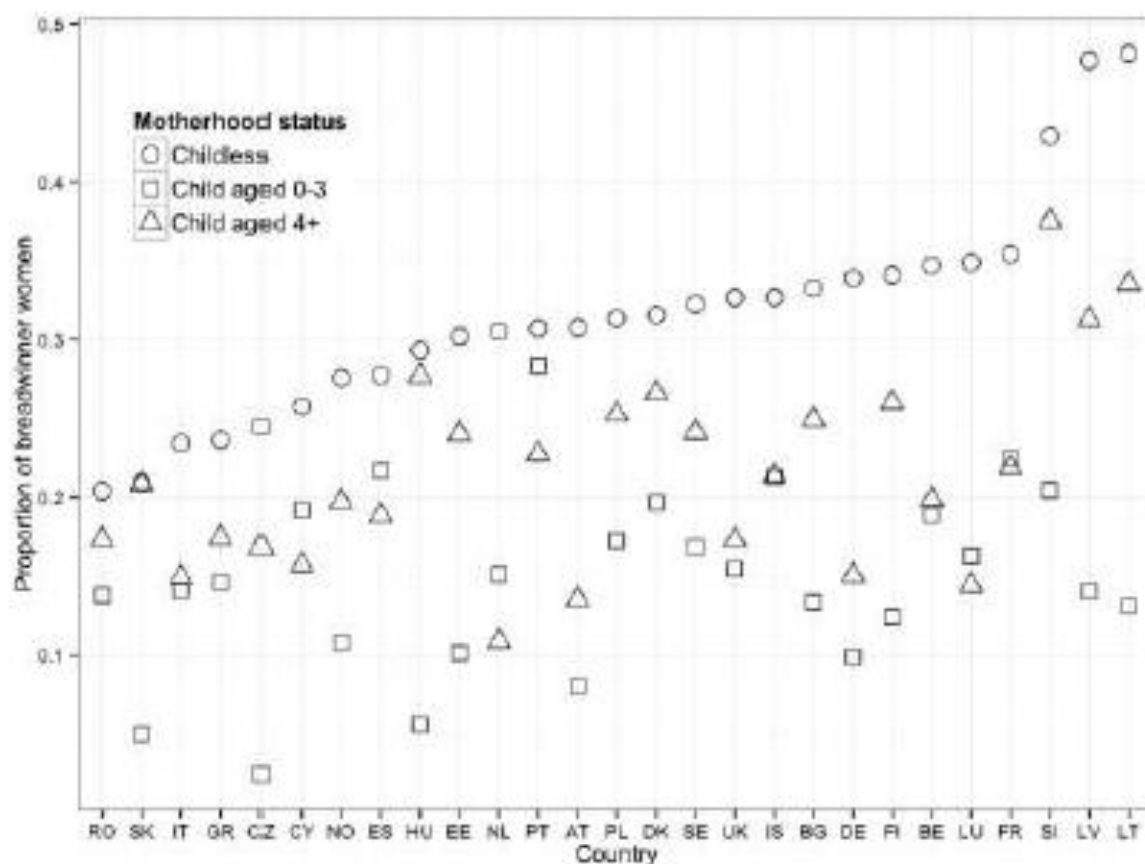
The 2007 Global Financial Crisis provides one of the most recent contexts for the restructuring of work and intra-household relationships. This crisis hit industries hard particularly those with a high concentration of male employees, resulting in a marked decrease in male employment (Cho & Newhouse, 2012). The construction, manufacturing, mining and quarrying sectors, all traditionally dominated by men, were identified as those

where job losses were particularly severe (OECD, 2013, 142). A comparative study of the labour market from the crisis until 2012 between North America and several European countries showed interesting trends, such as more women becoming the only breadwinner in the household because of male unemployment (Karamessini & Rubery, 2013), which is in line with one of the typologies described by Drago and colleagues (2005) namely that temporary female breadwinner families may arise accidentally due to temporary male unemployment or as a purposeful response to economic uncertainty, but may also emerge intentionally to protect the family from earnings fluctuations. Other typologies are the permanent female breadwinner families due to adverse events affecting the man, such as long-term unemployment or low earnings, or as a conscious strategy to maximise income, and the persistent female breadwinner families which may be driven by an ideology of gender equity (ibid, 3). Given concurrent changes which include rising economic precarity for young men, lead to more women assuming primary financial responsibility for their families and more households' reliance on her earnings (Glass et al., 2021), another crisis had the potential to long-term economic consequences for female breadwinners, namely the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreak started at the end of 2019, spread globally in the beginning of 2020 and it was anticipated that women's employment would suffer more than men's. The International Labour Organization (ILO) rated sectors as high risk of severe COVID-19 impact, representing 41 per cent of total female employment (compared to 35 per cent of total male employment) (ILO, 2020, 1). Moreover, one of the possible consequences of this crisis for female breadwinner households was a profound change in the work patterns and home lives, ultimately leading to a decline in these types of households. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, almost a third of mothers in working families across Europe were identified as female breadwinners (Cory & Stirling, 2015, 11; Barratt, 2019). These maternal

breadwinners are women with dependent children who earn at least half of the total family earnings. This includes single mothers who bring in all of the family earnings (with possible supplement of maintenance and child support from their children’s father), as well as some married or cohabiting mothers (Cory & Stirling, 2015, 8). In the Netherlands, only 12 per cent of the women with young/small children out-earn their male partner (Vink, 2020, 9). Another group of female breadwinners consists of childless partnered women, earning half or more of the couple’s income. Across Europe, between 20 per cent and almost 50 per cent of childless partnered women are main breadwinners. Specifically for the Netherlands: approximately 30 per cent of this group of women earns half or more of the couple’s income, according to the latest data before the pandemic (Klesment & Van Bavel, 2015, 20), see Figure 4.

Figure 4: Proportion of breadwinner women by country and motherhood status



Source: Klesment and Van Bavel, 2015

Now that the major effects of the latest crisis are almost over, an assessment can be made whether the pandemic has actually changed the home lives and work patterns of women, and of female breadwinners in particular.

2.3.3 Current State of Women's Home and Work life

The effects of COVID-19 in the Netherlands on women's work and home lives have been limited in the sense that the expectation of change did not fully come about (Meester, 2020a; Vollebregt, 2022a). Many jobs were saved by the government's COVID-19 support packages, with the caveat that the unemployment rate of women rose faster than that of men. The poignant thing is that this concerns women in low-paid occupations. In general, for high-income female breadwinners as a group this means they have escaped this crisis (although individuals may well have been affected) (ILO, 2020, 1; Sabbati & Lecerf, 2021, 1; SER, 2022, 13; Vollebregt, 2022a).

When it comes to women's home life, an expected change, or rather hope, has also failed to occur: the redistribution of household chores and childcare in favour of women. Since COVID-19, there have been additional government regulations to benefit both men and women with regard to childcare, but the biggest gain would be if parents had started talking more about the traditional division of roles. Many partners may want to avoid communicating about difficult issues in the relationship, which include household chores (Kluwer et al., 1997, 635). Add to this the fact that female breadwinners have their earnings as an extra thorny issue that can influence the division of roles in the household (Meester, 2020a; Vollebregt, 2020), which could lead to over compensation by her and under compensation by him. Talking and negotiating about the division of roles between female breadwinner couples is helpful, especially given that until recently it was not necessarily expected that women would make any significant contribution to the family income.

The current increase in female employment rates and the proportion of female breadwinner households can be seen as progress for women in Western societies. Still, women are lagging behind men in a way that can be felt in their wallets, because until now, women's average earnings are lower. Also, female breadwinner households face greater economic vulnerability (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2019, 5) and this is important in terms of considering the negotiations within these households. Below it is reviewed that it is not a new phenomenon that women earn less than men, what the causes are and why the labelling of the "gender wage gap" should be revised to better understand the negotiations within the homes of female breadwinners.

A century ago, a book described the position of the working woman: "the frequent inferiority of woman's earnings is due, in the main, to a general but not invariable inferiority of productive power, usually in quantity, sometimes in quality, and nearly always in nett advantageousness to the employer" (Webb & Webb, 1898, 63). During the industrial revolution, men replaced working in agricultural or home-based trades with working for wages outside their home and women took on paid employment outside their homes too, but the earnings between men and women were not the same. In manufacturing, the difference in pay structures arose from the division of skilled and unskilled manual work. Unskilled work meant that there was a form of work-related training towards becoming a member of a guild or trade organisation, but female workers were less likely to have access to any training. The jobs that women were able to do, regarded by skilled male workers and employers, were jobs that suited the physical strength of women and therefore valued less than the work of unskilled men. For this reason, women were paid less for the type of work that they did (Falchikov, 2001). Although the increased rationalisation and bureaucratisation of non-manual work has created new opportunities for women in the labour force in most industrialised countries (Charles, 2003, 270), in practice it is "mainly women who –for

reasons of economic necessity rather than free choice— make use of reconciliation facilities like family-related leave, flexible working hours, part-time work and so on in order to balance their private and professional lives” (European Commission, 2008, 5), which leads to a difference in earnings between women and men, also known as the gender wage gap.

The gender wage gap is the median earnings per year of a full-time working woman divided by the median earnings of a full-time working man (OECD, n.d.). In 2021, Dutch men earned an average of 25.84 euros per hour, Dutch women 22.42 euros, i.e., 13 per cent less (CBS, 2022f). Female breadwinners are not immune to the gender wage gap either. A survey by Citi and LinkedIn found a wage gap of 42 per cent in the United States: women who are the highest earner in the household made \$35,000 more than their partners, while male breadwinners made \$49,000 more than their partners (Business Wire, 2013). The gender wage gap therefore also seems to leave female breadwinners behind, making them more vulnerable to financial hardship than their male equivalent.

The concept of gender wage gap is perhaps confusing, because the solution to this inequality should be: just pay women more. It would put women in general and female breadwinners specifically in an equal position, but this is not how matters stand. Rarely it is emphatically stated that this gender wage gap is based on a variety of factors, which include, but are not limited to, the difference in: 1) hours worked; 2) years of experience, and 3) industries or jobs worked (Bleisweis, 2020). In other words, women’s low pay at work, is intrinsically related to their responsibilities at home.

The first factor is that women tend to work fewer hours to accommodate more care tasks and other unpaid obligations than men. “It is not that women are willing to forgo pay because they enjoy flexible working hours whilst men do not; rather, women are more likely to accept lower (per hour) wage offers if this is the only way they can combine the roles of mother and wage earner” (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009, 41). Of course, there is not much

attractiveness in low paying jobs, but there is an element in these kinds of jobs that draws many women who take on a disproportionate share of caregiving tasks. The second factor is the difference in years of experience. This difference is to a certain extent due to reconciliation issues that women may face: “they have disjointed, slower and shorter careers which are thus less financially rewarding” and that mainly women –and not men– take long parental leave periods (European Commission, 2008, 5). The third factor is the difference in industries and jobs, where (self-)stereotyping might play a role in the occupational segregation into so-called men’s and women’s jobs. In the next section, *Doing Gender at Work*, occupational segregation (horizontally and vertically) is further discussed, but in the light of men’s versus women’s earnings it is good to state that: “These wage gap calculations reflect the ratio of earnings for women and men across all industries; they do not reflect a direct comparison of women and men doing identical work. This is purposeful. Calculating it this way allows experts to capture the multitude of factors” (Bleiweis, 2020). It would be relatively uncomplicated for anyone to detect and take steps against employers keeping two pay scales for the different genders, which is what the gender wage gap could imply. The argument can be made to better speak of an earnings gap, or even a choice gap; men and women are likely to make decisions according to upbringing, ingrained beliefs and societal expectations, which eventually affect their earnings. While the argument of an earnings gap or a choice gap can be put forth, it is important to acknowledge the systematic discrimination at the root of these differences in incomes between men and women. Glass ceilings and undervaluation of traditionally female-dominated professions in workplaces hinder women’s progress (Kräft, 2022; Rossi, 2006), societal expectations and cultural norms influence career choices that reinforce traditional gender roles, and unconscious biases play a role in perpetuating wage disparities (Meeussen et al., 2016). Addressing these issues is crucial for achieving true gender equality and closing the gender pay gap.

The earnings of working women in general and female breadwinners in particular lag behind men's earnings, which can be attributed to the fact that the current state of women's home life being intrinsically linked to her current state of work life. This connection underscores the complexity of the issue. Hence, her work life should not be dismissed lightly as an isolated problem that a gender gap in earnings tends to entail. Her negotiations at home are more apparent in realising that her work is determined by several factors, which are further discussed in the next section: Doing Gender at Work.

2.4 Doing Gender at Work

This section gives the social context of what work means in the light of female breadwinnership. Starting with the definition of work and arguing that the place for (breadwinning) women in society is distinctly related to how work is defined, both in the home and in the paid labour force. I then discuss the gendered nature of work in both unpaid housework which is mostly done by women, and work in the paid labour force where there is horizontal and vertical segregation between men and women. These challenges for working women are often due to confirmed biases and beliefs, which all together can affect the home lives of these women. In particular for working women in powerful positions, this section provides insight that work in the paid labour force can have a significant impact on their home lives. This discussion shows that gender is "done" at work through broad scale structures and policies as well as by individuals.

Challenging definitions of "work" has been central to feminist struggles to enhance women's status. According to Simonton, "women's place in society is the result of a complex of ideas about what they are capable of and should do, so that their work, its types, locations and structures are gendered" (2006, 134). By focusing on the word "work", this quote can provide context for understanding the lives of breadwinning women. Often this word is used

interchangeably with the word “job”. They are both usually placed in the context of paid employment, but “work” has “different connotations depending on the relevant social, economic, technological, and cultural context” (De Masi, 2014, 58). There is also a distinction in this word by the descriptive adjectives that are used, such as mental work and manual work (Neff, 2006, 80). Mental work is not always easy to put one’s finger on; as the novelist and short story writer Joseph Conrad said: “How do I explain to my wife that when I look out the window, I’m working?” (De Masi, 2014). The location does not delineate the term work, as someone who is self-employed can run their business from home and the activities would still be considered as work (Simonton, 2006). Time does not offer sufficient delineation either, because there are countless work types that can take place at different times, which we would refer to as work. The most relevant factor could be if there is absence of a wage (Altbach, 1971), although voluntary work is also based on unpaid labour. According to Federici “the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it” (2012, 16). Hence, the place for women, especially breadwinning women, in society is distinctly related to how work is defined, both in the home and in the paid labour force.

Housework is gendered, with women usually spending more time on this type of work, as is the case in the Netherlands (Portegijs et al., 2018; Roeters, 2017; Thijs et al., 2022; Vollebregt, 2020). The gendered nature of housework is reproduced through public discourse via channels such as media, policy debates and children’s stories (Berridge & Romich, 2011, 159) and through other discourse; “family-level discourse does not occur in isolation from these larger shared and contested interpretations of housework” (ibid., 2011, 159). This could explain the reason that according to research, women tend to do more in the household even when they are out-earning their male partners, and also, men tend to do less

in-home chores when they are being out-earned by female partners (Baxter & Hewitt, 2013; Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Coltrane, 2000; Grunow et al., 2012; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). The suggestion is that both men and women “subconsciously disturbed by their violation of traditional gender norms, start acting hyper-conventionally to compensate” (Burkeman, 2018). Men and women are doing gender in very fundamental ways when they do or don’t do housework. Housework is also seen as a “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989), and it is noteworthy that the same European study that shows a significant increase in average working hours for women in recent decades, also reveals that the majority of the housework load still rests on women (Gershuny, 2018).

With the second shift referring to housework and childcare, the first shift is about the paid labour force which also tends to be gendered. There are sectors that are dominated by a certain gender. This division is called horizontal segregation, referring to the greater proportion of women or men employed in particular sectors or types of work (Richardson & Robinson, 2020, 246). There is also vertical segregation which is bluntly described by the findings of a study on gender and career a few decades ago: “traditionally, women are seen as not possessing the necessary attributes for leadership. They are believed to be compliant, submissive, emotional, and to have great difficulties in making choices” (Nieva & Gutek, 1981, 83). To further understand the gendered nature of work, how the first and second shifts relate to each other for female breadwinner couples, and how essential it is to explore further the connections between these two shifts in the lives and negotiations between these couples, I will explore horizontal and vertical segregation. The latter is discussed in the light of gendered leadership and matters particularly to female breadwinners with a high-status position.

2.4.1 Horizontal and Vertical Segregation

We speak of horizontal segregation when occupations are dominated by males or females. By way of illustration: in the Netherlands nearly 90 per cent of construction workers are men, roughly 80 per cent of health and social workers are women, and more than 60 per cent of jobs in education are held by women (CBS, 2022g), see Table 2. A few explanations for female-dominated jobs are that these jobs are flexible to combine with being a wife or mother role (Bettio & Verashchagina, 2009) and that these types of jobs are chosen due to self-segregation or self-stereotyping (Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010). “Self-stereotyping” is not just an isolated process within individuals as it is also through viewing yourself by the stereotypes of others and consequently conforming one’s self with that view (Whitley & Kite, 2010, 333). In 2005 a study was done among high school students in the Netherlands and found that for some boys and for none of the girls, earning money was one of the main drivers in choosing a job. For many girls it was more important that their job is something in “doing good for society” (Rommes, 2010, 155; see also: Bras-Klapwijk & Rommes, 2005). It is also supposed that girls are more interested in people and relationships; boys are supposed to be more interested in repairing and building (Faulkner, 2000; Ford, 2011). This brings us back to why we would see more men choose a career in, for example, construction and why more women are more likely to choose a career in service jobs like in the health care or teaching. Also, this relates to the earlier discussion (see 2.2.2 Intra-Household Relations and Dynamics) on how children’s expectations are shaped from the moment they are born, and how this effects the careers that they choose in later life. The social conditioning and standards on children steer them to conform to particular behaviours, which directs them along specific professional lines.

Table 2: Working population, Q1 2022

Industry	Total	Men	Women
<i>Construction</i>	393.000	343.000	51.000
<i>Education</i>	732.000	262.000	470.000
<i>Health and Welfare Care</i>	1.612.000	317.000	1.295.000

Source: CBS, 2022g

For women in male-dominated jobs a visibility-vulnerability spiral occurs, coined by Kram and McCollom-Hampton (1998, 213) who suggested that this is because of the “heightened visibility, intense scrutiny of performance, and the pressure to assimilate into the majority culture”. The difference between men and women in an isolated position at work or in being a “token” is, as Simpson (2004) argued a few years later that “while token women can be severely disadvantaged by their minority status, positive career outcomes may well accrue for “token” men” (2004, 352), because men are still expected to be career orientated and get the benefit of the doubt concerning their capabilities. The preferential treatment from female peers and superiors even goes as far as men being encouraged to move up towards higher (paying) occupations even against the men’s desire. Men are more likely to be pulled into female-dominated occupations while women are more likely to be pushed out of male-dominated occupations (Fouad et al., 2017; Jacobs, 1993). In this situation men and are also effectively being “kicked upstairs” (William, 1992, 256), creating a pattern of vertical segregation; this is the difference in status and seniority (and consequently reward) in the jobs held by men and women even when in the same industries (Richardson & Robinson, 2020, 246). Today, men and women still face these types of segregations in the labour force.

It is argued that vertical and horizontal segregation are linked because “most women are concentrated in female-dominated occupations, which comprise fewer positions of authority than male-dominated occupations” (Huffman & Cohen, 2004, 124). As a result, women are imagined to have fewer skills and competences to fulfil managerial roles which ultimately means that vertical segregation rests on the presumption that men are inherently more competent than women and therefore should obtain more monetary benefit, prestige and other rewards (Levanon & Grusky, 2012).

2.4.2 Effects of Gendered Work Segregation on Female Breadwinners

The persistence of segregation is illustrated in gender quotas, which are considered as the solution to correcting gender imbalance in the paid labour market. The discussion and implementation of quotas have had limited success, despite the popularised idea from three McKinsey studies that companies are more profitable with gender diversity—especially in leadership roles (Badal, 2014; Heskett, 2015, ILO, 2019; Noland et al., 2016). Later, this idea was questioned by scientific studies, of which one stated that “the relationship between board gender diversity and company performance is either non-existent (effectively zero) or very weakly positive” (Todd, 2022). Nevertheless, quotas do have the potential to break self-stereotyping. As an example, one study looked at the stereotype of women having weaker mathematical skills which makes some women feel pressured in taking maths tests because they experience the threat to be measured by the negative stereotype. However, when the stereotype threat is lifted, women and men perform equally to men on the maths tests (Quinn & Spencer, 2001).

Although the above-mentioned ways of stereotyping have mostly been directed to women, we cannot ignore that “stereotypes persist about the role of men and women in society and, by extension, whether they should be on the labour market or at home”

(European Commission, 2017, 1-2). It is not always easy to pinpoint how television and other media reflect society or vice versa, but it is a credible approach to see how gender is being stereotyped in the media (including print, television, Internet and social media). Taussig claims “when we consider social science representations of “real” work alongside fictional representations, we find the creative possibility to connect with culture as a means of understanding actual and possible organisations” (1993, 47) and others have found that the media “represents and shapes the actual behaviour of people, not least in workplaces” (Mavin et al., 2010, 556). There are authors who believe that the media constantly stereotypes, and not only in negative ways. In a positive sense, women could explicitly be portrayed as caring and honest, which does not seem harmful. However, any way of polarising leadership by stressing gender stereotypes can undermine the path for women to pursue a top career. Especially in regard to leaders, it is important to not represent female leadership as different from male leadership. For this reason, a degendering of leadership is advocated (Campus, 2013; Katuna, 2014; Pittinsky et al., 2007).

Underscoring the difference between male and female leadership, in the political world, is a study by Joan Y. Chiao (2008) who found that men seem to be electable only by measures of competence whereas women need competence and physical attractiveness to be elected. Attractive women may face challenges due to the perception that their looks are their primary asset, overshadowing their leadership capabilities. The “likability” factor can create a catch-22 situation where attractive women may suppress their attractiveness to be seen as competent, potentially sacrificing opportunities for advancement. Gender dynamics in the workplace can also contribute to the catch-22, as societal expectations often link attractiveness with femininity and leadership with masculine traits. The bias therefore lies in the assumption that attractiveness determines women’s leadership effectiveness, creating disadvantages or limitations for women in leadership positions. A catch-22 also applies to the

competency of women, as a “competence penalty” may come into force, which is a bias that penalises women for being too competent and women’s attempts to demonstrate competence are met with resistance and doubt. The double standards and likability factor further complicates their situation, as women may face negative reactions from others who perceive their ambition and assertiveness as incongruent with societal expectations for women, and attempts to assert their competence may not be viewed favourably from a likability perspective (Williams, 2004). Studies have found that women who passed through the hiring process encounter competency penalties as they interact with co-workers and supervisors, but that up to the hiring process they face the women’s incompetence bias that unfairly questions or underestimates the abilities of women compared to men (Arena et al., 2023, 71), which also pertains to leadership roles. Also, the “think manager – think male” phenomenon can foster bias against women in leadership positions because it implies that leadership is associated with male rather than female attributes. (Klatt et al., 2016; Schein et al., 1996, 34). Sociologists identified the concept of ‘homophily’ which is the tendency for people to associate with people who are similar to them (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954) this can shape the formation of homophilous networks, where individuals in leadership positions, often men, tend to surround themselves with others who are similar to them, perpetuating gender imbalances. In turn, homophily can contribute to the bias that perpetuates the “think manager – think male” phenomenon. Influential networks that are predominately made up of people with similar traits, like being male, can reinforce the perception that men are better suited for leadership positions. This reinforces the bias even more and makes it challenging for women to enter these networks and advance to top positions. In the context of these biases, other factors at the root of women’s underrepresentation in top jobs may include systemic gender biases in recruitment, selection, and promotion processes; organisational cultures; and challenges in finding a work-life balance and caregiving responsibilities (Stamarski & Son

Hing, 2015; Son Hing et al., 2023), all of which keep gender inequalities in place.

Furthermore, there is the well-known glass ceiling which is a metaphorical invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching top positions (Kräft, 2022; Rossi, 2006; Valiant, 1998), but many women do not even come close to that ceiling because of the maternal wall; a bias that hinders the ability of women to balance family and work life (Williams et al., 2021; Woolley, 2021).

These gender-related biases can stem from gender norms that indicate which roles are for women and which roles are for men (Meeussen et al., 2016; see also: Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eccles, 1994). The origin of the concept of *role* is a terminology of the theatre. The word was French for “roll” and referred to the roll of paper on which the actor’s part was written (Brannon, 2005, 116; see also: Brannon, 1976). Similarly, the roles that men and women are expected to perform in society and at home could be recognised as prescribed behaviours, prewritten for male and female actors (Lawrence-Bourne, 2018, 54). In the 19th century the ideology of separate spheres, as in the breadwinner-homemaker dyad, in gender roles was common across Protestant and Catholic Europe (Abrams, 2006, 30-31), but also in the United States where the notion of separate spheres was seen through a religious lens by the Supreme Court in 1872 to justify discrimination against women. By citing “God designed the sexes to occupy different spheres of action”, women were not granted the right to become lawyers, even if they were otherwise qualified (Lindberg, 2017). Emily Martin, vice president and general counsel of the National Women’s Law Center adds insight by saying “it is still the case that too many people think pregnancy and motherhood are incompatible with work” (ibid., 2017). The ideology of separate spheres with roots in religion could possibly still be embedded in gender norms through legislation, but also through biases and behaviours in society and at home. Therefore, it is useful to explore the “act” of “being” a man or a woman for female breadwinner couples, which describes the ways in which they are doing gender.

This section shows that work is not only gendered at home but also in the paid labour force, both stemming from the philosophy of roles that men and women are expected to perform in the separate spheres. As doing gender at work according to gender-related biases in the workforce can affect home lives and, in turn, doing gender at home by compensating for violated traditional gender roles in the household can influence work lives, it is essential to know how high-status female breadwinners and their partners negotiate their intra-household challenges by taking the relationship between home and work into account.

2.5 Summary and Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have highlighted the interconnections between gendered lives at home and at work, and between the macro scales of social policy or cultural expectations and the lived experiences of individuals and families. The “doing gender” approach provides a way to attend to those lived experiences without ignoring or downplaying the importance of wider social forces. In this chapter, I sought to emphasise the need for a comprehensive feminist approach that considers the intersection of gender with other social categories, that challenges structural inequalities, and that promotes collective action for social change. Individualistic forms of feminism are criticised that may ignore broader structural barriers and inequalities. Then, I underscored how the division of domestic work is intertwined with complex social and cultural factors that perpetuate traditional gender norms and expectations by focusing on how different effects contribute to the ways gender is “done” within households. Subsequently, I made arguments revolving around the gendered nature of household work, its impact on gender equality, and the necessity for further exploration of the experiences of female breadwinners and men’s perspectives on domestic work. The thesis accentuated the importance of understanding and challenging traditional gender norms and expectations within the context of domestic activities to achieve greater gender equality in

households. There was also attention for the concept of masculinities and the potential impact of hegemonic male ideals on gender dynamics within households. Not overlooked is the importance of examining the experiences of men in various family structures, particularly in female breadwinner households, to shed light on the renegotiation of gender roles and the pursuit of greater gender equality.

It was beneficial to also consider the complex interplay between welfare state policies, gender dynamics within households, and the challenges faced by female breadwinner couples. This chapter argued that additional study is needed, especially qualitative studies, to fully understand how welfare regimes and individual choices shape gender relations and experiences across households. It is good to comprehend how gender dynamics operate between couples and the role of factors like the transition to parenthood, intensive mothering ideology and class privilege in shaping these dynamics. I then underscored the need to focus on gender dynamics within female breadwinner households with high incomes, followed with arguments for discussing the historical shifts in gender roles and the growing involvement of women in the workforce. Here, the impact of societal and economic changes on household dynamics are acknowledged, prompting a re-evaluation of traditional gender norms and roles. I reviewed how global crises can significantly affect women's employment, particularly in industries dominated by men, and how these crises can lead to changes in household dynamics, including an increase in female breadwinners. This chapter also raised questions about the long-term consequences of the pandemic on female breadwinner households and the need for an evaluation of the pandemic's effects on women's work and home lives. I underlined the ongoing challenges women face in achieving true gender equality in the workplace and that systemic issues should be addressed such as occupational segregation, biases, and societal expectations to close the gender inequalities. Overall, the arguments presented in this thesis foreground the importance of challenging

gender stereotypes, biases, and role expectations in the workplace and at home to create a more equitable and supportive environment for high-status female breadwinners. Addressing these issues can help break down barriers and create opportunities for women to thrive in their careers and personal lives.

In conclusion, the chapter makes significant contributions to the debates in social geography and sociology around household dynamics, advancing our knowledge of how gender is constructed and performed within high-income female breadwinner households. It clarifies the complex interplay between societal structures, individual agency, historical background, and cultural factors in shaping gender dynamics inside homes, calling for further research and exploration of this important area. The following chapter presents the methodology that applies to exploring how high-status breadwinning women and their partners “do” gender in their home lives. By adhering to robust methodological principles, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the experiences, challenges, and dynamics within these households, further enriching the knowledge about this little-known group.

Chapter 3: Researching with High-Status Female Breadwinners

This thesis focuses on how gender is “done” behind the closed doors of high-status female breadwinner households. In alignment with feminist methodology, an approach in social research which is respectful of respondents and acknowledges the subjective involvement of the researcher (Letherby, 2003, 5; Richardson & Robinson, 2020), the aim is to capture the experience of women and men in these households. The following research question guides this thesis: “How do Dutch female breadwinner households do gender at home?”

Subsequently, directly connected to the main question are the subquestions:

- (1) What is “doing gender” in the context of domestic work for female breadwinner couples?
- (2) How do the earnings and financial arrangements of female breadwinners relate to negotiations at home?
- (3) How do state-level family policies and related cultural practices impact how female breadwinners are “doing gender” at home?

To understand the relationship between home and work in gendered household dynamics, I have developed a methodology that seeks to understand how people “do gender” in their everyday lives. This methodology attends to people in their social context, it listens to them as individuals with multi-faceted lives (both work and home) and locates them within a particular historical and geographical frame. In this chapter, the methods used to answer the research question are explored, including the rationale for choosing semi-structured interviewing as the most applicable for participants to share their experiences. I have conducted interviews with 27 women and nine men in the Netherlands. These interviews range widely over participants career histories and current work lives, their relationships and how life at home is organised. Carrying out this research requires thoughtfulness about the sensitivity of the topics covered as well as awareness of the unusual power relationships involved in “studying up”. Additionally, while the initial intention was that only women

would take part in this research, as it progressed insight led me to also include male participants. I explain below that although the couples are interviewed anonymously and separately from each other, there is a power flow between a couple that could influence the research; how this balances out in this thesis is explored in this chapter.

There is also an account of the research setting and more detail on the participants in this study. This is followed by an explanation of why a pilot study was carried out ahead of the main study which leads towards describing how the data collection and the data analysis have taken place. Towards the end of this chapter, I discuss ethical considerations and thoughts on how I, as the researcher, seek to identify my own potential biases which includes the suggestion that it is never possible to be completely unbiased whilst conducting qualitative research.

3.1 Scope

This study looks at how high-status female breadwinners and their partners are doing gender at home. The homes are located in the Netherlands. The capital of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, is seen as “a surprisingly powerful performer in the indices given its size”²⁰ and “is an example of a high-quality city that is now leveraging the borrowed scale, diversity and knowledge of its wider region (the “Holland Metropole”)” (JLL, 2017, 2017, 28). The “Holland Metropole” consists of Amsterdam and its three near neighbours: The Hague (seat of government), Rotterdam (largest harbour in Europe)²¹ and Utrecht²². This Dutch metropolitan region, which is the fourth largest in North Western Europe after London, Paris and the Rhine-Ruhr, is also known as “the Randstad” (Lopez-Carreiro et al., 2021, 279;

²⁰ Amsterdam is included in indices that rank global cities; these cities are important because of their “concentration of multinational businesses, financial services corporations, and the businesses connected to them draws highly educated workers from all over the globe” and also, they “attract more diverse profile of immigrants than any other cities” (Judd & Swanstrom, 2015, 166).

²¹ Rotterdam was the biggest harbour in the world from 1962 until 2004 (Port of Rotterdam, n.d.)

²² The Holland Metropole may also include the city Eindhoven.

Randstad Region, 2019). This is the area from where the participants were recruited to study female breadwinner households.

To bring the experience within female breadwinner households to the fore, the rationale to choose the Netherlands is based on its welfare state regime and ambiguous work-care policy (Goijaerts, 2022), which provide a context to explore the complexity of gender equality and the influence of social policy on gender dynamics. It was deliberately chosen not to take the egalitarianism of a country as a starting point, as welfare state regimes focus on addressing economic insecurity and inequality, while egalitarianism aims for equality and fairness within societies (Amenta et al., 2001; House et al., 2004; Van den Berg, 2023). The Netherlands provides an ambiguous context, because there are some social policies that support gender egalitarianism but there are still very pronounced differences in men's and women's workforce participation and in cultural attitudes towards responsibilities at home. It is a country's gender culture that deserves more attention amid the exploration of female breadwinner households and the Netherlands is pre-eminently a country to highlight through its special welfare state and ambiguous social policies.

In recruiting participants, diversity was sought among the participants because ethnicity, race and nationality can be important in terms of how female breadwinner couples negotiate. Diversity in the Netherlands is not difficult to find. In September 2022, there were 4,619,408 people with a migration background living in this country. That amounts to 24.4 per cent of the Dutch population. Of this proportion, 10.5 per cent of the total Dutch population has a western migration background²³ and 13.9 per cent has a non-western migration background²⁴. The share of people with a migration background is higher in large

²³ Relates to persons with a migration background from one of the countries in Europe (excluding Turkey), North America and Oceania, and Indonesia and Japan (CBS, 2022c).

²⁴ Relates to persons with a migration background in one of the countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey (CBS, 2022c).

cities than the national share of almost a quarter. In January 2020, it was measured that 51.8 per cent within the four major cities collectively had a migration background. In Amsterdam, the share of residents with a migration background was 55.6 per cent. In the Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht this was 55.6, 52.3 and 36.1 per cent respectively (CBS, 2022b).

A female breadwinner in this thesis does not imply that the woman is the sole breadwinner, this model does not follow a strict percentage of how much a woman needs to earn relative to her partner to be qualified as a breadwinner, such as with the models that Heckert and colleagues describe (1998). Rather, referring to the woman as the breadwinner is meant to leave room for understanding that a male partner may make a substantial contribution to the total income of a household, just less than the woman he lives with. This focus is distinct from the dual-earner model because even though the dual earner model includes the option of the female partner being the main provider, it also encompasses the possibility of the man as main earner and both partners contributing equally. In the female breadwinner model the emphasis is on the woman's higher earning power and the fact that this creates an unequal financial relationship within the household.

A sub-group of female breadwinner households is the focus of this study; women with a high-status position. The adjective "high-status" describes women who rank highly in professional or social hierarchies. More specifically: high-status women are at c-level (e.g., CEO, CFO, CRO)²⁵, in management or in board of Director positions or are well-known in the public eye. The women's high-status goes together with their high earnings, but the importance of the status to the study is mainly to consider the demands, responsibilities and challenges that come with their work and how the intra-household dynamics respond on this.

²⁵ C-level is an adjective used to describe high-ranking executive titles within an organisation (e.g., CEO, chief executive officer; CFO, chief financial officer; and CRO, chief records officer) (Franks, 2013, 344).

The women's high status plays a greater role than their salaries, so that a wide range of possible high-status positions could be included. For instance: assuming that a mayor of London is regarded as well-known in the public eye and considering that a high-income individual in the United Kingdom has an adjusted income²⁶ of more than £240,000 (London.gov.uk., 2022), then the mayor of London's salary of £152,734 (London.gov.uk, n.d.) would not meet the conditions to participate if salary alone was considered (aside the study's requirement that the mayor would need to be a female breadwinner in the Netherlands). High-income positions are usually associated with university degrees such as B.A., M.A., and PhD (Joshi, 2002, 455) and often needed for the pursuit and attainment of a high-status profession (Newton & Stewart, 2010, 8), but even without high levels of education, one can achieve a position in society, which in terms of power and status exceed the money one earns from it.

Within the scope are households consisting of adults (aged 18 years and up) cohabiting or married couples, with or without children. Heterosexual couples are the focus of this thesis, because of the notion that gender roles are defaulted to men and women in relation to each other. For non-conventional relationships such as same-sex couples, corresponding societal expectations do not exist to the same extent (Bauer, 2016, 114) or have a significantly different effect (Atwood, 2019, 5), which allows greater flexibility for more balanced distribution of tasks (Cao et al., 2016, 21; Lippa, 2008). For example, there are indications, that lesbians, in particular, tend to distribute housework more evenly than gay and straight households (Taylor et al., 2015, 1507; see also: Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Kurdek, 1993; Sullivan, 1996). When it comes to dual-earners, a study among 225 homosexual and heterosexual dual-earning²⁷ couples in the United States found that: "same-

²⁶ Adjusted income is all income including dividends, savings interest and rental income plus any pension contributions paid by an employer (Fahy, 2020; Roberts, 2020).

²⁷ In said study, dual-earning couples indicates that both members regularly work for pay for any number of hours per week (Matos, 2015, 21).

sex, dual-earner couples do not consistently share responsibilities equally but relative income and work hours are not reliable predictors for how they do divide responsibilities” in contrast to different-sex, dual-earner couples where “gender, income and work hours are predictive of how responsibilities are divided” (Matos, 2015, 3). A cross-national study of 723 same-sex couples in seven countries reveals that while they share paid labour equally, male couples struggle more than female couples to equally divide unpaid labour due to gender norms (Van der Vleuten et al., 2021). This indicates that gender roles influence the allocation of household tasks among same-sex couples. The study of Van der Vleuten and colleagues suggests that even in non-conventional relationships, gender identities strongly impact labour division and partners’ perceptions (see also: Atwood, 2019; Brewster, 2017; Cao et al., 2016). Thus, on the one hand, there are differences in the way in which heterosexual households and non-conventional households carry out their household tasks, and on the other hand, these different households are comparable in many respects. However, having the focal point on heterosexual couples when examining gender roles can provide the most valuable insights into how gender norms and expectations are perpetuated in society. Moreover, as the concept of intersectionality²⁸ is the starting point of this exploration, the findings from households most burdened by the dominant cultural narrative of gendered lives are to improve the position of all groups who experience some form advantages and disadvantages, by prompting an investigation into the privileges and power of highly educated heterosexual women and their partners.

This thesis acknowledges intersectional feminism, which recognises that women can experience multiple systems of privilege and discrimination at the same time, and that these intersecting factors –including gender, race, class, sexuality, and more– shape their social

²⁸ Intersectionality is a term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) who highlighted this theory in 1989 to explain that the sum of race and sex discrimination does not cover the experience among black women in the United States. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines this theory as “the complex, cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect.”

realities (Bowleg, 2012; Chaplin, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Davis, 2008; DeFelice & Diller, 2019; Ray, 2014, 782). The premise is that women's identities and struggles cannot be separated from these intersecting dimensions of their lives. Compared to traditional feminist movements, intersectional feminism expands its focus beyond gender inequality and considers how other social categories intersect with gender (Lawrence, 2017; Orloff & Shiff, 2016). When it comes to female breadwinners, intersectional feminism does not lose sight of the diversity and complexity that these women experience in being the main earner in their household. Unique barriers and inequalities for female breadwinners can be found in various areas, leading to gender inequality, racial and ethnic differences, among others. With regards to racial and ethnic disparities, research from the United States gives an illustrative example that not all women have the same patterns and experiences of labour force participation and of being the main breadwinner at home. A report on data analyses that covers breadwinning women, where a co-breadwinner is defined as a working woman who takes home at least 25 per cent of the total household income, states:

Although white mothers make up the majority of breadwinning and co-breadwinning mothers due to their overall greater numbers, when analyzing the data within racial and ethnic groups, it becomes clear that white women are less likely to be breadwinners than women of color. Black mothers are by far the most likely to be the primary source of economic support for their families; they are more than twice as likely as white mothers to be their family's breadwinner, and more than 50 percent more likely than Hispanic mothers. (...) White women, by contrast, are the most likely to be co-breadwinning wives, although the differences across racial and ethnic groups are not as large as those for breadwinning mothers (Glynn, 2019, 11).

In addition, women who are people of colour²⁹ may be more likely to experience workplace discrimination related to racial discrimination and stereotyping (Chin, 2020; Fiske & Lee, 2008). It therefore stands to reason that despite possible limitations in the dataset of the study, which emerged in terms of obtaining ethnic diversity among the participants, that an intersectional feminist approach is relevant and is applied within the scope of this study by addressing interconnected systems of power and privilege. Moreover, high-status women hold a distinct position within families when a woman is the breadwinner. Their economic standing can grant them access to better resources and opportunities, affecting their roles and household decision-making. However, it worth bearing in mind that their high status does not necessarily shield them from societal expectations and gender norms. Formulating policies and support systems that address the needs of female breadwinner households requires an understanding of the variety within these families as well as the subtleties of the junction between class and gender. By taking on an intersectional feminist approach, the intersection of gender and of class, in the sense of economic status, are attended.

3.2 Rationale for Research Design

In search of the most suitable research design, it was important to have a feminist methodology as the approach for understanding women's and men's experiences. The doing gender approach is used in this study to investigate the experiences of households where the woman has a high-status career and is the highest earning member of the household. The emphasis is on the active construction and performance of gender roles and expectations in the context of their home lives while taking social norms and pressures into account. As this

²⁹ Person(s) or people of colour can be defined as non-White minorities (Elengold, 2015, 43; Alvarez et al., 2016) and is a term used to “describes racial identity development for people of color, according to their experiences with racial oppression” (Jackson, 2006, 77).

research is aimed at providing insight and greater understanding of these households it can be described as exploratory as it is “conducted to gain new insights, discover new ideas and/or increase knowledge of a phenomenon” (Burns & Grove, 2003, 313). Yin (2009) states that exploratory research is most suitable when no prior research or little theory is at hand; this underlines the purpose of bridging the gap in literature about examining the nature of work, in the workforce and especially at home, for high-status breadwinning women.

The nature of my topic meant it was also of great importance to use appropriate ways to gather information regarding sensitive and intimate topics. On this account, focus groups were regarded as not suitable because of the social risk for participants to undergo embarrassing or offensive experiences (Gorbach & Galea, 2007, 455; Slaughter et al., 1999, 16), although it is arguable that people may feel comfortable discussing intimate relationship experiences due to group support and shared experiences (Frith, 2000; Lindhorst, 2002). Other reasons for not choosing focus groups are the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, which are difficult to fully protect when group members are sharing information among each other (Gibbs, 1997; Webb & Doman, 2008). Couple interviews, i.e., conducting interviews with both the man and woman at the same time, were also considered for this study. Although couple interviews offer partners an important benefit, namely “an opportunity to correct each other or to spark memories from one another” (Mellor et al., 2013, 1400), for this study the benefits of separate interviews weigh heavier, because involving two individuals in one interview “complicates the conduct of interviews in ways that cannot be anticipated” (Roulston, 2021, 37), which are succinctly summarised by Mellor and colleagues (2013, 1400):

- (a) to gain insight into potentially sensitive areas that participants might not have already discussed with each other, or that could bring pain by revisiting together (e.g., past abortions);

- (b) to prevent one party from dominating the interview;
- (c) to allow participants to discuss things that would be inappropriate to talk about in front of their partner (e.g., past relationships); and
- (d) to reduce response bias arising from the presence of their partner.

The best manner to attain a level of understanding about the experiences of these households and to understand how high-status female breadwinning women and their partners experience doing gender in their daily lives, is by interviewing these women and men individually. For the purpose of answering the research questions, conducting an interview gives “access to the observation of others” (Weiss, 1994, 1). Thus, gathering information by individual interviewing is the most suitable choice for this study’s research design.

3.3 Rationale for Semi-Structured Interviewing

In order to find out how and why female breadwinner couples “do” gender in the way they do I needed to ask them in detail about their lives. I selected a qualitative interview method that gives room to explore intra-household dynamics and gender relations. It is common to use qualitative methods for gender analysis to seek understanding in gender power relations and norms and their implications (DeVault & Gross, 2007; Morgan et al., 2016, 1070; O’Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012, Rubin, 2016). Feminist researchers are more explicit about gender in research methods and being alert about hierarchies of power, who are concerned with “giving voice to women’s own accounts of their understandings, experiences and interests”, considering the background that “feminist activism and scholarship about the process of qualitative interviews posed a major challenge to male-dominated ideas about the possibility and desirability of a mechanistic, unbiased, scientific, value-free and objective interview” (Edwards & Holland, 2013, 18; McHugh, 2014; Oakley, 1981). This research

chimes with this approach, by recognising the subjects of research as well as the place of the researcher in the production of knowledge (Hughes, 2015; Oakley, 1981).

An ideal interview type for this study's aim exists on a spectrum from the informal or unstructured interview to the formal or structured interview (Lemanski & Overton, 2011; Ruslin et al., 2022). The latter interview type follows a set of prescribed questions (VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009, 225) and is rigid in the way that all interviewees are asked exactly the same questions with the same wording and in the same sequence (Corbetta 2003, 269). Whereas unstructured/informal interviews are based going with the flow of the conversation and creating impromptu questions (VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009, 224-225).

Given the aim to understand the experience of the participating women and men in managing their home lives, the formal/structured interview is limited as it “does not allow for the respondents to elaborate on issues that can lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon” (Foss, 2012, 7-8). The counterpart lacks in having some form of structure and does not support the decisions and judgements that I would have to make as a researcher throughout this study, which would inevitably give purpose and structure to the interviews (Mason, 2002, 69). A position in between these two interview types seemed to be more suitable for the process, the structure and the content of the interviews.

An intermediate type of interviewing is called the semi-structured interview which has “ordered but flexible questioning” (Hay, 2010, 110). Compared to the informal/unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview is able to give enough structure by following “a written list of questions as a guide, while still having the freedom to digress and probe for more information” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, 173). This study uses this interview type to gather information from the participants. The semi-structured interview is seen as one of the general forms of qualitative interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013, 29) but specific types have been considered for this study as well. In eliciting the interviewee's own

story, there are options such as the “life story” approach (an account of one’s life given by an individual) and the “life history” approach (where other sources, including newspaper reports and public records, could validate the individual account) (ibid., 34). These approaches are more fitting if a wide range of the interviewee’s life span is being investigated (Giele, 1998, 22; Hutchison, 2010) and are therefore less suitable for this study which was focussed on the current time in interviewees’ lives.

Other approaches that are not as well-fitted for this study are the “oral history” approach, which is focused on “interviewing individuals on their past with the intention of constructing an historical account” (Ojermark, 2007, 4) and the “ethnographic interview”, which is associated with participant observation (Bocagni & Schrooten, 2018; Edward & Holland, 2013, 30; Ruslin et al., 2022; Shah, 2017) and is an account of a culture or group (Ojermark, 2017, 4), often used to explore foreign cultures (Bauman & Greenberg, 1992, 12) and has an unstructured nature (ibid., 13; Edwards & Holland, 2013, 31). These two approaches are not as suitable as semi-structured interviews which has the best potential of speaking to individuals about their intra-household challenges by following predetermined topics but without a fixed order.

Two specific kinds of qualitative interviews that have the most common ground with the aim of gathering insights on intra-household dynamics for this study are the “biographical” and the “narrative” interviews. Although the last mentioned is characterised as unstructured in the sense that “the participant is rarely interrupted in the telling of their story” (Stuckey, 2013, 59) and the first mentioned is very similar (Ojermark, 2007,4), while the preference for this study is given to a semi-structured interview where the interviewee may “control their answers and adjust his/her answers to questions” (Aarikka-Stenroos, 2010, 2), both the biographical and the narrative approaches use “personal narratives as the basis of research” (Ojermark, 2007, 4) and are therefore useful for this study. Still, according to the

sociologist Catherine Kolher Riesmann: “in qualitative interviews, typically most of the talk is not narrative but question-and-answer exchanges” (Riessman, 1993, 3), which is why this study has not adapted these approaches either. Rather than choosing one of the abovementioned specific forms of qualitative interviews, the general form of semi-structured interviewing is the most sufficient approach for prompting the participants to share relevant experiences and information that give insight to answering the research questions.

3.4 Researching Sensitive Topics

The challenge with interviewing is that the interviewer is a part of the measurement instrument and has to be well-trained in adequately responding to any contingency (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008; Yeung, 1995). One of the required interview skills for the researcher is being empathetic and some argue that this is “one of the main skills needed to undertake qualitative research” (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009, 65). Being empathetic is a skill that can be learned; a skill which is about showing a response that demonstrates you share or acknowledge a person’s feelings (Lee et al., 2019, 83) and is very helpful for every researcher because any subject has the potential to be or become a “sensitive” (Hughes, 2004). Still, not every research is defined by its sensitivity, but this study may well be described as a typical sensitive topic and therefore it is absolutely required to have a sense of empathy and a sense of making interviewees feel comfortable; both will be discussed below in the light of researching sensitive topics.

Where do interviewers draw the line in making interviewees feel more comfortable? Some say that “interviewers are supposed to be nice and polite, but not so involved; that is, the conversation should be about the interview with no small talk” (Robbins, 2009, 70) and to

avoid self-disclosure since it shifts the interviewee's attention to the interviewer and alters the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Weiss, 1994, 79). Others plead against a distant and hierarchical relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and see self-disclosure as a way to humanise and equalise the research relationship (Reinharz & Chase, 2003, 79). In my case, the research topic does not reflect my personal life other than my deep curiosity for the research results. Self-disclosure would therefore involve the risk of it being based on my view of other cases, which would not be appropriate to share. I do think that a phase of small talk and introduction is good to build trust, to develop rapport and to inform the interviewee about this study (Cleton & Schweitzer, 2021, 3858; Mellon, 1990).

An essential aspect that I wanted to reassure the participants about is the confidentiality and anonymity by data protection and by the integrity of the university that I represented. An informed consent form was used to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix A), which the participants received before the day of participation and which was also discussed with every participant on the day of the interview

In carrying out research interviews, I drew on my professional experience of working closely with executive women and men. In more than ten years as an executive search and recruitment consultant, I have come to understand how crucial it is to have empathy with the position that my candidates are in. More often than not, aspects of the candidate's personal life –usually concerning their partner and children– are discussed during the conversation about their career opportunities. The insights about their personal and work life enables me to not only feel compassion and possible concerns for their situation, but also to take actions to help in their next career step (or not, if we come to the conclusion that my job proposition does not suit the candidate at that moment), all in accordance with the wishes of the candidate. It is during these types of conversation that I developed an interest in the stories of female breadwinner households, as I encountered female candidates who were on the path to

becoming the highest breadwinner and who had reservations about this status, inspiring me to undertake research to gain more of an understanding of their lives and workload.

To a certain extent, conversations as a researcher are no different to conversations as a consultant, in the sense that feigned empathy is detrimental to the interaction and relationship. Still, the role of a researcher is different because of the contribution to a scientific discourse. As a researcher, I found that a balance between logic and emotion is essential when it comes to empathic communication; keeping in mind what the purpose is of the encounters with each participant, while allowing yourself to feel with the participants and experience their stories –which may contain sensitive topics.

Most people know intuitively what a sensitive topic is, but defining sensitivity, especially with regard to research, has its challenges. A simple definition of sensitive research is “research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved with it” (Lee, 1993, 4), but this leaves too much room for interpretation. The same goes for Sieber and Stanley’s definition: “studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research” (1988, 49). Other possible definitions also refer to the potential threat for those involved and potential repercussions or consequences (Lee & Renzetti, 1990, 512; Roster & Albaum, 2010, 2). A meta-analysis on sensitive-survey studies suggested categories where sensitive topics frequently occurred, among which studies about: sexual behaviour, drugs, and alcohol abuse, criminal offences and fraud, ethical problems, as well as charity, politics, medical compliance, psychological problems and a diverse miscellaneous category (Lensvelt-Mulders et al., 2005, 329; Lensvelt-Mulders, 2008, 462). On the basis of these broad definitions of sensitive research and the specific categories which include sexual and psychological issues, the interviews for this study entails disclosing

information that could most possibly be experienced as sensitive. Therefore, it was important to identify what could potentially further influence the sensitivity in this study.

What is considered to be sensitive can be connected to someone's personal history with the topic (Kays et al., 2013, 159). For instance, if a participant has suffered domestic violence, that person could perceive a conversation that touches on the relationship with their partner as more sensitive than a participant who does not have that personal experience. Of course, it is difficult to be well-informed about someone's personal history prior to the interview, but a way of avoiding that someone becomes too uncomfortable about sharing their personal history is to stay within the context of the research questions as much as possible and be respectful to the others, which is in accordance with the feminist research.

3.5 Power Dynamics and Recruitment

The awareness of applying feminist methodology helps to ensure that issues of gender, class, and race are addressed. While it is thought that a female interviewer is more likely to establish a trusted relationship with female interviewees (Morris, 2015, 106), and this would be beneficial for me, being a member of the same gender gives no guarantee of success. For instance, conflicting views can affect the dynamics with interviewees (El-Or, 1992; Wasserfall, 1993) as can differences in characteristics such as psychological, physical and background can impact the interviewees' responses (Miyazaki and Taylor, 2008). In the light of being a Dutch woman of Afro-Caribbean descent and that there were interviewees from various races and cultural backgrounds, but given that most of the interviewees did not have the same cultural and racial background as I have, the study of Holbrook and colleagues (2006) was relevant in speculating that greater social difference between the interviewer and interviewee may make interviewees more comfortable to respond on sensitive questions. As the researcher of this study, I try to ensure an equal power dynamic with the participants by

the application of feminist methodology as I am aware that a balanced relationship with the participants contributes to achieving the best results with the least detriment to interviewees. Moreover, it is paramount to build a relationship of mutual trust with the (potential) participants (Oakley, 1981, 56; Rubin & Rubin, 2012, 37). On reflection of my experience with mainly the female participants, I expected to come across two hurdles in carrying out the interviews. One was getting in contact with the potential participants and the other was gaining trust and building rapport.

The first hurdle, getting in contact with the potential participants, I associated with the notion that I would be “studying up”, also known as conducting elite interviews (Breeze, 2021; Harding, 2009; Nader, 1972; Sprague, 2005), which means that the researcher is studying participants that are in positions of higher social status or power than the researcher. Most social research studies involve “ordinary” or even “disadvantaged” people (Dubois, 2015, 30; Mikecz, 2012, 483; Nader, 1972, 289; Ostrander, 1995, 133) but high-status women fall into the category of people that are quite powerful and self-confident; an elite group that is very able to refuse or hold back regarding their involvement in the study. Although this group might seem more accessible due to their high visibility, getting access has been a challenge indeed because their world is difficult to penetrate and they ably protect themselves from outsiders (Odendahl & Shaw, 2002, 299). Out of the individuals that I previously helped in finding work, there was one who was part of a female breadwinner couple; this person participated in the study. One of the next steps I took to recruit candidates was to do “cold” approaches; I reached out to people I did not have prior contact with but who I thought could potentially be or know someone who fit the profile, were totally unsuccessful. This step made the hurdle grow higher. A better way in finding potential interviewees was to take a leap and meet them myself at business events and intimate parties, which was not all based on luck; I committed myself to intensive networking and speaking up

about my research which increased my chances of getting in touch with someone who was or knew a person that would be eligible for my research. It dawned on me that gaining access to these elite professionals is linked to being “likeable”; an elusive and perhaps even unmanageable element that is most likely to be seen in face-to-face contact. In other words, I realised that if people were going to agree to talk to me about their most intimate lives, they needed to think they might like me and they were most likely to like me if we met in person. Through intensive networking at events and parties, 11 (of the 36) interviewees were recruited for this study, but all of this (except one) happened before the COVID-19 outbreak took place in March 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic it was nearly impossible to network and meet people and the fieldwork had to be put on hold (see also the section Impact COVID-19 on Conducting Interviews). When in the spring of 2022 in the Netherlands the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to be over, it became clear that it could take a while to pick up networking at events and parties again, let alone at pre-pandemic levels. My plan of approach changed to focus entirely on reaching out to people I knew well or relatively well who I thought could refer me to potential interview candidates. Initially, this approach yielded just a few candidates but eventually led to many leads; even more than I hoped for. I was immensely grateful that some went to the trouble of naming more than a handful of individuals from their network that I could approach. Although not all of the people referred to were actually willing or able to participate, the vast majority of interviewees came through these references.

After the hurdle of getting in contact with the potential participants, I expected (and hoped) the next hurdle towards a balanced relationship would not be that high, despite the warning of Robert Mikecz who says, “gaining access to elites is hard enough; gaining their trust and building rapport with them is even more difficult” (Mikecz, 2012, 482). In gaining trust and building rapport lies great risks of having a power imbalance, for instance when the

researcher is too impressed by the participant or has given inadequate attention to self-presentation. As Odendahl and Shaw suggest, elite interviews should be like “an exchange between peers” (2002, 314) and according to Welch and colleagues, the researcher should emphasise one’s own professional and academic credentials and institutional affiliations (2002, 614) in an effort to prevent asymmetrical power. At the same time, the pitfall for researchers is that in being overly aware of the power balances during the interviews, the researcher could become more occupied with their own insecurities. One way of thinking about this is to consider the argument of business school professor Laura Empson, who researched elite interviewing. Her point of view is that elite professionals “may be feeling uncomfortable about meeting you, because you have one or two more university degrees than they, because they assume you have a deep understanding of the topic in question, and because your questioning may reveal their inadequacies” (Empson, 2017, 18; Jong & Jung, 2015; Keats, 2000), so researchers could also keep this in mind.

For me, the literature concerning elite interviewing is a modest confirmation of how gaining trust and building rapport with elite professionals usually happens within my profession as an executive search consultant and to what extent this way of communicating can be adapted in academic research. Instead of being busy with the unequal relationship by impressing the elite or downplaying yourself, it is about presenting yourself in an appropriate way, making the other feel at ease and then getting down to business, which in this case is conducting well-run interviews for this research and keeping that goal in mind during the interviews.

A nuance should be made though, when it comes to being goal orientated as a researcher: this does not exclude the possibility of developing a genuine friendship with the interviewees. One contact in particular developed into a good friendship, which is based on mutual interest that came out of genuinely trying to learn about her experience during the

interview. The friendship came about after the interview took place, which did not lead me to believe that the findings would be distorted. On the other hand, one of the pilot interviews were done with a friend. I took into consideration that our friendship would influence both this person's narrative as my questioning. The possibility that these findings would be distorted is mentioned in my field notes.

As well as being concerned with power dynamics, I wondered how friendships with candidates fit in the norms and customs of doing research. I came across the term friendship as method, used mainly in ethnographic research to reduce hierarchical separation between researcher and participant (Adams et al., 2015, 61-62; Fine, 1994; Tilmann-Healy, 2003; Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014). Although I read that friendship as method is designed to do justice to/for participants during fieldwork, I am resistant to being goal orientated and premeditated for friendships with research participants –if at all this is a realistic aim with elite professionals– as it may leave the other with the sense of you “trying too hard”. I took the approach of adopting a friendly and empathetic manner during an interview, which may or may not open the door for a natural friendship.

Another flow of power that was taken into account for this study is that which occurs in interviewing couples. Even with the intention that the partners would be interviewed separately, the complexity in this power flow between couples could influence the individual interviews, ultimately affecting the intention of the whole study. A researcher has no influence on this, but if a flow of power between participants comes to the attention, it can of course be described.

As the intention of this study is to examine the intra-household challenges of high-status female breadwinning women and their partners, the perspective of women is of great importance and the research focuses more on the women household members than the men. Nevertheless, the perspectives of the male partner are of value, not only to find out what is

really going on in the households, but also to see the perception of the women from another angle. The risk of women sharing modified information with the researcher because of the knowledge of her partner's contribution to the research is balanced out by the added value of studying the interconnectedness of the couple's experiences.

3.6 Pilot Study and Interview Design

It is worth noting that ethical approval from the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy (SSHP) was sought and obtained before the start of the fieldwork (which is the main study and the pilot study). Prior to the main study, a pilot study was carried out to gain a clearer conceptualisation of the proposed research topic (Lewis et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2008). In advancing the understanding of the experiences within female breadwinner households, the pilot study started with three women who are working towards attaining an executive position and are part of a female breadwinner household. As the focus is on Dutch women, these interviews were held in the Netherlands.

The pilot study was used to make preliminary decisions about the qualitative interviews (Mason, 2002, 96; Smith, 2019). During the pilot, the participants were first asked to describe their work life. After they outlined their job positions, work demands and working hours, I asked about their work life balance, which led to them talking about their home lives. Then, we took the time to go through their household chores. The answers that came from these topics gave a good idea of where the possible challenges were to be further elaborated on during the main study. As the pilot interviews did not lead to significant adjustments for the main study, the interviews of the women involved in the pilot study were eligible for the main study. The interviews in the pilot study were held in the same form as during the actual fieldwork that followed, namely semi-structured interviews that have the advantage of asking

additional questions to probe for potential contradictions, unclarities or gaps (Gall et al., 2007; Locke et al., 2000; Yang, 2022).

At the end of the pilot interviews the participants were asked to give their opinion about the sole attention to women for this interview. They expressed a belief in a more balanced research outcome if their partner were also interviewed, which made me reconsider excluding the male counterparts of the female breadwinners during the main study. This led me to include male participants in the main research as well, but they turned out to be less easy to recruit than female participants. The most obvious road to follow was to invite the partners of the participating women, although most of the invitations were declined via or by the women. The challenge of recruiting male participants for this study is reflected in the ratio of the final number of men and women, nine and 27 respectively.

In the course of the main study, the topic guide (Appendix C) and the interview questions were amended. While going over the work lives of the female breadwinners, I added one or more questions for the women to ponder on regarding their high-status job. During the discussions on the work-life balance of the participating women, they were asked additional questions about whether the seniority of the function brings any control over their working hours. When we arrived at the topic of home life, I implemented to pay more attention to how the relationship progressed between the partners; this always seemed to be a good hook to reflect on the development of household chores during the relationship. To explore the division in household tasks as concrete as possible, I asked each participant to estimate in percentages their tasks division, with results such as cooking: 60 per cent for her, 40 per cent for him. This was always followed by the question of how this came about. In the case that the participant is partnered with children, I also asked about the division between the partners in childcare and how this has developed, which involved their consideration of using daycare centres, au-pairs and nannies. Regarding other tasks, I added during the main

study that if outsourcing had not been discussed, that I would ask whether this had ever been considered for their tasks. If it turned out that outsourcing had been used, I asked whose initiative it was to outsource the task in question. After naming all their tasks, I gave the participant the opportunity to present any tasks that I did not mention.

Another topic I brought in is to ask about someone's association with the terms masculinity and femininity, in order to purposely consider doing gender at home. This topic was sometimes already discussed at an earlier time in the interview, for example when someone mentioned a task such as gardening as male or female. Usually, their answers about masculinity and femininity led to a brief re-discussion of their tasks to which no gendered association was previously linked, to find out whether an earlier explanation of the division of labour is based on gendered expectations.

Further addition to the interview questions was to go through the financial tasks after reviewing the domestic tasks. After discussing all the tasks, I included to ask about the participant's association with free time as I noticed during the series of interviews that the perception of time is often experienced differently by couples. Here I probed for a possible difference between leisure and alone time. I also inquired about their idea of how their partner organises his or her free time.

Several challenges have emerged at this point, but along the way I realised that it would be good to explicitly gauge whether there are potential sources of conflict between the partners in what we have discussed so far. During the series of interviews, I also became more alert to assess how the expectations of others (partner, parents, friends, colleagues, other men and women, etc.) played a role in everything that was discussed.

In addition to the gathering information about the financial imbalance between partners during the pilot interviews based on the yearly income brackets (Appendix D), I asked during the main interviews whether one felt richer/less rich or more wealthy/less

wealthy than the partner; this was a way to find out whether there was satisfaction with their financial relationship and what the participant's wishes are in this regard. Somewhere towards the end of the interview, I created a moment for the participant to express their future plans, wishes and desires. As they did not always express themselves very concrete, I implemented a helpful way for them to do this: I asked each participant to rate their lives on a scale of 1 to 10, which allowed the participants to make tangible how their quality of life could be increased; this was done incrementally, up to the number ten.

One of the last questions asked was for the participant to give advice to a potential upcoming member of a female breadwinner household; the intention behind this question was for the participants to take some distance from their own situation, but at the same time, for the participants to draw from their own experience to be a signpost for others.

After briefly making sure that I have gone through the main topics, and asked for the ages and ethnic background of, for example, the partner, I moved on to the very last question of the interview. I asked if there was anything that participant would like to explain in more detail, revise or even have removed. After this, it was time to turn off the audio and thank the participant for his or her contribution.

3.7 Participants

As has been suggested in my discussion of research power dynamics, and the diversity of my participants, the people involved in this study were selected purposefully and using snowball sampling. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, 61). This way of sampling is used to identify participants for this study. The participants were selected by profiling women and men according to the research questions.

In gathering the context out of which these participants were speaking about, everyone was informed that the focus is on heterosexual relationships and was asked if they live together with their partner. Participants were also included if they used to be part of a female breadwinner couple but are now separated or divorced from that partner; a reflection on their past relationship was helpful, especially because it seemed they might speak more frankly about their struggles. I was also deliberate in recruiting participants with and without children and with children of different ages. This is because childcare is such an important element of domestic work and as Grunow et al argue, “traditional gender norms seem to trump earnings ... particularly true when children are born” (2012, 289). I also wanted to examine the extent to which female breadwinner couples with children follow traditional patterns of dividing childcare and paid work, namely: “in most families, the mother stays at home taking care of the child and the father becomes (at least temporarily) the main earner in a family” (ibid., 2018, 4; see also: Bühlmann et al., 2010; Davis & Greenstein, 2009). In this context, the ages of all household members were asked to reflect on the life stages of the couples.

The women interviewees had to meet the criteria of holding a high-status position, which includes holding a position at c-level, in management or on boards, or being well-known in the public eye for instance as a (social) media figure. The top position would have to generate the income that makes the woman the highest earner in her household. Also, women were eligible for this research if they live and work in the Netherlands.

Couples from many cultures, races and ethnicity are included in the thesis to reflect on how their identities intersect with roles in the household, but a good understanding of the English or Dutch language was necessary.

The focus, of course, was on romantic partners who run a household together; married or unmarried, but I also came into contact with women who wanted to look back on broken

relationships with partners they out-earned. Ultimately, it includes two women who recently separated at the time of the interview and two women whose divorce had already been finalised.

The majority of the participants came via people who I knew (relatively) well and referred me to potential candidates. The referrals of participants were extremely welcome, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the majority of participants were recruited this way. I also asked participants if they knew other potential participants, although snowball sampling³⁰ was not the initial choice for the study, because of the disadvantage that the background of the referrals could be too similar; my emphasis with the participants was on gauging whether their partners could also be interviewed. Almost all the first contacts I had with those who eventually took part in this study were women, only one was a man; through him it was also possible to interview his wife. For the rest, the initial contact was with the women so in essence the female breadwinners were the gatekeepers to the male participants.

Unfortunately access to the men was limited for various reasons. In many cases the women indicated in advance that they knew that their partner would not participate, for example because he finds his role in the household uncomfortable; an interview would therefore not be desirable according to these women and of course I made no attempts or suggestions for her to convince him out of respect. There were also women who explained that he has no problem with the household division, but that he does not like to talk about his private affairs with others. A number of women said that they had already discussed the content of their upcoming interview with their partner, which enabled the women to express their partner's opinion with certainty. Other women were not certain if their partner would decline to be a participant, but they would still ask him anyway. Mostly, the outcome was

³⁰ Snowball sampling is a strategy where one participant recommends another (Staller, 2021, 901; Shaw & Holland, 2014: 87)

indeed that he did not want to take part of the research. I did not receive these answers directly from the male partners, but via text message or emails from the female participants; of course, I do not know whether some of them have refrained from asking their partners at all due to the sensitivity of the topic. In the findings chapters –chapters 4, 5 and 6– I make clear when I do not have the male partner’s point of view. Ultimately, nine men and 27 women were interviewed (see Table 3).

Table 3: Participants overview

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age category/ Age category partner	Occupation/ Occupation partner	Income/ Income partner (classifications)	Child(ren) together
Aart	M	60s/50s	Retiree/Chief Compliance Officer	C/G	Y
Anna	F	50s/50s	Manager/not applicable	E/A	N
Carla	F	50s/50s	Director/Senior Manager	E/F	Y
Celina	F	30s/40s	Legal Professional/Artist	E/C	Y
Dre	M	20s/30s	PhD Student/ Psychologist	B/C	N
Ellis	F	40s/40s	Partner/ Marketing Professional	G/D	Y
Erma	F	50s/50s	Managing Director/ Photographer	D/C	Y
Eva	F	30s/20s	Psychologist/ Student	C/B	N
Gijs	M	40s/30s	Civil Servant/Lawyer	D/E	Y
Greetje	F	50s/50s	Board Director/Teacher	F/C	N
Hans	M	60s/50s	Researcher/Medical Specialist	C/E	Y
Hebo	F	30s/40s	Consultant/ Personal Trainer	E/A	Y
Isa	F	40s/60s	Director/Manager	E/D	N
Jasper	M	50s/50s	Senior Manager/Director	F/E	Y
Jeanne	F	50s/50s	Company Owner/ Banker	G/D	Y
Kim	F	40s/70s	Board Member/ Artist	I/A	N
Lia	F	40s/40s	Director/ Financial Worker	E/C	Y
Lisa	F	40s/40s	Board Chair/Manager	F/E	N
Lieke	F	40s/40s	Department Head/ Banker	E/C	Y
Lily	F	30s/30s	Senior Manager/ Student	D/A	Y
Linde	F	50s/60s	Executive Board Member/Artist	F/A	Y
Lulu	F	50s/50s	Firm Partner/ Coach	F/A	N
Margaret	F	50s/60s	Chief Compliance Officer/Retiree	G/C	Y
Mathilde	F	50s/60s	Medical Specialist/Researcher	E/C	Y
Merel	F	50s/50s	Doctor/ Consultant	E/D	Y
Mitch	M	60s/50s	Consultant/Director	E/F	Y
Monique	F	50s/50s	Actress/not applicable	C/A	Y
Mulan	F	30s/30s	Chartered Accountant/Marketing Professional	D/C	N
Nathan	M	40s/30s	Artist/Legal Professional	B/D	Y
Olivia	F	40s/40s	Managing Director/ Teacher	F/C	Y
Paulien	F	50s/50s	HR Specialist/Bank Employee	D/D	N
Peter	M	30s/30s	Master's Student/ Senior Manager	A/D	Y
Sara	F	30s/40s	Lawyer/Civil Servant	F/C	Y
Sissi	F	50s/60s	Director/Consultant	F/D	Y
Zorro	M	50s/50s	Teacher/Board Director	C/F	N
Zwaantje	F	50s/60s	Firm Partner/ Entrepreneur	E/C	Y

As mentioned, I was aware of the disadvantage of snowball sampling in case the background of the referrals could be too similar, because the aim was also that participants from a diverse cultural and ethnic background would take part in the study. During the interviews, I asked the participants about their ethnic identity, but because high-status women of colour are a rarity and in order to preserve their anonymity, I have not included information about those characteristics here. I therefore limit this information to sharing the following: from the 36 individuals, six people in this study identify as non-White.

Another way to protect the anonymity of the participants is not to mention their specific ages. Initially I intended to state the ages of both the participants and their partners, but I soon realised that, together with descriptions of their work and private lives in the findings chapters, their identity can be more easily traced by their exact ages. Instead, the participants are described using age ranges of decades (in her 30s, in his 50s, etc) at the time of interviewing. I have also omitted the ages of their children and the number of children that the participants have and suffice to state whether or not they have children with their partners in Table 3 (Y = Yes, N = No), although it is occasionally described in the findings chapters that there is more than one child in the household. Participants' information that has been completely left out for the sake of anonymity are the places of residence and work. All four major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht that together form the Randstad are well represented because all participants worked and/or lived in this region.

Of course, the most effective way of all to protect the participants' anonymity is not to use their real names, which is why pseudonyms are used. Instead of making up names myself, I asked each participant to come up with a fictitious name that I could use for this study. Many names are typical Dutch first names, such as Aart, Gijs, Greetje and Lieke. Merel and Zwaantje, which mean blackbird and little swan in Dutch, are relatively common forenames names in this country. The names Mulan and Zorro refer to fictional characters.

The brackets of yearly income (see Appendix D) of the women were between C and I; the income brackets of the men were between A and E. In order to compare the financial imbalance between couples, I took a hard copy of the table regarding income brackets with me at each interview, see Table 3. At the end of the interviews, I used these brackets, that were classified from A to I, for participants to give a vicinity of their income and to indicate which bracket they thought their partner was in. Among the five individuals who had partners participating in this interview, three saw themselves and/or the other in different income brackets than what their partner reported; I did not give a signal about these differences in their stated income brackets, as refraining from signalling differences or similarities applied to every talking point. More about the couples who reported differently on their income brackets can be found in the findings chapters.

To create the income brackets, it was a matter of looking for the right classification. I wanted to make sure that the participants did not feel uncomfortable giving a near full disclosure of their salary, because I did not deem that necessary for this study. For this reason, I thought of leaving room for a wide margin in the overview of income brackets. During the pilot study, I asked the participants for feedback about the classification of brackets and got back that the margins could be reduced, which I then adjusted. Over the course of the entire study, I was unsure whether the margins could be narrowed more, especially since some participants indicated that they were quite open to reporting more specifically on their earnings. On the other hand, there were also a few who were noticeably uncomfortable in their words and behaviour with this last part of the interview. The question about informing which letter (A to I) reflect their income only took place at the very end of the interview, which means that all other possible sensitivities around their work and private lives have already been discussed; for some people the topic of salary turned out to be the most sensitive. This was not surprising, by the way: in the Netherlands there is a culture to

talk openly about all kinds of things, including money, but at the same time to rarely open up about one's own salary (Hovemann, 2011; Wiebes, 2018). When Dutch people do talk about their income, they prefer to use obscure language, for example terms such as earning “1.5 times modal³¹”, than to tell others exactly what they earn (Vollebregt, 2022b). In this sense, it was good for to maintain wide margins for the income brackets. In retrospect, however, I do wish that I reduced the margins some more and I strongly considered to do so during the fieldwork. Especially for the brackets between B and E, I would have been better to make one or more splits in the classifications, but quite early in the field research it became too late to make adjustments because the comparisons with earlier versions of the table would be skewed. An example of how big the margins actually are: a female breadwinner pointed out that she and her partner were at the extremes of a bracket, namely D/D which is between €55,000 and €115,000 (roughly equivalent to £50,000 to £100,000). Incidentally, there is a couple where the woman recently took a job that meant she earned less than she had and her partner became the highest earner in the household, namely: Carla income bracket E and her husband Jasper, income bracket F. There was certainly still room for a division in some brackets to sharpen the financial relationship between couples, despite the increased discomfort it would have created among some participants. Nevertheless, the overview of income brackets between the participants and their partners provides valuable insight into the financial imbalances, which are explained in more detail in the finding chapters.

3.8 Research Setting

There were several options in deciding where interviews for this study could have taken place: the walking and talking interviews, the telephone interviews, the e-interviews and the self-interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013, 45-52), but the best research setting for

³¹ The average gross income in 2022 is € 38,000 (Rijksoverheid, 2022).

participating high-status women and their man (separately from each other) is face-to-face, in their environment.

The ideal was to conduct every interview at set locations, mainly to control distracting ambient noises. In reality, the interview sites varied from public places to the homes of the participants and were chosen due to the balance of power in the researcher-participant relationship, the participant's remoteness to the set locations and other convenient factors for the participant. I had my reservations about conducting interviews at the work of the participants. In the beginning of the fieldwork, I wondered to what extent participants were able to mentally disconnect from their work when talking in their office. I considered that the interview site could reflect the participant's relationship with the site and the idea that participants tend to talk more freely about their experiences separate from organisational goals (Edwards & Holland, 2013, 45), but bearing in mind that each site has the potential to limit the way one calls up their household chores; even when the location is their own home, I did not avoid the workplace of the participants.

The conditions for every site were that the participants would be comfortable, that they did not feel that others are within hearing distance and that the location would be distraction-free (Edwards & Holland, 2013, 44; Zulawski et al., 2001, 477), taking into account that if excessive ambient noise was present at a public place that we would relocate to another site.

Considering that some questions have the potential to be awkward or embarrassing for the participants to answer, I pondered on telephone interviews instead of face-to-face conversations. The reason for this consideration was that interviews by phone could be more helpful in covering sensitive topics by creating more social distance with more perceived anonymity as there could be less threat from a "faceless researcher" (Dinham, 1993, 25; Irvine, 2011, 203). Ultimately, the absence of visual cues (Garbett & McCormack, 2001) and

the possibility to build a relationship of trust were among the decisive factors for choosing the face-to-face interviews over the telephone interviews.

Another consideration was the use of a video call application such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts and WhatsApp. These applications are especially useful solutions in case of challenging agendas. Researchers can still have visual contact with the participant and perhaps also see part of the participant's environment (Edwards and Holland, 2013, 49). However, an interview through a video call was not offered as an option for this study, because of the sensitivity of the research and the challenge to read non-verbal clues. Halfway through the fieldwork, after the fifteenth participants was interviewed, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred and the use of video calls was again seriously considered, but even then, it weighed more heavily to conduct face-to-face interviews and therefore to wait until this was possible again. In addition, the measures brought about by the pandemic compromised the sensitivity of the research topic if the interviews would be held through video call, as it would be more likely that most of the household members would be at home and possibly within hearing distance of the conversation during the time of the interview. More on this in the section Impact COVID-19 on Conducting Interviews.

3.9 Data Collection

Data collection for this study began after approval was given by the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy (SSHP) Ethics Committee. This study has collected interview data from 27 women and nine men in the Netherlands. The quality of the interview data was highly dependent on the questions that were asked, not only during the actual interview but before and after this moment too. This is why an interview protocol (Appendix B) was developed, which contains guidelines about asking the necessary questions and also defines an order in the activities concerning the data collection. The interview protocol

follows the suggestions of Jacob and Furgerson (2012, 2) to include a script of what to mention before and after the interview, a cue to collect a signed informed consent form and a reminder to ask other information.

The interviews are audio recorded; a written consent was obtained from the participants for the audio recording of the interview via an informed consent form (Appendix A) which is sent by email for review before the interview takes place; the signing of the form happened during the appointment of the interview. The disadvantage of recording is that interviewees may feel pressured to give polished answers on the recorder. The effects of their self-consciousness could lead them to self-censor their remarks (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019) or request to speak “of the record” (ibid., 2019; Robins, 2018, 14) when touching on something that is controversial or very sensitive –which has happened during one of the interviews– and could potentially take the flow out of the interview. Nevertheless, the drawbacks do not outweigh the advantages of audio recording that make it possible to be hands free from constantly taking notes and being able to focus more on the relationship with the interviewee. Another advantage is that the complete verbal records are available to transcribe for later references and increased transparency, accuracy and insight of the collected data.

Transcribing verbal records is time-consuming. It is possible to transcribe sections of verbal records, but it is not recommended because this “tends to lead to premature judgments about what is important and what is not” (Fielding, 1993; Seidman, 2006, 115). There are two methods of transcription that qualitative researchers use. One is naturalised; this method aims for as much detail in the transcripts as possible but entails the drawback of producing less readable transcripts. The other is denaturalised; this method makes it possible for the transcriber to add grammar corrections and remove involuntary vocalisations such as “*hm, ok, ah, yeah, um, uh*”, etc. (Bucholtz, 2000; Davidson, 2009; Oliver et al., 2005; Thompson, 2022, 1412). This thesis takes the naturalised approach. Stop words, repetitions, hitches or

slips of the tongue are reproduced, even though this could lead to linguistically incorrect sentences in the transcript. The disadvantage of unpleasantly readable transcripts pales in comparison to the advantage of analysing the interviews in detail which could lead to new insights.

As some interviews were in Dutch and others were in English, many of the Dutch transcripts were translated to English (with the aim to have most transcripts in the English language). In order to avoid losing terms and concepts in the translation, I took into account extra explanation, provided in brackets, in the English transcripts that are translated from Dutch.

Interviewing continued until saturation point was reached. Saturation is where no more theoretical insights is gained if additional in-depth interviews are conducted (Charmaz, 2006; Dworkin, 2012; Easter et al., 2022; McClelland et al., 2015). In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when I had collected data from fifteen participants and was waiting to resume fieldwork, I anticipated that saturation would probably be reached at around 35 interviews (in the end the total was 36) based on the data analysis I conducted during the pandemic. There was no fixed maximum, although it is recommended not to exceed the number of 50 participants because it might be difficult to manage the quality of data collection and data analysis above that number (Ritchie et al. 2003, 84; Sandelowski, 1995). Around the last interviews, indeed, no new information emerged and that turned out to be the case in the few interviews that followed.

3.10 Data Analysis and Coding

In qualitative research, it is typical that “data collection and analysis occur simultaneously so that the analysed data guides subsequent data collection” (Cho & Lee, 2014, 4; Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003). At the time of conducting the pilot study, the collection and analysis

of the data were based on a topic guide which consisted entirely of pre-determined themes that I, as a researcher, had before I started talking to participants. After every interview I evaluated if the then-current topic guide was still adequate, but also during the interviews I left room to adapt and probed new insights that were given to me by the participants. The shift of attention to the participant's perspective is called emic, the shift of attention to the researcher's perspective is etic, terms that are coined by linguist Kenneth Lee Pike (1954), who dropped the "phon-" from the original words (phonemic and phonetic) that the terms find their origin in, to disconnect from the reference to human's production of sound units in order to study all forms of human behaviour (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020, 2). The terms etic and emic have become widespread and popular among anthropologists and are also used in other disciplines unrelated to linguistics and anthropology (Headland, 1990; Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020).

According to Crozier and Friedberg (1981), there is a fixed sequence from etic, to emic and back to etic which is a dyadic approach in which the relations between field and theory is considered. However, a triadic approach also looks at how data collection and analysis participate in the construction of theory (Chauvin, 2014). In literature I have found that these terms are often described as binary opposites, but in practice I experienced that there is not always a clear dividing line as it is possible for etic and emic to merge into each other, which has not had much attention in literature (Hoare et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, evidence of clear categorical use between etic and emic in this study is that as I have been finding themes as I go (emic), I was able to sharpen the pre-determined themes (etic) on the spot and later decided to adjust the topic guide. For instance, the first nine research participants were women and during the sixth interview I noticed a pattern: if a female breadwinner spoke about being dissatisfied about the household division of labour, she would also give information (varying from insinuations to clear statements) that her

partner is unhappy with his career path, while there was little to no indication that she was unhappy with her own or his career. Although I had previously given this information from the women's perspective some attention, I was made more conscious of this information during the early interviews and also during the interviews thereafter, by constructing the topics in a way that would give sufficient attention to his career path and adding his level of satisfaction concerning his work in the topic guide (see Appendix C for the final version).

In analysing emic and etic themes, there are several elements that I take into consideration. One element is data condensation³² which refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes and interview transcriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 10; Miles et al., 2019, 12; Tesch, 1990, 139). For this thesis I have been listening to each audio recording of the interviews to ruminate on the conversations. I kept a field diary about the impressions that I had about the interviews regarding the verbal content and the non-verbal messages (such as tone and body language), made cross-references to what I heard from other participants and wrote down what I felt was missing or what I didn't get enough insight about. I let some time pass before I made verbatim transcriptions of all the audio recordings and made additional notes while making the transcriptions. Both in the transcriptions as in my notes, the participants are made anonymous by only using their pseudonyms, removing detailed information about their work(place) or family members and giving codes or general information about their work area. A rolling document has been used to condense all of this information into an overview that was more helpful to analyse.

Another element of analysis is data display which is “an organized, compressed assembly of information that allows conclusion drawing and action” (Miles et al., 2019, 12-

³² Data condensation is another term for data reduction. The latter is being avoided in this thesis because “reduction” implies the weakening or losing something in the process (Miles et al., 2019, 12).

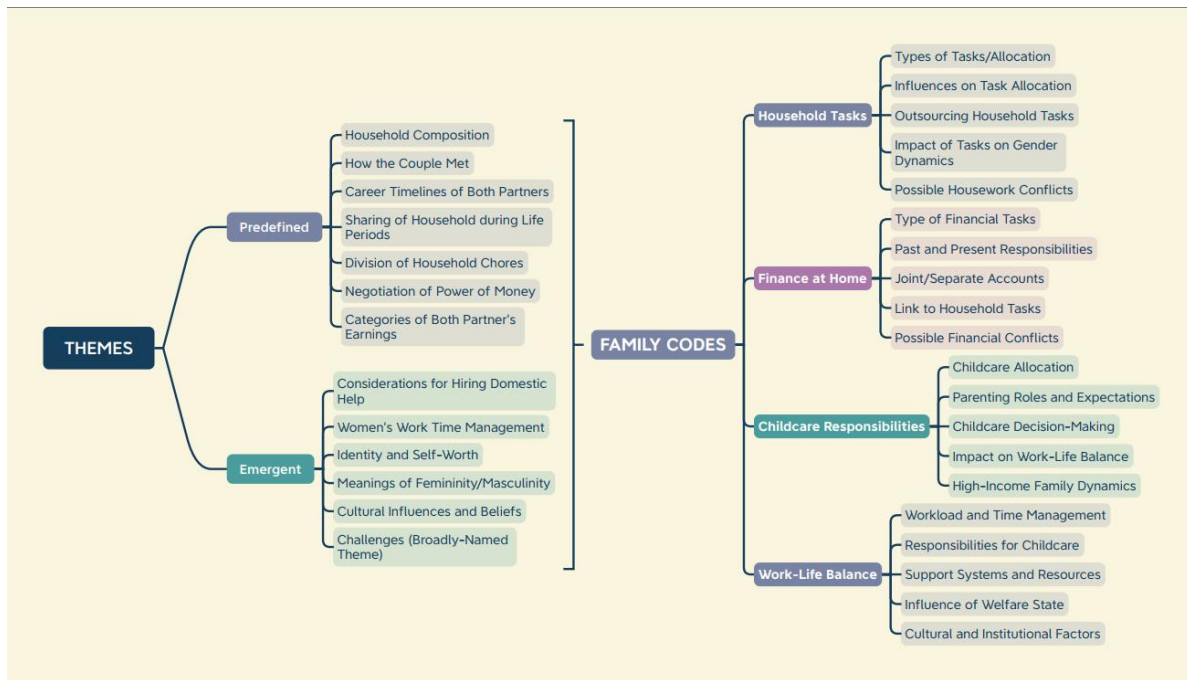
13) and could be an extended text, but also other forms of data display –such as charts, diagrams, graphs or matrices could assemble organised information (ibid., 13). I have used matrices of rows and columns to provide quicker visual comparison. Along the first row is an overview of the pseudonyms of the participants, together with their gender, age group, ethnicity and city of residence. Along the columns are themes that were predefined, such as: household composition, how the couple met, sharing of household during which period of their lives, division in household chores, negotiation power of money, categories of both partners' earning. Also, there are themes that emerged from the interviews, such as: considerations for and implications of hiring someone to support with domestic work, identity and self-worth, meanings of masculinity and femininity (after participants mentioned “man of the house” and “male’s ego”).

One theme that I removed from the columns was related to the couple’s romantic life; although I found in the literature several references to the romantic life and household chores or female breadwinnership and household chores, I did not notice that anything substantial came up during the interviews. A very broadly-named theme is “challenges”, which includes the potential frustrations between the couples. One of the notes that I wrote as preliminary analysis under that theme was: “If a couple come together on the same (financial) level and her career takes off but his career not as much, then there’s more chance of tension”. In the first part of my fieldwork, right before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I was pleasantly surprised to find a recent quantitative study among US couples that confirmed this analysis, saying that husbands suffer psychological distress when their wife earn more 40 per cent of the household income but there is no distress about the wife’s income if her earnings were higher before marriage and the existing and potential income gap was clear to them (Syrda, 2019). This specific insight led me to make notes in the related cells. By adding notes or

quotes in the cells that intersect with the columns and the rows, I created a data display as part of the analysis process.

There is a pivotal link between collecting the data and analysing the data, namely: data coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019, 4), which continues “until no new patterns appear in the data” (Boudah, 2011, 233). As data analysis is an undertaking to discover patterns through data coding, there are two ways to code qualitative analysis: one is deductive which is concept-driven, the other is inductive which is data-driven (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022; Khandhar, 2009; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Ramanadhan et al., 2021). The deductive approach is appropriate when the purpose of the study is to test existing theories or retest existing data in a new context, while the inductive approach is appropriate when prior knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation is fragmented or limited (Cho & Lee, 2014, 4). The deductive process has been applied in this thesis to expand the scope on the concept of how couples do gender at home, by using codes that were reflected in the topic guide (Appendix C) and that are developed on existing literature (chapter 2: Context of Doing Gender). As a code can be defined as “a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes or ‘translates’ data” (Saldaña, 2016, 4; see also: Vogt et al., 2014, 13), I derived codes from the themes that I used during the interviews (see above for the discussion of these themes) and grouped these codes into code families in order to reflect the main objectives of the study. I found a software application called Xmind that worked really well for creating a coding diagram (see Figure 5). This tool made it possible to make a diagram in a more streamlined and effective manner, resulting in improved clarity and presentation of this study’s coding concepts.

Figure 5: Coding Diagram



To illustrate, the finance at home was a family code which received sub codes, such as: type of financial tasks, past and present responsibilities, joint/separate account, link to household tasks distribution between partners, possible financial conflicts. However, this did not mean that there was a blind commitment to stay within this framework (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013, 401; see also: Sandelowski, 2010), as an inductive approach has also been applied to this study. An inductive approach resembles grounded theory, in that the themes identified are emerge from the data”³³ (Hotchkiss, 2018, 45). This makes this approach suitable for generating theory rather than confirming theory (ibid). From the inductive process, sub codes have been added to the family codes, making it possible for data from the participant’s perspective (also called: “emic”, see above) to bring valuable information to the study. Returning to the family code highlighted above, –i.e., the finance at home–, the following emerged: rich versus wealth, payment domestic worker, degrees of commonality on household income, link to income differences between partners. The process of both

³³ The term grounded theory, coined by Glaser and Strauss, is defined as “the discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed in social research” (1967, 1).

inductive and deductive coding involved me gathering and reading specific literature that could help generate ideas to better explore the study. Exploring and analysing the most prevalent patterns amongst findings is crucial to qualitative research, but it is also essential to discuss findings that do not match those patterns. The study's inductive process allowed for speculation based on untested data, but the deductive process was utilised to compare the new data to previously collected knowledge in order to assure reliable results. This assessment helped in determining if the new data were applicable in particular situations or whether they were outliers that required careful study and possibly would still be included in the findings as a point of attention. By making coding a multi-step process by reducing the data to key themes which now form the chapters, sections and subsections of the findings chapters, it was possible to apply a "uniform qualitative criteria across the sample", in order to establish aspects of trustworthiness, such as reliability and validity, in the qualitative data (Deterding & Waters, 2021, 731; Kelly, 2022, 81), which are discussed below.

3.11 Trustworthiness

In this study, several strategies for trustworthiness were employed to enhance rigour, whereby the concept of trustworthiness, also known as the authenticity of research (Klenke, 2008, 38) can be defined as a "criterion of how good a qualitative study is" (Bryman, 2012, 49). These standards for qualitative research, proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), are credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Cho & Lee, 2014; Swanson, 2021; Tuckett, 2005).

Credibility refers to how believable the findings are and how to ensure that the study "measures or tests what is actually intended" (Shenton, 2004, 64). The research data was collected out of the semi-structured interviews and this data was received first-hand by the researcher, who was also the interviewer and the one who analysed the data. The pilot study was used to gain familiarity with this type of participants and to troubleshoot issues that may

arise during these interviews. All interviews were recorded as audio files to check if the collected data supported the conclusions that were drawn in the study, as this allowed to validate the accuracy of the findings by referring back to the original spoken words of the participants.

Transferability is “the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings.” (Trochim et al., 2016, 72). Shenton (2004) points out the level of difficulty in qualitative research to demonstrate that the findings can be applied to other contexts, but that this criterion can be achieved by giving as much detail as possible about the geographic location, data collection methods, number and length of the data collection sessions, number of participants, etc.; this information is given throughout this study to increase the level of transferability which lies in its ability to resonate with individuals and couples in comparable conditions through “focus on the informants and their story without saying this is everyone’s story” (Connelly, 2016, 436). Thus, despite the analogy to generalisation in quantitative research, the nature of transferability in qualitative research is different because it is up to readers to determine how applicable the findings are to their situation (ibid., 435). For that reason, providing a rich and detailed description of the information just mentioned and being transparent about the analysis and about all aspects of trustworthiness are of great importance to inform the readers of this study as well as possible.

Confirmability is associated with the influence of the researcher’s personal values, which can be described as “the qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity” (Shenton, 2004, 72). This gives another reason to refer to the audio recording, because the transcriptions of these recordings, and also reflective journals of the research process, were not only to be shared with my supervisors, but also to extend the confidence that the findings were based on the experiences and knowledge of the participants, through rigorous data

analysis and fair coding, discussed in the previous section. Moreover, shortcomings in the study's method that would potentially affect the research were acknowledged as much as possible (Kennedy-Clark, 2012, 5) and the research is analysed within a theoretical framework.

Dependability refers to the “stability of the data over time and conditions” (Polit & Beck, 2012, 585). A possible effect on reliability in this study is that, since the interviews are based on retrospective memories of the participants, there is a risk of recall bias meaning that when individuals remember past events, they usually do not have a complete or accurate idea of what happened (Raab, 2021, 126) and disparities in partners' accounts of time spent working or on housework can reveal the influence of recall bias. A way to reduce the recall bias is to use a method such as using retrieval diaries, but due to the considerations (further discussed in the section Impact COVID-19 on Conducting Interviews) of this elite group's limited time availability and the additional challenge of changed household behaviour during COVID-19 which would lead to a distorted view in self-reporting, solicited diaries were not practicable. Instead, during the interview, the time periods were divided into small and manageable portions to reduce participants' cognitive burden. By asking about specific experiences and events within short time frames by discussing step-by-step transitions in their lives, rather than covering longer time frames such as years or decades, I aimed to increase the accuracy of the participant's recall. As the procedures for dependability includes maintenance of process logs (Connelly, 2016, 435), researcher notes were kept of all activities that happened during the study and of decisions about aspects of the study, such as: whom to interview, what to ask, what to amend and what to reconsider. Moreover, the intention from the outset was to provide sufficient detail and transparent methodology to allow the research to be applied at other times; the interview protocol (Appendix B) has therefore been adhered to as strictly as possible, so that it can serve as an accurate guideline

of the conduct of the researcher in regard to the data collection. Consistency is followed throughout the research project, permeated into coding, as outlined in the previous section Data Coding, leading to more trustworthy research results.

3.12 Impact COVID-19 on Conducting Interviews

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the fieldwork of this study to a halt. In response to contain the virus outbreak, government authorities undertook several policy measures to reduce infection. The first infection with the COVID-19 virus in the Netherlands was established at the end of February. Advice soon followed, for example to wash your hands long and often, and to give an elbow instead of shaking hands. On the Sunday of March 15, 2020, all food and beverage outlets, sports and fitness clubs, saunas, and coffee shops in the Netherlands had to close their doors, which lasted until 1 June 2020. This would be one of three lockdowns in this country (second lockdown: 14 October 2020 to 5 June 2021; third lockdown: 19 December 2021 to 25 February 2022) to minimise contact with others. These measures included shutting down schools, malls and other places where people congregate. A curfew was also imposed between 9 p.m. and 4:30 a.m. from 23 January 2021 to 28 April 2021 (Notten & Hooijmaaijers, 2021; Rijksoverheid, 2021; n.d.; Wu et al., 2020).

As fifteen face-to-face interviews had already been conducted, the progress with this study was crucially affected by COVID-19 measures. I considered using video call interviews to continue the fieldwork, due to the upside of still having access to verbal and nonverbal cues, but the downside was too risky: the lockdowns meant that families were being confined together and this may affect what was said in interviews. The chance was too great that conversations would take place differently than if the conversations had not been conducted under those circumstances. The major factors would be the sensitivity of the conversation topics and the risk that household members would be within hearing distance of the

participants, which made implementing video calls not a good solution, especially not when the measures were in force that each member of the household had to be confined to the house as much as possible.

Another option was the use of solicited diaries. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I was already considering using solicited diaries but I had not made a decision about whether to so. The thinking behind not using diaries was that neither the participating women with a high-status career nor their male partner would make sufficient time to keep the diaries (Fan & Smith, 2020, 9; Kenten, 2010, 4). The COVID-19 pandemic led to reconsidering the use of solicited diaries. Foremost, the fact that COVID-19 lockdown restricted people to their homes does not imply or assure a more favourable time commitment of the participants and their willingness to complete the solicited diary for this thesis. However, the COVID-19 restrictions brought a detrimental affect with it: changes in household behaviour due to, among other things, limited activities, disturbed work and home arrangements and lack of privacy within households. It would give a distorted view of female breadwinner couples' home lives if the diaries were filled in during the COVID-19 restrictions or right after the restrictions were lifted.

Ultimately, it was decided that adding video calls or solicited diaries did not bring the detailed information that was needed for completing this thesis. In order to continue the fieldwork, I would have to wait for the decline of this pandemic or the course of the interpandemic period. As a result, I carried out analysis on the interviews that I did have and started drafting my findings chapters based on the data available. As most of the recruiting activities relied on attending live events, which gradually took place again from the beginning of 2022, it was not until the summer of this same year that I was able to interest sufficient additional participants to complete the thesis. The result is that I was able to gather largely

comparable data from all interviews but with a frustratingly long gap in the period of fieldwork.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

As mentioned above, I followed the requirements for my institutions' ethical approval and got clearance before carrying out any fieldwork. However, it is not merely about filling out forms; it is about ensuring the integrity of my research and the well-being of those involved. Ethics is not a static set of rules; it is a notion that all people seem to recognise but that individuals interpret and apply differently in light of their own values and life experiences (Resnik, 2015; Ward, 2011, 1). For this reason, it is good to discuss how ethics was embedded into this study.

A general concept of ethics could be seen as the distinction between right or wrong, based on religious beliefs such as the Ten Commandments (“Thou shalt not kill...”), based on a code of professional conduct like the Hippocratic Oath (“First of all, do not harm...”), or on wise saying of Confucius or other philosophers (Resnik, 2015). Societies use these widely accepted ethical norms in their law books, but laws and ethics are not the same –some ethical norms are considered illegal while some unethical norms are legal (ibid.). In the same way, a certain action may not have been prohibited by authoritative institutes or authors, but that same action could be unethical. In this research, it is not only about avoiding unethical practices but also about keeping the ethics bar high that in conduct conforms to the guidelines of the College.

The process of recruiting participants for the study avoided any form of persuasion. Before participation, all participants were sent an email with the informed consent form as attachment (Appendix A). The interview protocol (Appendix B) was an aide memoire to reinforce the point that the participant can withdraw at any time. Ethical conduct is not only

to inform all participants about their freedom to not participate or to withdraw at any time, but also informing that these actions are without harm to their relationship with the researcher or the university. Other ethical conducts include – but are not limited to: (a) informing participants of the purpose of the study, (b) sharing information with participants, including my role as a researcher, (c) refraining from deceptive practices, (d) using ethical interview practices, (e) being respectful of the research site, (f) maintaining confidentiality (Creswell, 2012, 620).

Essential ethical considerations in this study are confidentiality and anonymity. Anonymity is “when researcher is analyzing the data nobody can find out that who was the individual respondent and what was their views on particular issues.” (Sen & Nagwanshee, 2016, 38). Confidentiality is when the researcher makes sure that whatever information he/she is going to collect from participants is not going to be shared directly or indirectly to third parties (ibid., 39). The best way to ensure confidentiality and anonymity is to destroy the identifying information as soon as it is no longer needed for the study (Babbie, 2008, 89). Both, confidentiality and anonymity, were, and still are, safeguarded for the participants (see Appendix A), of which they were informed of prior to the interviews. With these actions and awareness, actions were taken to largely defuse the sensitivity of a matter for the participants of this study.

I communicated explicitly to the participants that all information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous by me, also in the case of their participating partners. All participating partners were interviewed at different times to each other and I made sure not to share any information about one partner to the other, which could compromise or jeopardise confidentiality (Forbat & Henderson, 2003; Mellor et al., 2013). Of course, I cannot prevent any participating partners from disclosing information to each other, because that is a couple’s own prerogative. Further anonymity was provided by

assigning pseudonyms to the participants and removing information that could reveal their identities. Only I, as the researcher, have access to the list of the actual names, the assigned pseudonyms and all other (removed) information of the participants. This information is kept separate from the data and is coded. The data, including backups, will be kept for 24 months from the date of submission, before being destroyed. The information obtained in this research may be presented at professional conferences or published in scientific journals, but the data will always be reported as anonymous (Appendix A).

3.14 Biases and Knowledge Claims

In any type of interview—due to the social nature—it is impossible for researchers to uphold the pretence of neutrality, which is why I consider the background that I take into the interviews and how I seek to identify my potential biases.

The background that I take into this study is my professional experience in executive search and corporate recruitment in both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, that gave me many opportunities to talk to women about their careers. These encounters made me want to understand how their career choices possibly affect them on a more personal level. Also, my previous work in journalism gave me additional experience in conducting individual interviews. I made a conscious effort to use my professional background and also my academic background in Law and in Journalism, which both require certain skill sets of doing research, but with the awareness that additional skill sets and knowledge are needed for this study.

Not having a background in social research was a challenge that I had to overcome by investing a lot of time in researching both the basic principles and the latest developments in this field. By reading literature, by attending lectures during my two-year residency in London and going to seminars in the Netherlands when I lived in continental Europe again,

and also by taking part in digital sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was continuously working on my skills and knowledge as a social researcher.

It is insurmountable that my professional and academic background shape my positionality as a researcher, which I particularly noticed during the first few interviews I conducted. I purposely started all conversations with discussing the career development and the work-life balance of the participants, but I did notice a tendency to think in the context of my work as an executive search and recruitment consultant. For this reason, the start of the conversations was also the moment for me to be extra aware to not shift into another role than that of a researcher.

The best way for being conscious of my positionality, being busy with developing the relevant skills and being aware of setting aside other professional roles as a researcher is by reflexivity, meaning “continual re-examination of the research process in relation to the researcher’s position” (Pacheco Lopez, 2019, 58; see also: Kostovicova, 2016, n.p.), which is also needed to minimise my potential biases. In search of my potential biases concerning this research, I listened back to the audio recordings of the interviews, read through the transcriptions, kept reflective journals and spoke to a select group of people with whom I reflected through my analyses. A simple but profound piece of advice I received was to continuously take into account that people do not know what they do not know; this does not only apply to the (un)awareness of participants but also my own. On top of this, my principal supervisor reminded me before I resumed interviewing after the COVID-19 pandemic, to not fall victim to confirmation bias, i.e., to guard against looking for what is consistent with what I have already heard. She suggested to take a few days before re-listening interviews and to not just go back for the bits that I remember. I took to heart not ask myself how I can use what I have been listening to, unless I have listened to it objectively.

Gray (2017, 403) has an additional piece of advice for reducing bias that leads to systematic bias or error³⁴, which is to “standardize not only the interview schedule, but the behaviour of the interviewer”. However, this advice has its challenges when conducting semi-structured interviews. It is in any case important to give attention to the behaviour of the researcher, not only to avoid systematic errors but also to recognise how the behaviour is influenced by the researcher’s general awareness, communication skills and prior experiences in regard to interacting with the participants.

Biases are all potential shortcomings, but the main shortcoming could perhaps be the ignorance that there is such thing as bias-free research (Borzillo, 2007, 96; Janesick, 1994). In reality, every researcher faces “first impression impact, his selectivity and overconfidence in some data, his tendency to interpret co-occurrence causally, and a tendency to voluntarily discard information that isn’t in line with the hypothesis that he is trying to prove” (Borzillo, 2007, 96). Feminist researchers have also challenged the idea of qualitative research being “unbiased, scientific, value-free and objective” (Edwards & Holland, 2013, 18; McHugh, 2014; Oakley, 1981) and argue that biases can be seen as resources (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; 14; Olesen, 1994; 165). In the acceptance that there is a false neutrality to the idea of bias-free qualitative research, it is about situating my knowledge claims as researcher appropriately.

³⁴ Systematic error (or systematic bias) is a flaw in the procedure that could question the validity of the interview results. Interview bias, for instance by using leading questions in the interview, is an example of a systematic error. Another example is using faulty measurement instruments like a faulty stopwatch. These are errors that are in our control. The counterpart is random error (or random bias) that are out of our control but can affect the reliability of the interview results, such as the mood levels and alertness of the participants. Unexpected noise in the room in which the interview is taking place can also be considered as random error (Walonick, 2011; Fisher, 2016).

3.15 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the research methodology and starts with addressing the research question “*how do Dutch female breadwinner households do gender at home?*” and the corresponding subquestions that form the basis of the thesis. The introduction of this chapter unfolds that 36 people in the Netherlands took part in the study, of which 27 were women and nine men. Individual interviewing is the best choice for this study’s research design and the search for the most suitable qualitative interview method showed that the feminist approach has similarities with the approach that this research aims to apply, namely recognising the subjects of research and the place of the researcher in the production of knowledge. As this study can very well be described as a typical sensitive study, empathy is absolutely required. The importance of empathy has already been made clear to me through my work as an executive search and recruitment consultant and it is also through my work that my interest in female breadwinners has been ignited. I explain that despite the different roles of a researcher and a consultant, that there are similarities when it comes to bringing in empathy into conversations, which applies when interviewing members of a female breadwinner household.

At the centre of this study are high-status women, which comes with challenges because they are part of an elite group that is very able to refuse or hold back concerning their involvement in the study. Through networking and approaching contacts who in turn looked in their network for suitable candidates, a sample size was acquired that exceeded my expectations for this study; especially considering the impact COVID-19 had on conducting interviews. The data analysis entails an interaction between emic and etic; by pre-determined insights from me as a researcher and by new insights from the participants. Additionally, the detailed nature of coding ensured the reliability of my data, allowing me to identify patterns as well as individual experiences that deviated from them.

Finally, I consider the biases and knowledge claims by discussing the pretence of neutrality, by taking my academic and professional background into account and by talking about my search for potential biases. I then speak on the greatest possible shortcoming: the ignorance that there is such thing as bias-free research. The crux lies in situating my knowledge claims as researcher appropriately.

In the end, the approach of qualitative research was successful. Despite COVID-19, I managed to interview 36 extremely interesting people living in diverse forms of female breadwinner households. Participants spoke to me in depth, shared intimate details about their home and work lives and enabled me to understand deeply the intertwined effects of work and home on the ways that gender is done by female breadwinner couples. The rich data I received from interviewing these participants, are the product of the findings chapters with the aim to improve the theoretical understanding of how female breadwinner couples are (un)doing gender at home. These chapters correspond with the subquestions of this thesis. The first chapter, *Doing Gender in Domestic Work*, highlights the experience of participants of this study in regards to housework and childcare, portrays possible feminine and masculine division of tasks and the participants' notion of this division to answer the question: What is doing gender in the context of domestic work? The second chapter, *Doing Gender in Financial Tasks*, underlines decision-making processes in money management for the question: How do the earnings and financial arrangements of female breadwinners relate to negotiations at home? The third chapter, *Family Policies and Cultural Practices on Gender Roles of Female Breadwinners at Home*, features female breadwinners' challenges to navigate and reconcile external influences, encompassing societal norms and institutional guidelines surrounding gender roles, which concern the question: How do state-level family policies and related cultural practices impact how female breadwinners are "doing gender" at home?

Chapter 4: Doing Gender in Domestic Work

This chapter consists of three sections which each use a detailed case to explore aspects of domestic life in detail. Using detailed case studies was fruitful because it allowed me to examine how different aspects of the couples' lives affect each other. This approach was also the best way to understand negotiations and actions between these couples by focussing on each person's different understanding of what is going on behind closed doors. The first section concerns mapping out the potential ways that couples negotiate housework and childcare. This section is centred on the female breadwinner couple Sissi and Mitch, and I also discuss the households of Monique, Linde and Anna. The outcome of how they negotiated, explicitly or otherwise, the division of their household responsibilities illuminates couple bargaining and the allocation of housework by looking at three main economic resources. Attention is also given to non-economic resources such as social networks and physical appearance, to consider the specific bargaining power of high-status female breadwinners. The next section is to a large extent based on the household of the female breadwinner couple Lily and Peter, but also looks at the households of Mulan, Lieke and Olivia. The distribution of household tasks is discussed by examining housework according to the routine or non-routine character of tasks and their related gendering. After which cooking and cleaning, gardening and childcare are examined in more detail and the relationship between gender, housework and leisure is also discussed. The last section is about conflict management in housework and introduces four other women who are the highest earner in their household, Zwaantje, Lulu, Paulien and Lisa, but the main focus is on the household of the female breadwinner Lia and her partner. I was not able to interview her partner, but partners of other breadwinning women were interviewed and are included here.

The analysis of high-earning female households within this chapter offers an insight into the complex dynamics of gender roles and household management, resonating deeply with the critical discourse on neoliberal feminism and its impact on women's lives (Rahali, 2021;

hooks, 2013). As we go into the narratives of individuals like Lia, Lily, Sissi, Lieke, Mitch, Peter, Monique, and Zwaantje, a nuanced picture emerges, revealing the pervasive influence of traditional gender norms despite women's advancement in professional spheres. These households, which embody the principles of "Lean In" feminism, confront the stark reality of entrenched societal expectations surrounding caregiving and domestic labour (Fraser, 2022; Grace, 2022). Drawing from feminist literature, this chapter aims to contribute to a sophisticated understanding of the enduring struggle for gender equity within the private sphere. My discussion of these narratives draws on scholarly debates of gender dynamics, societal expectations, and negotiation of domestic labour discussed in Chapter 2 (Kluwer et al., 1997; DeRose et al., 2019). This chapter directs attention to key concepts, namely: the outsourcing of domestic work in negotiations of gender roles and responsibilities³⁵, the significance of parenthood and notions of intensive mothering³⁶, societal views on masculinity³⁷ and gendered access to leisure time³⁸. The experiences recounted by individuals like Sissi, Mitch, Monique, and others mirror broader patterns of gender inequality found in literature by Hays (1998) and O'Reilly & Ruddick (2009), particularly concerning the arrival of children and the phenomenon of intensive mothering. The literature on intensive mothering emphasises the heightened demands and expectations placed on mothers, often resulting in a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities (Hays, 1998; O'Reilly & Ruddick, 2009). The literature on fatherhood and masculinity highlights the interconnectedness of societal perceptions of success, provider roles, and the reinforcement of male expectations within relationships (Connell, 1987; Hefner, 2009). Additionally, the literature underscores the

³⁵ See: Botman, 2011; Derks, 2019; McGinn & Oh, 2017; Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009; Sent & Staveren, 2020; Stratton, 2012; Van Engen et al., 2009.

³⁶ Cannon et al., 2008; Endendijk et al., 2018; Hauser, 2012; Hays, 1998; Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Kaufman, 2013; Kupers & Rochlen, 2005; Larsen, 2021; McGinn & Oh, 2017; Miller, 2018; O'Reilly & Ruddick, 2009; Van der Vleuten et al., 2021; Verniers et al., 2022; Williamson et al., 2023

³⁷ Asare, 2019; Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004; Cha & Thébaud, 2009; Connell, 2003; Demantas & Myers, 2015; Diemer, 2002; Dreby, 2010; Hoang & Yeoh, 2011; Kupers & Rochlen, 2005; Lane, 2011; Larsen, 2021; Schneider, 2012; Smith, 2005; Thébaud, 2010; Thijs et al., 2022

³⁸ García Román & Garcia, 2022; Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2021)

ongoing challenge of achieving gender equity in leisure time allocation and domestic responsibilities within female breadwinner households (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Thijs et al., 2022).

In this discussion of domestic work, outsourcing emerged as a strong theme and appears to be effective from a resources perspective for breadwinning women in lowering their time spent on domestic work. The decision to outsource work at home has the potential to preserve existing ways of doing gender because women (and men) tend to hire other women as domestic workers. All household chores have the potential to be made genderless or gender-neutral, but the difference in how women and men experience these chores seems crucial. I found that female breadwinners may not be aware of the time they spend providing care (in the broadest sense of the word) because those tasks are perceived differently; experience of leisure is also an essential point of attention, because this tends to blend with the time that they spend providing care as well. However, increasing awareness that housework, childcare and leisure are gendered and that female breadwinners have more financial resources to buy time at home does not guarantee that conflicts between partners will be avoided. In the process that partners find their way in their non-conventional arrangements, outsourcing can also be relevant. I found a considerable chance of resistance from male partners to take on more household tasks; resistance that is not there when the negotiations chime with gender norms. This shows that negotiating conformity to gender norms is largely invisible and becomes visible when those norms are challenged or violated.

4.1 Household Bargaining Frames: Sissi and Mitch

Bargaining is the negotiation of the terms of an agreement³⁹. For female breadwinner couples, the agreement might be thought of as to run a household together and divide the time that each

³⁹ According to WordNet, the online dictionary of Princeton University.

one spends on housework tasks. These agreements are explored by looking at how the division of household tasks works out within these households and how the participants of these households experience their division, after which it can be determined how doing gender is enacted within the households. Several economic and non-economic resources may apply as negotiation tools within these homes, bearing in mind the idea that home is a gendered space as it is closely linked to the notion that women are homemakers, as detailed in Chapter 2. I argue that this cannot be separated from the context of female breadwinners in the workplace; a place that is also gendered due to the disparity between men and women in top positions and the time use for paid work by women. In the next chapter, *Doing Gender in Financial Tasks*, paid work is discussed in depth, but before that, in this chapter, it is relevant to take one aspect of time in paid work into account. In the households below, it is stated how many hours a week the female breadwinners work in order to put into better perspective how their tasks have been negotiated. Drawing at length on separate interviews with the couple Sissi and Mitch, and also with Monique, Linde and Anna, we have the opportunity to gain insights into how female breadwinner couples negotiate their household tasks.

Mitch works from home as an independent consultant for an average of 25 hours a week. His partner Sissi works as a director for a large organisation for an average of between 60 and 70 hours a week. Given the ratio of working hours and available time at home, one might assume that Sissi does less housework than Mitch; this does not appear to be the case with them. According to their separate reports of the domestic division of labour, Sissi performs more domestic duties, which seem to have arisen from who has the preference, skill or physicality to handle the tasks. For instance, when I asked Sissi about their gardening, she said:

Every now and then I do a bit of weeding but that's also leisure (...). Lawn mowing, that's a man's job. [INT: You bring up that this is a man's job.] Yes, he has a lot more

power for that than I have. And I find mowing the lawn really boring (...) I tried that once and then I mowed over the cord. (Sissi, 50s, director, income group F)

For Mitch, there are also tasks that he says he has no feeling for, such as cleaning the bathrooms, grocery shopping and window cleaning. I asked him about who takes care of their bathroom and toilet. Mitch:

I have never done that. [INT: Why not?] Sissi or my daughters are much more likely to think it needs cleaning and I don't care. (...) I wasn't born to do the shopping and to clean windows, I'm not going to do any of that and I don't have to. But the same goes for Sissi. She does a lot more than I do, but that's her nature. We leave each other completely free in everything. (Mitch, 60s, consultant, income group F)

When asked about cooking, Mitch said that he rarely does this and Sissi said that she usually cooks because it is a relaxing thing for her to do (I discuss cooking as relaxation and gardening as leisure in the next section). Many of the tasks in Sissi and Mitch's household are outsourced, such as cleaning the bathrooms, but there are still tasks that remain. Sissi said that chores are actually a "waste of time"; she considers it time that you are obliged to do something you do not want to do; it was her initiative to hire domestic support.

At first glance, the division of labour in Sissi and Mitch's household is based on their preferences, skills and physical capabilities, but there also appear to be gendered expectations and exemptions (the next section will elaborate more on how men and women have different experiences with regard to various household tasks). However, the dividing line cannot be sharply positioned. Sissi argues that mowing the lawn is a man's job, which she substantiates with reasons why this activity is not her preference and falls under Mitch's skills. Mitch points out that he was not born to clean windows and run errands, that Sissi does more than he does, but that it is in her nature, which does not necessarily have to be related to the fact that she is

female and may refer to her character. However, since she says that she does not experience housework as pleasant, it is more likely that she takes on more household tasks because of the gendered expectations and that doing gender is the underlying cause. Also, during the conversations with Mitch and Sissi it became clear that most of the household tasks were not explicitly negotiated, but rather are taken on by one or the other of the couple without discussion. This concurs with studies suggesting that people tend to neglect housework tasks in their explicit deliberations (Koster et al., 2022, 685: see also: Hooghiemstra & Pool, 2003; Van Lenning & Willemsen, 2001; Wiesmann et al., 2008). This can cause the distribution of tasks to develop implicitly in a way that is difficult to redistribute later. I asked Sissi if anything changed in the household division of labour with the arrival of their children, for example in grocery shopping. Sissi:

Yes, for the exact reason that the children came. That is when I became more concerned with arranging that the fridge was full. And I still regret that. [INT: Really?] We should have just kept doing this fifty-fifty. (...) so it's my own fault that this got stuck and that I took on the organisation for that.

Sissi wishes that she had not taken on the responsibility for this household task, because she has not been able to reduce her input so that she is only half responsible for it at most. Sissi blames herself rather than blaming Mitch and further inquiries about possible conflicts between them in their housework and childcare turned up nothing, which could be due to a conflict-avoidant stance that she has adopted to deal with the unequal domestic division. A Dutch study from the 1990s found that “traditional wives and wives with traditional husband were more inclined to avoid conflicts about the division of labor –despite their discontent– than egalitarian wives and wives with egalitarian husbands” (Kluwer et al., 1997, 635). This may apply to Sissi and Mitch, as they are perhaps less egalitarian than their atypical arrangements at home might

at first appear and that instead of changing their household division of labour, gender norms are left unchallenged.

That it is not always easy to redistribute household tasks is also apparent from the household of Monique and her partner. Monique is a well-known actress who works 40 to 60 hours a week in television and theatre productions. Her partner has recently been medically disqualified from working and is now mainly at home. He has not been interviewed because he shuns any direct contact with the media and does not want to be interviewed for any purpose, not even for academic research. Monique explained that her partner had been working four days a week, she says: “He thought that was fantastic, but it did not match to what I earn. He earned very little, almost nothing.” She does know that he proudly tells others that he has a very busy wife with a great career and that he says with the same pride: “I’m the houseman⁴⁰.” Yet, according to Monique, her partner does up to 50 per cent of their household chores and she thinks that he should be doing more. For example, she said that he could “hoover the floor every day and handle a cloth for the toilet”.

[INT: Have you ever talked to him about this?] Yes, but then he says ‘leave a note and then I’ll do it’. Notes? Is this a toddler? [INT: Have you ever had a note in your hands?] I think it’s very childish, because he lives in that house too. And then I also think it’s a bit sad if I would point out the crumbs on the table, so to say, and that I am writing notes all the time. That would not make things really fun. (Monique, 50s, actress, income group C)

Like Sissi, Monique has initiated the hiring of domestic support. When I asked her what could be improved in her home life, she replied that she would like to do less household chores, but

⁴⁰ Houseman is a better translation for the Dutch word “huisman” as this is the opposite of “huisvrouw” which translates as housewife, although male or female homemaker would be more common words to use in the English language.

that this will only happen if she outsources even more tasks: she does not count on her “houseman” to play a greater role in this. Later, in the subsection Economic Bargaining Resources, it becomes all the more evident that for many breadwinning women the best way to redistribute their time at home is to purchase market substitutes for their housework.

It is not so much that all female breadwinners want their partner to become a houseman; one of the participants indicated that this would be far from the desired negotiated outcome, even with him having considerably more hours available for this role. Linde is an executive board member and her husband has been an artist for a few years. Linde said that she and her husband had domestic support for a long time, but have not had this support since the COVID-19 pandemic. Their household tasks are about fifty / fifty divided among themselves, with which Linde is quite satisfied “now we think: ‘we do it well together’ and that is fun, companionable and we also do some exercise with it.” She gave me her husband’s contact details to email him for an interview as she believed that he could add valuable insight to this study. He never responded, but the information Linde shared gives some insight to his point of view. About the career decisions that her partner made, Linde says:

My husband also had a tough job, a lot of work, but he always earned much less. After 25 years of being so socially involved, he said: ‘I’m quitting because I have to work quite hard, so I’m going to do something I also like.’ He is now in the cultural sector. So, with that I am not only the main breadwinner, but I am the sole breadwinner. (...) I think it’s important that he does useful things, so he has to get going (...) I also want to be proud of the story I tell people about my husband. Yes, and if I’m very honest and that’s what I want and have to be in this interview, then I wouldn’t like it that very much. I never said my husband is a houseman. [INT: What is your image of housemen then?] (...) yes, very judgmental, but when the children were small and I picked them up from school a few times a week, then I met other mothers, because they are always mothers who...and

that's very judgmental what I'm about to say... there are mothers that I know who are also well educated, who stand there in the schoolyard chatting and then you see them with their tennis rackets. And then I think: What are you doing? What are you giving back to society? So, my image of a housewife or houseman is 'don't you have better things to do? At least do some volunteering.' (Linde, 50s, executive board member, income group F)

The reason Linde emphasises that she never says that her husband is a houseman is because she also acknowledges that he has more time available in the house, which was the case before his career switch too; he then had his office at home, so he could take care of the children and they did not have to arrange an au pair or babysitter.

Another female breadwinner, Margaret, shared in her interview that when she and her husband decided that two careers would not work in combination with having small children, he started working less and less and basically became the houseman. Margaret said about this:

I found that quite difficult: I found it particularly difficult because it was complicated for me to see my husband as a houseman. It took quite a lot of time and energy to find some equivalence again. [INT: What did you find difficult about it?] You have to get used to the fact that you have different conversations with each other. Normally it was about work, he had his story and I had my story (...) I thought it was quite complicated, while it was also very luxurious. One should be very grateful with an opportunity like this, but I found it quite a bit of getting used to. (Margaret, 50s, chief compliance officer, income group G)

Margaret made it quite evident during the interview that she struggled with her husband's position as a houseman. In chapter 5, section Distribution of Finance, it is further explained in the light of a couple's income differences how Margaret and her husband, Aart, dealt with their

positions by letting them both speak for themselves, but here it is good to take a closer look at why these women may have difficulty with seeing their husband as a houseman.

Both the word houseman and housewife (“huisman” and “huisvrouw” in Dutch) have a negative connotation for Linde, which is not unusual for these words in both English and Dutch. Dictionary.com points this out in the usage note for the word housewife:

Most people, married or unmarried, find the term housewife perfectly acceptable. But it is sometimes perceived as insulting, perhaps because it implies a lowly status (“She’s just a housewife”) or because it defines an occupation in terms of a woman’s relation to a man. Homemaker is a fairly common substitute.

The possible negative connotation of the word ‘houseman’ does not alter the fact that among female breadwinner couples there can be great satisfaction that they have negotiated for the male partner to fully take on the role of homemaker, as is the case for Anna and her husband. Anna is a manager at a large international company. More than ten years ago, she got the chance to work abroad and they decided that he would give up his job. Anna: “From then on we also said: well, then he will be the houseman”. They have been back in the Netherlands for a while now and he has remained a houseman. I asked her what it was like to make that decision at the time. Anna:

The hardest part was letting go of the laundry because it went wrong a few times in the beginning. For the rest, I was able to let go very easily, because we made a deal. [INT: How easy or hard was it to make that deal?] It was really easy because we both thought of this as a win-win situation for us: I never have to do anything in the house again and he never has to work again. [INT: He didn’t feel uncomfortable about that?] No, he didn’t, but he did get a lot of comments from those around him that as a man you shouldn’t waste your high education like that. (Anna, 50s, manager, income group E)

The subsection *The Intersection of Work Life and Home Life* further elaborates on reactions from the environment of Anna's husband, but here it surfaces that the reactions of others may contribute to the fact that the word 'houseman' can continue to carry negative connotations for a while longer and may deter female breadwinners from making a deal to similar Anna and her partner.

Of the four female breadwinner households discussed so far in this section, the most obvious practice of undoing gender is in Anna's household, because gender did not seem to be the primary consideration when making the decision as to who should bear the major responsibility for performing household chores. Anna's arrangement may look promising in the light of the trend in the last four decades in Western countries, that women decreased their unpaid workload whilst men increased their unpaid workload (Kan et al., 2022, 374), but the fact of the matter is that the gender gap in these tasks persists and is closing relatively slowly: women do the bulk of routine housework and care for relatives, while men contribute disproportionately to non-routine housework (Kan et al., 2022; Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2021). The three most used resource-based frameworks to explain this gender division are the time availability approach, the relative resources approach and the absolute resources approach. However, when it comes to female breadwinner couples – where there may be over compensation and under compensation in the household by the woman and man respectively – it is good to also consider possible aspects of the women's social status as additional resources, which is why the following will be taken into account: physical attractiveness and social networks as bargaining power.

4.1.1 Economic Bargaining Resources

The first resource-based framework is the time availability approach, also known as the time constraint approach (Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2021; see also Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Coverman, 1985; Foster and Stratton, 2018; Hook, 2004), which is based on the idea that the demands of working in the paid labour force comes at the expense of time at home. In other words, the partner who has more time outside of the paid labour force will take on more household tasks, because the other partner has less time available to do so. Women, on average, work fewer hours in paid work than men and devote more of their time to routine housework, such as cooking and cleaning, than men (taking into account that non-routine housework can be done in holidays and weekends), but the female breadwinners in this study's sample tend to work more hours than their partner, which, according to the time availability approach, would lead to her performing less housework. However, even if the female partner has a higher involvement in the paid labour force, and thus less time available at home, it is more likely that she will contribute more to housework tasks as "studies show that gender norms remain salient for explaining the gender division of housework and child care in households with gender-atypical arrangements" (Sánchez-Mira, 2021, 3), as illustrated in the case of Sissi and Mitch. On this account, time availability for female breadwinner households is best applicable when it comes to the involvement in the labour force of men: part-time employed fathers do more housework and childcare than full-time employed fathers (Bünning, 2020).

The relative resources argument is the second resource-based framework (Kolpashnikova 2018; see also: Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). This argument draws on the idea that one's bargaining power in the household increases with the level of resources compared to their partners. Income, and also non-monetary resources such as occupational and educational prestige or social standing, give power to induce the other partner to do more domestic work (Kolpashnikova, 2018; Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021;

Sánchez-Mira, 2021). This would mean that, due to the higher income of female breadwinners, that they would have more bargaining power than their partners. However, as with the first discussed resource-based framework, gender norms seem to prevail here too as female breadwinners are performing more housework and childcare than their partners despite their greater relative resources (Sánchez-Mira, 2021, 3). A representation of the practice for female breadwinners is given in the section Distribution of Housework and Childcare.

The third resource-based framework is the absolute resources perspective, also known as the autonomy perspective, positing that individual resources (absolute resources) allow partners in the household to outsource their own share of housework (Gupta, 2007). In comparison to women with lower earnings, women with higher earnings are expected to use their purchasing power to do less housework (Killewald & Gough, 2010), with the same being true for male counterparts: men with higher earnings are also expected to use their purchasing power to do less housework than men with lower earnings. As each partner outsources his or her housework to hired labour without having to negotiate with their partner, this perspective is more closely associated with autonomous decision-making rather than negotiating (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2020; 2021). Nonetheless, this perspective is also relevant for this study because intra-household communication and decision-making in which both partners are involved can lead to an autonomous decision to outsource domestic work. This insight emerged from interviewing several participants, including the following female breadwinners who are presented and discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

Hebo, a consultant, recounted that although her husband did not think it was necessary to outsource housework, she argued that after coming home from work that she wanted to spend time with the children, that she would not have time to clean the house and that she did not see him taking over her part, so “I hired a cleaning lady and paid for her”. Kim, a board member, is also the initiator of having her housework outsourced, as she was used to having a domestic

worker, even in her first jobs. Currently, she leaves the contact with the domestic workers to her husband, saying: “I have two loving ladies who have been doing this together for a very long time. My husband is really bad at cleaning. And I like a nice and cosy house, and it should also be clean”. Kim mentioned during the interview that she pays for all the bills, so also for the domestic workers, but emphasised that when she and her husband met and she did not have any income and that he paid for everything; now it is the other way around and it evolved naturally. Lieke, head of a department at a large Dutch company, explained that she is the initiative-taker in outsourcing their housework – of which she would do more than he does. With the help of these insights, I was able to ask other participants, such as Sissi and Mitch, more specific questions about their decision to outsource the housework.

Many women take the initiative to get domestic support and to keep in touch with the domestic worker. That is not to say that there are no couples that jointly decide to hire someone or where the male partner took the initiative, but among my participants there were no couples who explicitly indicated that the man suggested hiring someone for the household tasks. In fact, in a few cases the male partner even thought it was too expensive or a waste of money. Paulien: “We can afford it, but he thinks it’s a waste. He’d rather spend money on something else”. Celina: “He thought it was too expensive for what it would offer him, but I really like it.”

These participants who hired domestic workers are among the estimated one million households (13 per cent of Dutch households) that use personal services at home. About 272 million hours per year and at a cost of 2.5 billion euros per year (SER, 2020, 21). In addition, there is a latent demand: approximately 345,000 households that do not currently use personal services indicate that they will in the future (ibid., 21). Lily, a senior manager, could be one of them. During our interview she was still in doubt about hiring a domestic worker. She said:

He doesn’t want to spend any money on a cleaning lady. As it results, either I have to

hire a cleaning lady myself, which I can do, but then I think, okay let's do it together.

So, yeah that's also an interesting one which you probably would not have if you both had, like, a good income. You would probably say "okay let's hire a cleaning lady".

Lily goes on by saying: "he finds it ridiculous and then, so yeah, maybe, maybe if I really feel like it, I will still do it". Her resource-based approach highlights that using domestic support is primarily in the hands of breadwinning women, because they "may have enough absolute resources to make autonomous decisions about their own unpaid work" (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2019, 6).

Compared to the previous two frameworks, the absolute resources perspective implies not always having to negotiate, bargain and come to an agreement with one's partner. Sociologists argue that it is not the relative resources, but rather the absolute resources that matter more in the explanation of housework participation (Gupta, 2007; Killewald & Gough, 2010). This argument can be illustrated as follows: one woman's husband is a millionaire and she earns 25 per cent of his income; another woman's husband gets paid a minimum income and she earns 100 per cent of his income. Although the latter woman earns symmetrically the same as her husband, she is probably more dependent on her husband's income. Therefore, she might not have sufficient financial means to purchase market substitutes for her housework, while the woman who earns a quarter of a million has more disposable income to do so. In essence, relative resources are a measure of the symmetry between couples, whereas absolute resources represent the economic independence within a relationship (Van Damme & Dykstra, 2018, 2-3) and can better construe a couple's housework participation.

As I have argued in this thesis, the women's ability to make autonomous financial decisions enables them to outsource their housework. This dependence on other's often unacknowledged care work is important, especially in light of the possibility that high-status

women serve as examples of the “Lean In” ethos (see 2.1.1 Feminisms and Doing Gender). It is crucial to remember that this ethos, while beneficial in certain contexts, it overlooks these women’s privilege to hire others to take care of their household responsibilities for enablement to focus on their careers. This dynamic might make domestic labour market inequalities worse while ignoring the need for comprehensive work-family policies that assist women from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Shevinsky, 2015; Slaughter, 2015). As domestic workers are key in relieving women of the “second shift”, something else is also at play: the men are spared from taking on more housework. In fact, most of the domestic workers hired are women, not only in the households of the participating women but also worldwide. Globally, 76.3 per cent of domestic workers are female (ILO, 2022, XVIII), perpetuating the gendered division within the homes. Bittman and colleagues (2003) clarify that the resource-based frameworks do not negate the effect of gender on the division of housework, however, they assert that the effects of gender are indirect, working through the effect of gender on economic resources (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2019, 6). Based on the income categories in Table 3 and considering the above quotes from the participants, it can be reconfirmed that these female breadwinners are high-income women. Although high-income women are more able to favour themselves through outsourcing their housework, their economic resources do not seem to change expectations and behaviours of doing gender at home. The question arises whether non-economic resources face the same challenge.

Two non-economic bargaining resources have been studied by Esping-Andersen and Schmitt (2020), namely social networks (number of friends) and physical appearance. For female breadwinners, a social network as a potential bargaining resource is relevant because employment tends to extend social networks and may benefit their career prospects. An extensive social network can be seen as social capital, but as a potential bargaining resource the researchers found that “our expectation that social networks would influence bargaining

power received no support.” The influence of physical appearance did receive empirical support: “it is a resource that is highly age-contingent, basically limited to women under age 40” and that “attractiveness was associated with him contributing slightly more time to domestic tasks”, which could be interpreted as “if *she* can reduce her housework input via her attractiveness, *he* will probably have to pick up (at least some of) the slack.” (ibid., 17).

The findings of Esping-Andersen and Schmitt’s study in regard to physical appearance are a challenge to be directly applied to the female breadwinner couples of my study, as these researchers’ discussion of attractiveness refers to BMI (body mass index, a correlation of weight and height), which only captures a very specific aspect of looks in the form to physical appearance. It is noteworthy, however, that even the advantage of physical attractiveness will only give women a slightly higher bargaining power. In their research on multi-dimensional couple bargaining and housework allocation, Esping-Andersen and Schmitt (2020) confirm that economic resources are the most effective source of couples’ bargaining power and that their findings support the large amount of literature that focuses solely on income effects. This suggests, the frameworks that are responsive to the economic resources are the most suitable for this study and the best applicable for understanding the arrangements of Anna, Linde, Monique and the couple Sissi and Mitch.

To see what the arrangements at home of the female breadwinner couples are based on, it is useful to weigh the functioning of economic resource-based frameworks against the functioning of gender norms. As the resource-based framework based on time availability would suggest that the partner who has a greater demand from the workforce and less available hours is also the one who performs fewer household tasks, but the gender norms seem to explain better why Sissi still does more housework than Mitch. In Monique’s case too, gender norms seem to underlie their arrangement at home; with proportional time between couples in the labour force one might expect a proportional ratio in the household, i.e., 50/50, but if one

partner (i.e. the female breadwinner) has higher demands of working in the paid labour force than the other partner, then this other partner (i.e. the male partner) should take up even more than half of the responsibilities at home, if the line with the time-availability approach is maintained. As stated above, the time availability approach is better applicable between the male partners of the female breadwinners, with the expectation that the males who work full-time spend fewer hours on household chores than the males who work part-time, but the women still tend to do more and this is best explained by prevailing gender norms. These norms also have great potential to exceed the relative resource argument for female breadwinners, despite the bargaining power that lies in their income, occupational and educational prestige or social standing. We see this with the couple Sissi and Mitch and also with Monique and her partner. Between Linde and her partner on the one hand and Monique and her partner on the other, there is a range in which women's bargaining power can be deployed within the framework of relative resources. In Anne's case, her higher bargaining power leads her and her husband to decide that he will be the houseman, while Linde indicates that she wants to stay away from the idea of him becoming the male homemaker. From the absolute resource perspective, Linde's household no longer uses domestic support and she is satisfied with the division between them, but for other women such as Sissi and Monique, their purchasing power offers them a better opportunity to do fewer household tasks in the midst of their high demands of working in the labour force.

Given that the gender atypical position of female breadwinners in the labour force exposes that gender norms in households are likely to be perpetuated and that the abandonment of these norms is seen as odd –as the environment of Anna's husband points out– or seen as undesirable –as in the case of Linde and her husband– it can be argued that the context of atypicality for women in work life cannot be separated from the atypical relationship to her partner at home, i.e. that she is the highest earning partner in their household.

4.2 Distribution of Housework and Childcare: Lily and Peter

Under normal circumstances, we all have time each day to distribute during our waking hours. We can choose to spend some of it on ourselves and give some of it to others. The time we give to others can be considered as care work; including childcare or informal care to parents. Household tasks can also be seen as “care”, because other household members often benefit from this (Roeters, 2019; see also: Folbre, 2006). In the Netherlands, women spend more time on these care tasks than men, which may come as no surprise given the prevailing traditional model, but female breadwinner households have the potential to change this arrangement. In this section I use the case of Peter, a student and his partner, Lily, a senior manager. By examining their agreements and assumptions about the division of childcare and housework, I look in depth at the cluster of housework tasks which are traditionally more associated with women and which are time-consuming. In this cluster, cooking and cleaning are analysed, taking into account the possibility of undoing gender in the context of performing these tasks which brings to the surface that cooking and cleaning as household tasks are not as clear-cut as they seem. Also, degendering gardening as housework is not as simple as it appears and childcare has its share of challenges too. I argue that men and women experience time differently regarding these tasks and that leisure, in a remarkable way, seems to be the connecting factor in these tasks within the female breadwinner households.

Peter is responsible for the home repairs within his household. I asked him how this came about and his response was: “She has two left hands; she can’t do anything in terms of technology, in terms of lamps, in terms of the toilet that is clogged, the shower that is clogged, something that is broken.” When I asked who calls in a mechanic when he cannot or will not do something, he replied: “We had a broken central heating system twice, I made the phone call. We also had a water leak; I made the phone call too. She is like: ‘You’re the man, you call’”. His take on what Lily implies that “he is the man”, is that he knows what they are talking

about so he can better call them. Peter: “It’s also suited to my interest. As soon as it’s about the baby, then it is her concern”. Here we see not only how a non-routine task like home maintenance is attributed to and appropriated by a person, but also that there is a gendered meaning associated with tasks. Peter was not asked if these tasks were masculine or feminine, but gave a gendered meaning to these tasks himself.

His partner, Lily, also attached a gendered meaning to Peter’s duties, without being asked to do so. “He fixes my bike, these kinds of things... like the more male kinds of things”. When I asked her about what she thinks female tasks are, she said that childcare appeared to be 95 per cent a female task. “Apparently that is the case. I only learned that in the past three months.” She went on to say:

I get it, breastfeeding is for women and that’s a big part of the first six months to two years. When I stop breastfeeding there’s no reason why I should be doing more than he should. Then for me, a 50/50 split would be ideal. (Lily, 30s, senior manager, income group D)

Almost all the other household tasks are evenly divided between Lily and Peter. As she has a full-time job and he is a full-time student, I asked Lily whether a smaller share of the household chores might be more desirable for her. She replied: “I’m not complaining about it. Although he’s not earning money, 50/50 is good”. I probed why she thinks it is good. Almost as if a lightbulb switched on, she said that unconsciously she thinks that washing clothes and such are female things; especially when you are raised with seeing how your parents traditionally divide their housework. “So yeah, you’re raised with ‘these are female jobs’ so with a 50/50 arrangement, you kind of feel lucky.” She clarifies that she feels lucky because “at least you have 50/50, which should not be the case”, which is the crux for female breadwinners at home: gender norms are challenged but also reinstated. It is like taking two steps forward, but at least

one step back with the risk of moving backward even more, depending on which norms are reinstated. On the one hand, women can be regarded as forerunners because of the atypical position they occupy in the labour market (because of the high-status position they hold there) and the atypical position in the household (because of being the highest earner at home). On the other hand, these same women can be burdened by gender norms that could affect their position in both work life and private life to the point of nearly nullifying their initial advantage as forerunners.

Considering yourself lucky as a female breadwinner that the partner performs household tasks, in comparison to gender-typical work-family arrangements, explains why undoing gender in these homes is easier said than done. It is evidence to the pervasiveness of gender norms that are difficult to challenge, even when women have economic resources and devote more time to the labour market than their male partners. However, the complex nature of certain tasks, despite the seemingly clear clusters of housework, may also present these women with additional challenges.

4.2.1 Clusters of Housework Tasks

Cleaning and cooking are traditionally considered feminine while home maintenance and repairs are typically masculine. This is according to one of the two classifications of housework: the gendered meanings of the tasks, referring to tasks culturally constructed as feminine and tasks culturally constructed as masculine (Farré et al., 2021; Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2021, 2; see also: Berk, 1985; Gager et al., 1999; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020; Shelton, 1992). As these cultural constructions refer to strongly gendered patterns, I use the phrase ‘stereotypical’ or ‘traditional’ to refer to the gendering of these tasks, because statistics show that this is the case but it is not the intention of this study to reinstate gender norms by assuming

that tasks should be done by one gender rather than another. It is important to note, that while tasks may be ‘traditionally’ male or female, these gendered associations are not set in stone. The association of certain tasks with feminine and masculine performance has changed over time, and this has transformed grocery shopping and home management into the most shared type of housework: gender-neutral.

The second classification refers to the routines of a task. Routine housework is usually time-consuming, often requires daily commitment and includes tasks like cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. Non-routine housework can be performed when there is enough free time or when needed. This type refers to tasks like managing household finances, outdoor cleaning, home repairs (Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2021, 2).

Kolpashnikova and Kan (2021) argue that with the three gendered characters of a task (feminine, masculine, gender-neutral), the routine character of a task (routine or non-routine) forms the following clusters of housework tasks: (a) traditionally more associated with women and time-consuming: cooking and cleaning, (b) traditionally ‘gender-neutral’ but routine: grocery shopping and home management, and (c) traditionally more associated with men and time-flexible: maintenance and repairs (ibid., 3). These clusters are useful for assessing whether female breadwinner couples deviate from gender norms across the range of household tasks, but below is mainly focused on the tasks that are traditionally female. First, the spotlight is once again on Lily and Peter’s household, but this time regarding cooking because this traditionally feminine task does not fit straightforwardly in the first cluster. Another task that is even less straightforward but is not listed by Kolpashnikova and Kan (2021) is gardening. While this task is viewed as traditionally more associated with women (Mann, 1998; Mannerhovi, 2008), from the interviews emerged that this task is gendered in a way that makes people talk about it differently. Although gardening does not occur in the clusters, the

discussion of this task gives the (un)gendering of other housework tasks an extra dimension in displaying the complex nature of gender in household tasks.

4.2.2 Cooking and Cleaning

The cluster with the most impact on the female breadwinner household is the one with the tasks that are the most time-consuming and traditionally more associated with women: cooking and cleaning. Cooking relates to food and eating that are all consumption practices intertwined with work in the home (Cox, 2013). As women continue to do the lion's share of foodwork, studies show that women and their families perceive this division of labour as fair (Beagan, 2008) and that "women have a considerably higher likelihood of reporting main meal planning and preparing and food shopping duty" but "it is interesting to note that the majority of respondents of both genders people report sharing responsibility for these tasks" (Flagg et al., 2014, 2070), which is indicative of the different perceptions between genders regarding this task. Still, home cooking has increased among men in recent decades (Taillie, 2018). In fact, home cooking is also being embraced by men who are part of a female breadwinner household and experience gender role threat. As existing studies have shown, men do less housework when they earn less money than their female partner and experience gender role threat, yet this threat does not affect cooking as these men do not decrease the amount of time in food preparation in contrast to other housework chores (Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014).

Between Lily and Peter, cooking is a housework task that is divided differently than the 50/50 arrangement for other work in their home: "He cooks 70 per cent of the time and I cook 30 per cent of the time. He really loves cooking and I don't like cooking that much". Lily is not alone in reporting that her partner mostly takes care of the cooking. Erma: "When it comes to cooking, he always does this", Eva: "He usually does the cooking, I think 80 per cent of the time", Kim said that her husband cooks 90 per cent of the time, and also Zwaantje and Lia

credited most of the cooking in their relationship to their husbands. This is not too surprising because for many, cooking is experienced as relaxation and more enjoyable than other forms of domestic work, while for others it is a burden; a burden linked to home-making (Cox, 2013).

Cooking has two aspects: feeding mouths to keep people alive and recreational meal preparation. The boundaries of these home-based activities can be blurry, which gives cooking a complicated place in the household. Also, cooking as a household task is not as intertwined with masculinity. As a matter of fact, cooking can even be disassociated from housework and seen more as a leisure activity due to ‘recognisable manly’ aspects that involve using specialised equipment and techniques, whereas cleaning rarely involves any equipment more advanced than a vacuum cleaner (Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014). Women too can experience cooking separately from household chores if they see it more as leisure or relaxation, as is the case for Sissi who was introduced in the Household Bargaining Frames section: Sissi: “cooking is relaxation for me, so I don’t mind doing that at all.”

Cleaning (washing dishes, washing clothes and cleaning the house) is more clear-cut than cooking, but because cleaning seemingly lacks any necessary skill to learn, as it could be labelled or recognised as such and there are no famous male cleaners on the television in the way that there are male celebrity chefs, makes cleaning perhaps less appealing for men to brag about. It is more likely to be a gender role threat and therefore less likely to be subject to undoing gender within households. At least cooking has transitioned from women’s work to something in which men can find pride and mastery, although it is a recent phenomenon in the span of 20 years or less (Ibid., 2014). This should give hope that cleaning can be degendered in the future as well and that female breadwinner households could be pioneers in this process. After all, these non-conventional households have the potential of organising alternative household arrangements without reference to gender norms, as their household model is not as defined in its structure. The findings show otherwise: female breadwinners including Lilly and

Peter tend to adhere to gendered patterns in housework; these patterns are most detectable when household chores are separated from their ambiguous nature.

4.2.3 Gardening

Not listed in the abovementioned clusters, but relevant to display the ambiguous nature of gender in household tasks is gardening. This task can be performed when there is enough free time or when needed. In line with the clusters of housework tasks, the non-routineness of gardening classifies this task as time-flexible and traditionally more associated with men. The following considerations suggest that a masculine character –or at least a gender-neutral character– could be assigned to gardening: men spend more time caring for the lawn than women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), men plant more crop species than woman (Philpott et al., 2020), men are more likely to complete physical gardening projects –like digging and lifting– than women (Hulse, 2021). According to Eurostat (2019b), the statistical office of the European Union, participation in gardening (growing vegetables, flowers, etc.) across countries varies between 4 per cent and 16 per cent for men on average and between 3 per cent and 24 per cent for women. In the Netherlands, men participate slightly more than women in gardening: 10 per cent and almost 9 per cent respectively.

During the interviews with the members of female breadwinner couples, gardening emerged as a task that matters to people differently. For instance, as Peter describes his upbringing, he introduces gardening into the story:

I was raised very traditionally. My mother stayed at home from the moment I was born. She quit her job, went to work on the farm and took care of the family. She has been a housewife all her life, well, from the moment I was born. My father cannot even fry an egg. He really can't. He burns the water in the kettle, so to speak. I see that my mother is super handy; she does the garden. (Peter, 30s, master's student, income group A)

Although he expressed being disappointed that his girlfriend could not do what his mother did, he attributes the dissimilarity to personality differences. “It is not about being a woman, it is just that my mother can do it all”. This illustration places gardening as part of the traditional practices of homemaking, but other participants were triggered to mention gardening as a male activity within the household.

Despite their masculine association with this task, two women decided to take care of everything in and around the garden themselves. One of the women, Hebo, explained that her taking care of the garden arose from the fact that her father taught her to perform maintenance and repair tasks. The other woman, Lia, recalled a conversation with a friend. They were discussing things that a “real man” would do and Lia said to that friend that she had completely turned over the garden. When her friend replied with “that is really a man thing to do”, her response was that this can be expected from her, as she would “just take care of that as a man”.

There are two notable aspects to what Peter, Hebo and Lia said about gardening. The first aspect: gardening is anything but gender-neutral to them, but the gender to which this task belongs differs. These participants were triggered to mention gardening in relation to their mother or father and in reference to a conversation with her friend about gendered behaviour, but their classifications were not the same. Other household tasks, such as cleaning and repairs, were usually introduced by participants (after a series of open questions) earlier in the interview and discussed by them in the spirit of the three clusters, but here is where working on the garden does not occur to them. Gardening is apparently not as clear and decided as other household tasks. The second aspect: gardening has a gendered connotation that is strong enough to float up in their memories and then serve as an anchor for their take on masculine or feminine behaviour within households. It is therefore an activity that is open to more than one interpretation in the discussion of household task division but it gets more ambiguous.

Gardening is also a leisure activity. A survey of 2500 Dutch households on gardening behaviour shows that 70 per cent would rather spend time gardening than on paid work or housework. Only 9 per cent of women prefer housework to gardening, compared to a meager 2.5 per cent for men (Wonen, 2019). Dre shared during the interview that “she does the indoor plants and I do the outdoor plants”. His wife, Eva, makes it evident that gardening is borderline with leisure, since she mentions gardening in the same breath as other hobbies: “I like to read, I like to do handicrafts, especially crochet, and I like working with plants”. From the perspective of gardening as a chore, Eva admits to disliking performing housework “besides taking care of the plants”. Ellis said that she just likes potting plants. “I had just lived for years in a student house without a garden. I really just missed flowers, so I built a herb garden; it was pretty sad.” When I brought up gardening as a possible household chore to Sissi she told me “I sometimes do a little weeding” but she immediately adds “that’s free time”.

Gardening is not just a given, but it is significant how Sissi, Eva and Ellis chose to talk about it. To them, gardening is more than or different to housework; it is an activity for relaxation or pleasure. It is their leisure time, which tends to be a challenge for female breadwinners. I address leisure in more detail below, but for now it can be said that gardening serves female breadwinning women as a counterpoint to both paid employment and the daily devotion of housework.

The participants gave various reasons for taking care of their gardens, but there is a common ground that these women have with other women of Western industrial societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century: they have more resources to spend on hiring someone to do the gardening, often a male worker. “Upper and middle-class women would usually employ men to garden for them, while working-class women were more likely to do some gardening themselves” (Mannerhovi, 2008, 42). This is in line with what some of the female

breadwinners in this study said about their “tuinman”⁴¹, a male gardener: “I have a maid, I have a handyman and I have a gardener. So maybe very luxurious, but I can also afford it, I realise that too.” (Jeanne). “We have a big garden, but for that we have a gardener” (Kim). “Suddenly we had a big garden, and what we did then: twice a year we hired a gardener” (Ellis). There is no denying that the word “gardener” as a profession in the Netherlands is male-gendered, but gardening is complicated as an activity within female breadwinner households. Seen only through the lens of housework, gender is ambiguous when it comes to working in the garden. Add that this activity can be made indistinct with leisure activities, then this is an example of how undoing gender at home is not the process of reorganising activities between their neat boxes but is about working with the complex interrelationship between activities.

4.2.4 Childcare

Childcare is a distinct activity from housework, but shares the challenges of undoing gender in female breadwinner households. From the interviews with participants who have children, it appears that men and women seem to experience time differently when it comes to childcare. In this subsection, there is first an observation of a couple’s conflicting views on taking care of their child, which exposes their differences in experience regarding childcare in the broad sense of the word. After that, childcare is narrowed down to several hands-on activities in response to the descriptions of other participants regarding their division of tasks in childcare. Here I unfold that challenges arise when time in childcare is combined with time for housework and also time for oneself. I then argue the importance of recognising the difference in time perception, to the purpose of undoing gender in childcare.

⁴¹ These three women were interviewed in Dutch and used the word “tuinman”, translated as “garden man”, equal to the gender-neutral English word “gardener”.

At the beginning of this section *Distribution of Housework and Childcare* we already looked behind the door of Lily and Peter. There, Lily stated that childcare turned out to be 95 per cent a female task in their household. My transcripts show that we both laughed at that statement, but when I read my notes back and listened to the audio recording again, the seriousness in her narration about the division of childcare resurfaced. When I asked her if she negotiated this, she said “he made it clear upfront like ‘okay when we have a child in the first year it is all yours’ and of course I was like ‘what is this’, but this seemed to be the case.”

As Lily was still on parental leave at the time of the interview, I asked her if they had already spoken about what will happen when she goes back to work. Her first reaction was that they have not spoken about it, but then she recalled that they did. She said:

Yeah, we did speak about it a bit. Probably there’ll be a combination, because I have to work full-time, but I still have holidays so the first half year I can probably work for four days and I can work one day from home. He can probably manage to work one day from home and we have grandparents who also might be able to look after the child for one or two days and maybe one- or two-days childcare. So then probably, most likely it’s going to be like that. (Lily, 30s, senior manager, income group D)

I asked Lily if she thinks that their household division would be different if he also worked full-time. Her reply was: “No because he’s now pretty much studying more than full-time and, don’t know, I think it would be the same if he was working.”

For women, parenthood is often associated with reduced working hours while for men working hours remain almost the same (Kay, 1998; Kowalewska & Vitali, 2019; Van der Lippe & Van Dijk, 2002) and this thesis shows that for men the retention of working hours can also equate to study hours. This state of affairs seems to be dripping with unreasonableness and perhaps even absurdity, but what is usually not exposed is the view of the fathers. In the

interview with Lily's partner, I asked for his perspective on fatherhood. Additional information in advance of his narration is that he contributes to the family income with the money he earned before he took a work-break of a few years to attain an academic degree.

Now that I have a family, I really feel the need to take care of the two of them. Not for my partner alone, no, for the two of them, while she has absolutely no need to take care of me. As a mother she has the need to take care of the child; that's her child. That's a very important difference. And because I have that need to take care of the two of them so that they can continue living, well, I can't do that without money. (Peter, 30s, master's student, income group A)

Peter's interpretation of childcare is to provide mother and child with adequate resources, giving Lily as much space as possible to nurture their child. Although he formulates that he needs the financial means for this, we can also pull out that it is not only about the finance, as Lily does not fall short economically. Later (Chapter 5) I discuss in more detail that they manage their finances separately, but as he has described that his way of caring is a one-way direction, the arrival of children affects the gendering of household roles beyond basic childcare. Parents are more likely to organise their domestic responsibilities along traditional gender lines than childless couples are (DeRose et al., 2019), and my study shows that female breadwinner couples are not exempt from the fact that childcare is a challenge to undoing gender in households. The childcare arrangement between Lily and Peter reveals that it is not so much the female breadwinner who holds on to the traditional gender lines, but not being aligned with her partner on childcare, in the broad sense of the word, may result in her feeling that she has to accept those gender lines. Despite the fact that Peter has a substantially smaller income than Lily (category D and A, respectively), he still configures the male role in childcare as being primarily financial. Peter's lived experience of having a partner who does not need him to do this, has not changed his ideas, and equally, his ideas about his role do not seem to

have changed his behaviour. He explained that he has taken up his current studies to make a career switch, because he previously had to travel often for work. He said: “Of course I made a choice to resign and to do a second study. But that was also with the underlying idea that I wanted to become a family man”. He also said he does not expect to earn more than Lily right after he finishes his studies, but later mentioned that he out-earned her in his previous profession which he may eventually expect to do in his new field of work. He talked about his current studies as a way to be a better provider in the future, and his emphasis is mainly on the financial aspect.

Between Peter and Lily, it is he who has a more traditional view of his role and she who expects him to move more towards the role of a caretaker with the arrival of their child. Lily’s view may not be shared by all breadwinning women, despite their common experience in gender-atypical work-family arrangements. Mulan is a chartered accountant and lives with her partner, who indicated that he did not want to be interviewed for this research. Mulan let me know that: “he just finds it a difficult subject”. Mulan shared about her partner that he has not worked much for a great part of their relationship, partly because he studied for a long time and partly because he could not find a job afterwards, but recently he has a job and with this he earns half of what she earns. In the household, she expected him to take on more responsibility, especially when she was very busy at work and he was without a job. She said about their division of roles:

I’m not that woman who does everything for her man. I think we are equals. That’s how I was raised by my parents, that we are equals, so I’ve never been into gender roles that describe for the woman to take care of the man. (Mulan, 30s, chartered accountant, income group C)

Later in the conversation, I asked how she envisions the division of roles when children come and she said that in this case she would like to be the caretaker and spend a year with the child.

Mulan:

Look, I would wish for him to have time with his child too. So, if he can go to work for four days and then gladly, but he will probably have to take the lead in being the breadwinner (...). Maybe in the position we are in now, I earn more than him, it makes more sense that he should work less when we have children, but I wouldn't want that; I would then like to take a step back. [INT: Why?] Yes, that feels more like something for the mother to do...yeah, maybe I shouldn't say that.

I said that of course she can say anything and probed on what she really wants. Mulan: "That's really what I want, but maybe this comes from some kind of expectation, but yes, as I said, I think the mother-child relationship is very important."

Both the development between Lily and Peter since the arrival of their child and Mulan's intention when she has children are in line with studies showing that parents are more likely to divide domestic work along traditional gender lines than childless couples are (DeRose et al., 2019; Grunow et al., 2012; Salin, 2018), but it should also be noted that one of the partners did not want such a traditional distribution at home with the arrival of children. Lily's dissatisfaction with Peter's lack of hands-on time spent in their childcare does not rule out that Peter would not be more involved in the future. Nor is the childcare arrangement among Lily and Peter a blueprint for how other female breadwinner couples actively engage in childcare activities.

Various types of childcare activities can be distinguished: physical care and supervision of a child, educational and recreational childcare, and transporting a child. While men tend to devote their time to reading and playing with their children, women devote most of their time

to physical childcare (OECD, 2011, 20). Through the narration of Lieke, we can get an idea of how some of these activities play out. Lieke and her husband are married with children. She said:

We do a lot around the children who are all fanatics in sports, so on the weekends we are often on the sports field to see them or to drive or whatever, or in the evenings we also have to help with homework. (Lieke, 40s, department head, income group E)

She went on:

I don't need a lot of time for myself, I like to spend time with others and my children and I also like being at home or doing all kinds of things, but I don't have that when I come home from work, that I think 'Ahh, now it is my time to do nothing for an hour'.

I did not succeed in getting her husband's point of view from him directly, but in Lieke's words we can understand that the time for herself is contained in her time with and for others. Work—as in the active care of children—is entwined with leisure, but herein lies the risk of a low sense of entitlement in regards to time for oneself. Later on, the traditionally complicated relationship that women have with leisure is discussed in more detail by regarding this activity separately, but it is key to recognise here already how leisure relates to childcare.

Both fathers and mothers might experience that the time in childcare cannot always be strictly divided into care work and leisure. For instance, going to the cinema with only your spouse is considered to be leisure; going to the cinema with your spouse and your children can be fun but it is mainly childcare because you are sharing the care responsibility for the children; going to the cinema with only the children if it is a children's movie that you barely want to watch, then it is easier to acknowledge that this is mainly childcare rather than leisure, but the dividing line is not always to be found or even to be made. The literature does make a distinction between childcare as an activity in itself and childcare with other activities, i.e.,

active rather than passive childcare (Andrew et al., 2020; IARIW, 2021; OECD, 2011), but time-use surveys usually overlook or do not even collect data about other activities undertaken during childcare (Folbre, 2021, 3; OECD, 2011, 18), such as housework and leisure time. This gives an incomplete picture of time that parents devote to childcare. Despite this limitation, the literature states that based on the available data on passive childcare, childcare is predominantly a feminine activity (Andrew et al., 2020; Folbre, 2021; IARIW, 2021; OECD, 2011).

In terms of undoing gender, it matters if childcare is mainly a feminine activity within the household. Pinho and Gaunt (2019) sampled 236 parents and found that whereas primary caregiving mothers carried out most of the emotional care and responsibility for childcare with very little involvement of the breadwinning fathers, among role-reversed couples emotional care and responsibility were shared more equally. These findings suggest that households consisting of breadwinning mothers and caregiving fathers undo gender by performing tasks according to their family role rather than prescriptive gender norms. Considering that time in childcare is experienced differently between parental genders and has dissimilar results in undoing gender, I argue that the greatest gain in degendering childcare lies in making determined efforts to deal with the complex role that leisure plays.

4.2.5 Leisure

A few paragraphs above, in the subsection Childcare, I gave some insight into the life of Lieke, who shared that she and her husband devote a lot of time to their children and that she does not need much time for herself. I probed for more information about other possible uses of time besides her 55-hour work week. Lieke said:

I used to really want to be a cook, but my parents then very wisely let me taste what it is like to work in the catering industry and then I realised that I still enjoy cooking but

more as a hobby. So, for me cooking, for example, is very relaxing. I actually spend a lot of time eating, even on normal weekdays. But that's for me, so when I come home, I cook. That's my hobby. And yeah, I'm not a real athlete, but I also exercise when I'm cycling. In the summer I swim as much as possible, and in the winter, I also try to skate regularly. And well, I think that besides work, the children are where I put a lot of my time on. (Lieke, 40s, department head, income group E)

Lieke's mention of cooking brings us back to the earlier discussion of this activity, where the blurry divide between recreation and housework emerged. Indeed, cooking is not only carried out in the context of 'keeping people alive', but can be seen as a hobby for both men and women. The point of concern for women, however, is when practically all leisure activities are focused on meeting the needs of others. As free-time family management rests mainly on the shoulders of women (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018), little time is left for activities unrelated to caring for others; an apparent contradiction to caring for oneself. Self-care is not selfish or superficial, but rather it is profound and important in continuing to care for others (Lee, 2018; 2019). Spending time with loved ones also counts as self-care, but it seems that "for women, however, leisure is complicated by their many roles and responsibilities (...) and their very sense of an inherent right to leisure time and leisure activities" (Scanlon, n.d.), what was said about women in general up until the early 2000s, but now also seems to apply to breadwinning women in particular.

Leisure as a counterpart to paid work has become a challenge for women, because the constraints on women's access to leisure included domestic work, the unequal division of labour at home, and fragmented days and tasks (Scanlon, n.d.). Studies of the United States and many Western European countries have shown, besides large gender differences in paid work activities, housework and childcare, there are also notable gender differences in leisure time (García Román & Pablo Garcia, 2022). Differences between men and women in time use

are related to differences in the quality of leisure time, given that the “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Hochschild, 2021) makes the total workload –paid and unpaid– higher for women than for men, leaving little free time for women, and their sense of responsibility towards others inclines women to adapt their free time to the needs and preferences of their partner and/or children, making their leisure activities less in line with their own preferences and therefore less enjoyable (Miller & Brown, 2005). EU data also hints at a gender perspective of the multitasking phenomenon, showing that women tend to perform more household and care activities in parallel to leisure activities (Eurostat, 2019b), but to gain a deeper understanding of the gender difference, we need to know more about how leisure time is experienced. Previous qualitative research has already indicated that women’s perceptions of leisure were often expressed as a multi-dimensional concept, as one of the women interviewed by Martinson and Schwartz (2002) described: “I have two definitions of [leisure]. Leisure for me, unto myself, is spending time with the dog, reading... Many times, those are activities I do alone. There’s also another definition of leisure that’s kind of related to other people.” (Martinson & Schwartz, 2002, 37). This shows not only the different definitions of free time, but also how fragmented these activities can be. Other qualitative research note that fragmentation of free time activities is likely underreported (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003, 1026) but it is precisely qualitative studies that may include the, often invisible, time of women spend coordinating and managing household tasks (Mattingly & Sayer, 2006, 209), and those insights into their experiences enrich macro-level analysis (for more info, see subsection Households in Welfare States). Yerkes and colleagues’ study compared the quality of leisure time between men and women, revealing that the gender gap in leisure quality is moderated by country characteristics; in countries with conservative gender norms, –where there are low levels of childcare coverage, limited paternity leave and lower levels of women in political power– the women’s leisure quality is lower than men’s leisure quality, while in more egalitarian countries,

the gender gap in leisure quality is lower and, in some cases, reversed (Yerkes et al., 2020b). These results point to the need for an unambiguous welfare state, where steering is possible towards closing the gender gap in leisure quality, given the specialised responsibility of women for caregiving can lead to a low quality of women's free time. "Country-level norms and policies shape men and women's behavior through socialization and role expectations" (Yerkes et al., 2020b, 370). This comparative research exposes the relationship between the egalitarianism of a country and the extent to which couples "do gender". Adding to the existing qualitative research perspectives will help us understand the gender-related leisure experience between couples, which is another way to contribute on a larger scale, by showing that when it comes to gendered differences in leisure activities, coupled women say: "I would like to make the time, but I think women prioritize. And I'm stereotyping. We prioritize more. We know what needs to get done, and they may not" (Whiteside & Hardin, 2011, 132). A few decades ago, Kay (1998) examined how women constructed and experienced their lifestyles and she argued that, "Employment empowers women to challenge gender inequity in leisure, with the practical and psychological gains being potentially greatest for women in high status jobs". However, she found that despite high employment status, women had unequal access to leisure in the household, which came from the way couples negotiated the pressures on household discretionary time rather than from their paid work commitments.

In the course of the data collection, I realised that time in leisure is also experienced differently by the men and women participating in my study, especially if there are dependent children in the household. For example, the three fathers interviewed who had a child with the female interviewees (Peter, Mitch and Gijs) tended not to include activities with their family in their list of leisure activities. For instance, Peter described his hobbies for which he travels abroad, Mitch listed his hobbies and activities with his friends, and Gijs discussed his sports

activities. By contrast, many mothers interviewed talked about activities that are related to family responsibilities. To illustrate, Erma said:

My spare time? I try to pay attention to my family in my spare time. I have a partner and (x)⁴² children. And of course, I also try to see friends. And furthermore, yes, I also try to do sports every week. (Erma, 50s, managing director, income group D)

Merel shared that:

I like to go out for dinner with friends. I really like good food. So that's relaxation for me. On Saturdays, I love being around the sports field for my youngest child. I like walking a lot. I walk almost every day. Yes, and on weekends I often walk with my husband. Then we walk or cycle around or to friends. (Merel, 50s, doctor, income group E)

Only a small number of women with dependent children mentioned that they took time for themselves, for example to exercise by themselves or to simply take a moment of rest, but most indicated that they took too little or no time for themselves, like Isa:

I have little for that. I do miss that sometimes, like some evenings I wish that everyone could go away so I can sit on the couch with a glass of wine and read a book, by myself. [INT: Does your partner have this time for himself?] Yes, he has that often. I spend a bit more time with friends and I'm out a bit more in the evenings so he does have more me time. But he also consciously chooses it. I also go... if he has a dinner appointment on Saturday I think 'yes, then I also go out with friends' so I also choose it, but every now and then an empty house is also nice. (Isa, 40s, director, income group E)

⁴² To preserve anonymity, not only are the exact ages of the participants not mentioned (hence, the use of age ranges of decades; see chapter 3, *Feminist Methodology*, section Participants for more explanation), but also the ages of their children are omitted, and references to the number of the participants' children are removed.

Another breadwinning mother who was asked about her own time, emphasising the moments that she might have for herself, is Linde:

Recently I've been trying to be a bit more aware of that, but actually I'm never taking care of myself. [INT: Why not?] I think it's selfish. Yes, because if I'm going to take care of myself, then I won't take care of (her husband's name), then I won't take care of my kids, and then I won't take care of my girlfriends. (Linde, 50s, executive board member, F)

These female breadwinners illustrate that their perception of leisure goes hand in hand with other, especially family-based responsibilities, which is in contrast to the perception of the fathers that were interviewed during this study. This says nothing about the value men place on time with their children, because Gijs talks enthusiastically about the activities he undertakes with his children, Mitch proudly speaks about his father-children time and Peter expresses his appreciation for the time he has with his child, but it gives an insight into the different ways that men and women, particularly mothers and fathers, think about leisure and suggests that these gendered understandings are not in any way challenged by the atypical households of female breadwinner couples.

The blending of family-based activities into lists of leisure activities of these breadwinning mothers was not entirely universal and there were also breadwinning mothers I interviewed who expressed a different experience when I inquired about their private lives. I asked Ellis, married with children, what she considers as her private life. Ellis:

Everything that goes on behind the front door, I guess? I sometimes have dinner with girlfriends, but they're all girlfriends who all have jobs, which merge into each other. So, we are not talking about the latest clothes at the department store, but about the business: how we can help each other, what we have learned. So that's kind of private, because it's

with acquaintances or girlfriends. [INT: Is private life the same as free time for you?]
Yeah, I don't know, because in my spare time I go to the hairdresser, but at the hairdresser's I'm doing my business email with my phone, so I don't know. It kind of goes together. (Ellis, 40s, firm partner, income group G)

Interestingly, Ellis experiences that a blurring of leisure time does not arise from family-based activities, but from business activities. Later in the interview, I had to explicitly ask about her family activities for her to mention them.

Ellis explains towards the end of this chapter, in the subsection Possible Conflict Resolutions, that she has outsourced many of her tasks and used to have a nanny. Ellis' children, all primary schoolers, are the youngest among the breadwinning women who spoke about their family activities. This raises the possibility that the ages of children are an important factor, but among this sample, attitudes and experience vary too much to make a direct link between mother's attitudes to leisure and their children's ages. Olivia, who has one of the oldest children living at home among these women, did talk about how she has been gaining ground over the past few years when it comes to her free time. She said:

I always have date nights with my husband and I have regular moments, brunch or dinner, with my family. I have (x)⁴³ sons and I still see my friends regularly. It wasn't always like that because my oldest son is (x) years old and my youngest son is (x) so they are already young professionals or young adults. So now we look like (x) adults with different responsibilities and that's how we treat each other, basically a group that really likes to spend time together. You know, I wouldn't say we're friends because of course we are not, we all have our own friends, but we do like to be with each other.
(Olivia, 40s, managing director, income group F)

⁴³ See supra note 43.

About date night she continues:

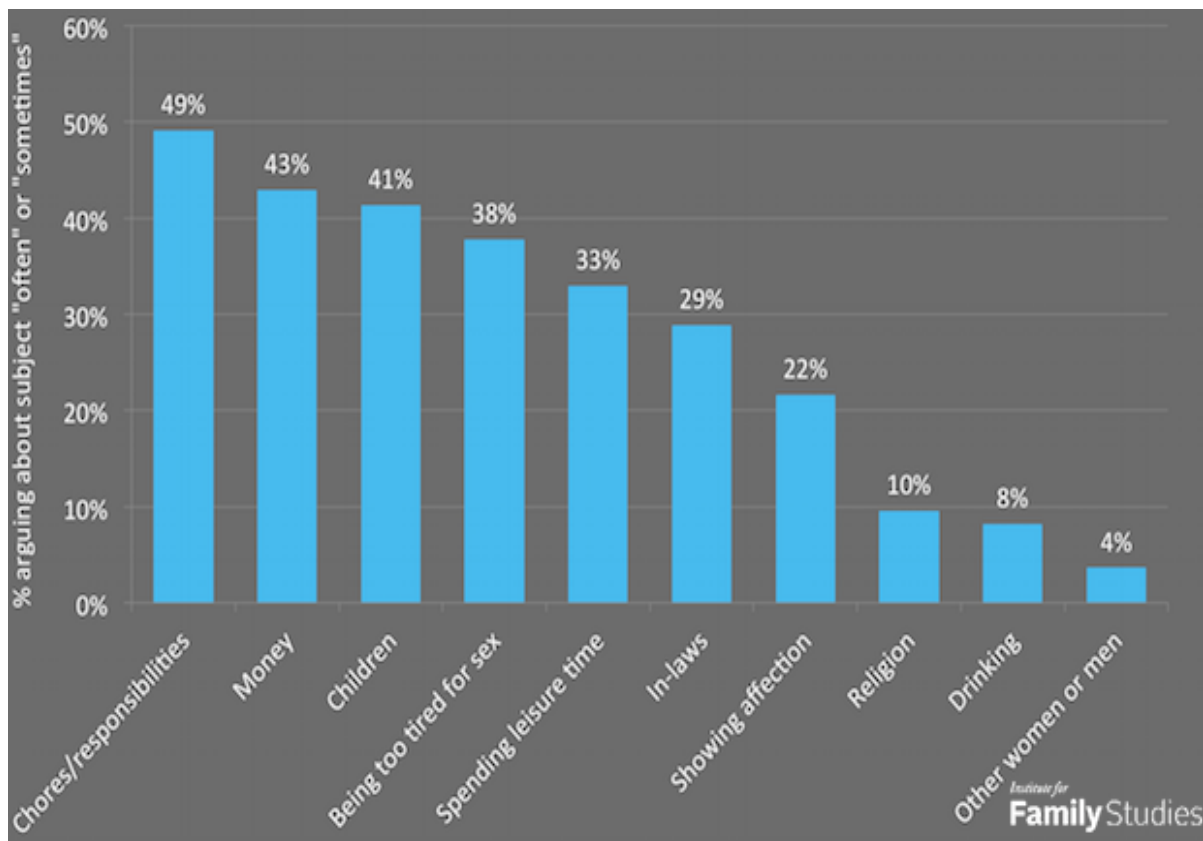
It sometimes drops out, but it's always on Saturday and it's only with my husband. But it wasn't always like this. When they were little, we opted for an au pair in the house, which is not given to everyone, but otherwise I couldn't have done this. So, we chose music class, sports once a week, play dates and stuff, and homework tutoring; she did all of that.

During the course of my research, it became apparent that the breadwinning women with dependent children experience that they feel like they have little right to free time compared to the time they invest in the labour market and to the free time that their male partners keep. Among the mothers, not many women seem to really experience the freedom to engage in activities that had nothing to do with meeting the needs of others; let alone to have time for activities by themselves or for doing nothing in their free time. Instead, nearly all of these women seem to experience that their leisure activities should be in combination with other family-based responsibilities, which has roots in the complicated relationship women have traditionally had with leisure (Scanlon, n.d.). While the advantage for high-status female breadwinners might be that they are in a better position to outsource tasks, so that they have more free time to combine with the non-outsourced tasks, this does not alter the fact that they have more demands on their time than their partners. In the next section I examine how conflict situations can arise over demands on time and how female breadwinners deal with them.

4.3 Conflict Management in Housework: Lia and partner

Conflicts are part of life, and usually people try to come up with solutions to conflicts that satisfy all parties. In the United States, the most common area of contention for couples is chores and responsibilities (Zill, 2020; see also Figure 6), which can arise if the experience is that the housework is not equally divided.

Figure 6: Subjects expressed in percentages that couples with children argue about



Source: Zill, 2020

In the Netherlands, more than a quarter of people indicate that household tasks are approximately evenly distributed within their household. Nearly 50 per cent of men say that their partner does most of the work, while the vast majority (70 per cent) of women say they do most of the household chores (Laurense, 2022). One way in which this inequality comes into being maybe through early communication between partners about the distribution of tasks, or the lack thereof. Research has found that women who had a conversation with their male partners when they first moved in together are significantly more satisfied with the division of household responsibilities than women who did not have a conversation that they had wanted to have (Matos, 2015, 18). This conversation can be crucial to avoiding or reducing conflicts over their household arrangements, but even in the absence of early communication, changes can prompt couples to re-organise their responsibilities at home. In my research it

emerged that two determinants create conflicts for female breadwinner couples, one is the change to the female breadwinner household model during the relationship, the other is men's evaluation of their careers. I examine how these determinants play out in domestic responsibilities, using the example of Lia's household. I did not interview her partner, because at that time they just decided to separate and it was too sensitive to ask him to be a participant, which I of course fully understood. Nevertheless, even without the contribution of her partner, it is possible to gain insight into conflict situations in the households of female breadwinners. These conflict situations were typical amongst interviewees, because they do not relate solely to the male partner's resistance to taking on more household tasks, but are also closely related to the two determinants mentioned. Ultimately, I assess in this section that outsourcing can act as a crutch until the couples get past the resistance of the male partner to do more household chores, but care must be taken that an eventual lack of resistance of the male partner does not necessarily mean that all is well and good; apparent cooperation can be just as treacherous for a relationship. This shows that for female breadwinner couples, it is not only about keeping the well-being of the females in sight, but also about not losing sight of the males' well-being.

Over the years, Lia has become displeased with the way her husband contributes to the housework. She said:

We both lived in student rooms. I lived alone, I had everything for myself: my own washing machine, my own kitchen, that kind of thing. He had to share the kitchen and the bathroom with two more fellow students and also had to go to the cellar to wash there. And very quickly I started to wash his clothes. And that was an offer from myself. He never asked me to do that. But I saw the stacks of clothes and, well, for me it was easy. I had my own washing machine; I did not have to sign up on lists or things like that. And so it went then. (Lia, 40s, director, income group E)

I asked Lia if they had a conversation about their housework. She replied:

Let me think: did we really make agreements about how we were going to share the household tasks? Of course, you have to arrange it. But it was quite a natural thing.

She carried on to say:

I always did the laundry, because he also indicated that he often gets the colours wrong and things like that. And also, what I told you, I already had everything in terms of washing machine and so on, so that was kind of automatic. In terms of cooking, that actually went fifty-fifty. We often did grocery shopping during the weekend. And cleaning: I think I did the most of it and I always instigated that cleaning had to be done.

When I asked her to estimate the distribution, her reply was: "I have to think carefully. I think I was at 65 or 70 per cent and that he was at 30 per cent, really in terms of cleaning. Cleaning up and vacuuming that kind of thing."

I asked Lia to explain how the division in cleaning came about. She said:

He has always found it less important. At one moment that really became an issue. Not so much the weekly cleaning up, meaning the big cleaning you do every week, so the toilet and stuff like that. I always did that and I did not mind doing that. But what I did not like ... at a certain point I progressed in my career. I often came home later. I worked at (x) where there were also meetings that would have me come home later. And then I found it very annoying to still see the dirty dishes when I came home at 11 o'clock in the evening. And we really argued about that all the time, about that he thought it was not a big deal. He would say: "What does it matter, why is it bothering you? The children were lying in bed, what is your point?" I said that I cannot explain why, but I find it very annoying to come into a kitchen where you have everything from dinner while I come home at eleven and have no perspective about when it is gone. Is it still there when we

have breakfast tomorrow morning? Are you going to clean up? Do you expect me to clean it up? We had a lot of arguments about that.

I asked how they managed this conflict. Lia said:

He said it brings me more negativity that it doesn't happen than it brings him negativity when he does it. So, it's harder for me that it didn't happen than it is for him to clean it up. So, he made a choice: 'I have a wife who is annoyed by it and it also annoys me that I have to clean up, because I don't feel like it. But her irritation is greater than my irritation'. So, in the end he would do it.

Later on, she added: "And for the care of our children', that's never been the issue".

The conflict between Lia and her husband does not concern domestic work as a whole, but is about the most routine type of housework which has the potential to quickly come under pressure from changing time availability between partners. Also, this housework is overwhelmingly distributed according to traditional gender lines and deviation from these lines can cause resistance. The method of conflict management Lia and her husband have used is that one confronts the other, eventually causing the confronted person to take action, but not because of an intrinsic motivation. Obviously, it is not the responsibility, and most of the time it is not even in the other person's power, to work on another person's deepest motivation in any area, but it is worthwhile to better understand the men's resistance, since Lia's experience is not an isolated one. From the conversations with this sample of participants it emerged that two determinants tend to underlie these conflicts: one is whether the woman became a breadwinner during their relationship; the other is how the man seems to evaluate his own career. Before discussing them, it is good to examine what the difference an early communication about housework chores could make.

4.3.1 Early Communication

Lia and her husband's early communication is based on their student lives. During this period, Lia had a more independent household management than her partner did; later she took it upon herself to do some of his tasks as well. She indicated that the joint household division proceeded in a natural way, with the result that grocery shopping is distributed evenly because it is done together but that she is mainly responsible for cleaning. Considering that grocery shopping is traditionally 'gender-neutral' and cleaning tasks are traditionally more associated with women, the 'natural' way here is equal to the traditional way.

Lia said that she was always the initiator in terms of cleaning and that cleaning was always less important to her partner; something that started to bother her as she progressed in her career. His part became a point of discussion, not because he confronted her but the other way around, this is in line with other studies. Previous studies disclose that men tend to avoid discussions about housework because it is to their advantage. After all, they tend to do less in the household and a conflict discussion about this topic could lead them to do more (Samp, 2017; see also: Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). Carlson et al (2020) found that men take on more housework when women communicate less positively about it, which for Lia and her partner could be the case as he points out her annoyance about the situation. This causes him to eventually do what she initially expected, but since his side of the story in this regard is not known, as he was not interviewed for this thesis, it is not clear whether he does more after these confrontations. Lia does not avoid conflict discussions, which leads her partner to speak out about the trade-off between the negative consequences for him and his wife. A similar consideration of trade-off might also be a reason for women not to enter into confrontations: engaging into a conflict with their partners might outweigh the benefits they could obtain, causing women to accept the unequal division of tasks at home (Samp, 2017), which is not in keeping with what I found in other interviews; most women who were dissatisfied with the

unequal distribution seem not to be shy about pointing out the lack of support to their partners, more or less as Lia did.

What further emerges from what Lia says, is that progress in her career is the reason to confront her husband about the housework. She did not stay silent, but voiced her desire to align the household responsibilities better with the demands of her work. This brings to the surface that their gender norms at home were invisible, but once those norms became subject to change, justification was needed and with that comes greater visibility of these gendered norms. I therefore argue that undoing gender, in the sense of confronting assumptions about gendered roles in the home is the biggest stumbling block for those who are not female breadwinner couples from the start. Ergo, early communication about household arrangements is important and could be a missed opportunity if it has not happened, but for women who become the main breadwinner in the course of the relationship, communication about adjusting gender norms in the home is all the more important.

4.3.2 Changing Household Model during Relationship

In the event of women becoming the highest-earning partner during the relationship, it is easy to assume that the greatest difficulty lies in systematically redistributing the household chores. But even more difficult is resolving underlying resistance. Lia shared in detail how becoming the main breadwinner has been the source of conflict with her husband. Lia: “The issues have been my development, the money that I earn with my work, and also having a high profile. These are actually three aspects and especially that being in the picture has always been an issue for him.” I asked her to give an illustration, she said:

Well, a very striking example: I was interviewed last Tuesday by a number of young professionals. So that is two hours of chatting about yourself, in response to questions of

course. Later we ate together as a family. I mentioned that I had been interviewed by students and I said: 'well, I thought it was pretty awkward to talk about myself'. To which he said: 'I think you have no problem with that.' Lia recounted another instance; she was describing a potential next career step. Lia: "His first reaction was: 'who do you think is waiting on you?'" That really hit me hard at the time. We really had verbal fights about this.

She spoke further:

When I talk about my work, I can imagine that it comes across as: that is someone who talks about her influence. But I talk about the influence that my function entails and also the expectations that people have about it. (...) I have also tried to explain to him: 'no, it is not necessarily that I want to talk about myself, but the work that I do, yes, depends to a large extent on how I do it, what I contribute to it'. Yes, yes that is very far from who he is. He likes modesty, while I think: 'I guess I talk modestly about my work. But it is about what I do for a living'. And we never found each other in this.

Lia elaborated on the way he responds to her career progress:

Well, his remarks... Look, it also has to do with our development. I earned more and more money each time with a new job. I remember that I was somewhere for a year and that something was happening. I talked to him about it and I said that it might be interesting for me to move up. That reaction was: 'well, can't you just stay somewhere?' Yes, but this is an opportunity that is occurring now. Would be weird if I would not do something with it. So that conversation was about why I always have to go further.

I asked Lia what she would suggest to other women who are on the path of out-earning their partners, she said:

I find that very complicated, because if you ask him now, and I have also done so: ‘do you have problems with your wife earning more and making a career?’, then he would sincerely say: ‘no I think it’s super; she has to go for it’. But the consequences... so actually seeing that someone earns more money and also spends it... apparently there is an issue with this. So, I also wondered: could it have been done differently, or better, or something? I have discussed every career step with him. I did not come home and say: ‘by the way I have a new job’. No. I said: ‘but okay, how are we going to do this,’ and so on, and so on. Yes, so that is difficult if someone in my opinion is not entirely honest about that.

It is understandable that she does not find him honest in communication, as his behaviour is different from what he reports. I would have preferred to have spoken to him myself, but that turned out to be unwise given the precarious developments in their relationship around the time of the interview with Lia. Since it was challenging to interview male participants (as explained in chapter 3, *Researching with High-Status Female Breadwinners*), the insights of men who were willing to contribute to this study were used. The view that these men and also some female breadwinners have on the relationship between homework and a man’s self-evaluation is discussed below.

4.3.3 Men’s Self-Confidence

To gain an understanding of how the partners of breadwinning women evaluate themselves, without having interviewed most of the men, it is helpful to consider possible factors. The effects of adhering to hegemonic masculinities are reflected in studies on female breadwinner households (see section 2.1.2 *Masculinities*). It brings a valuable perspective to narrow down what can happen to men’s confidence, which is why this subsection gives space for men to give their view on this specific topic. Due to the lack of Lia’s partner’s point of view, two

other male participants are providing insights into the self-esteem of men in atypical household arrangements. Lia's husband is one of many partners who did not participate, often for the reason that this subject is sensitive to them or that they prefer not to express themselves on personal issues.

One of the men who took part in this study is Gijs, who is partnered with Sara; they are introduced in more detail in chapter 6. When Gijs met Sara, she was just starting out as a lawyer and he earned more than her. I asked him if he ever felt uncomfortable with the thought that she could end up earning more than him. He said:

No not at all because I knew that. If you know that and you choose it... I don't understand if men would have that either. I sometimes joke with my friends about my position, but when I talk to them one-on-one, they actually say to me 'out of all of us, you actually have the best deal'. (Gijs, 40s, civil servant, income group D)

He refers to the fact that his friends would also like to have more free time, but that men have certain expectations from their work, the outside world and also for themselves. Gijs and Sara decided with the arrival of their children, that he would work less, from full-time to eventually 2.5 days a week and that Sara would continue to work full-time. Gijs continues by saying: "Most importantly, they care about the outside world. How does the outside world view it? And people are guided by that a lot. Yeah, I don't really care. It is my life." Mitch is married to Sissi and said: "It may sound lame, but I have all very successful friends. But no one messes around with me, and I don't mess around with them either" what he said to clarify that "status doesn't interest me; I've had it all." With Mitch and Gijs, it should not be ruled out that their self-confidence is connected to a sense of feeling wealthier than their partner, which is further discussed in the section Possible Conflict Resolution in chapter 5: Doing Gender in Financial Tasks. Other factors that can influence men's self-confidence are given

by Zorro, Nathan and Hans. “What many men want to show is that they are the breadwinner, and that they might be better than the woman. I have never understood that”, is what Zorro illustrated; Nathan recalled what someone said to him: “He told me, and that always stuck with me, that men always want to be a provider”. Hans broke down that “the three P’s – Provider, Protector and Procreate– are the demands that are made of a man, and are still being made of the man. And in fact. I think that many women also make those demands of men” and gave an example of a famous dating programme on television in which he sees that many women say that they still expect for the men to pay for the dinner. These men said what society expects of men in concrete terms, from which it can be deduced that if this is not met, this can affect their self-confidence. Mitch, Gijs, Zorro, Nathan and Hans are candid in sharing their view of how the outside world can influence some men; later on, other male participants will provide additional insights. For example, Peter will speak in more detail in the next subsection Conflict Management in Housework about the self-confidence of men who are out-earned by their partners at home, but from the perspective that these women have more resources to leave the man. Dre, who is featured in the following chapter 5, Doing Gender in Financial Tasks in the Financial Management Styles subsection, in which he shares that confidence does not necessarily depend on who brings in the most money, but stems most from having the lead in managing the household finance which he relates to taking on a masculine role at home (masculinity and femininity according to the participants is discussed further in the chapter 6: Family Policies and Cultural Practices on Gender Roles of Female Breadwinners at Home).

It is also insightful to look at how low self-esteem from men affects the relationship with their partner at home through the eyes of women breadwinners, which will happen first through Lia and then adding Zwaantje, Olivia and Lulu. These breadwinners reveal that the process of undoing gender may succeed or fail with how men seem to evaluate themselves as

part of a female breadwinner household.

In the previous subsection, Lia elaborated on the way her husband responds to her career progress. Her husband's reaction to her success may be related to his own self-esteem, as gender is strongly associated with widely shared stereotypes. Men are typically associated with success and competence in the paid workplace; women are largely assumed to be less competent and less achievement-oriented (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Maccoby, 2002; Ratliff & Oishi, 2013). Social structures that link masculinity "with being a good monetary provider by demonstrating power, success, and achievement" (Hefner, 2009, 23) might explain why men may receive the success of their partner as their own failure. However, it does not mean that all successes for the woman imply reduced self-esteem for the man in their relationship. Studies have found that it is likely that the success of a partner could have a positive effect on male self-esteem that corresponds with the basking in reflected glory hypothesis (Cialdini et al., 1976), which is best described as "the tendency to create, magnify or promote one's association with successful or desirable others" (Miller, 2013, ii).

In the interviews with other female breadwinners, I recognised Lia's reflection on out-earning her husband during their relationship. Zwaantje also started earning more than her husband during their relationship, while he remained unsuccessful in his business throughout their marriage. Zwaantje said:

He is very proud of me and does not hide that and he has always expressed this. He has always had the idea that I could do everything. So, he was like: 'go and do that too, and do that too, you can do it, you can do it'. So, what he says is: 'you are so strong I cannot stand up against you'. He has been talking like this over the years, but what I didn't pick up on is that he has lost more and more of his self-worth. (Zwaantje, 50s, firm partner, income group E)

About their household arrangements she said:

I wanted to share the responsibility together. And then it does not matter whether or not one or the other person has an income. (...) I think you bear the same responsibility if you have made choices together. If the load is more on one person than on the other, that does not matter to me. You choose together to do it like that. And if you do not talk about that, but you push the one away from doing the household chores, which only makes the other person work more... because, at home I did not have a place anymore. We are now a bit further, and looking back makes me think: 'if he had only talked about what was bothering him so much inside'. And maybe I've been blind to it, that's possible too. I do not know.

Zwaantje's point of view adds the perspective that undoing gender at home is not successful in itself by only establishing that the redistribution of household chores lightens the burden of female breadwinners because the man takes on more or even most of the responsibilities. At the time of the interview, Zwaantje and her husband were divorced and remained good friends after that. Nevertheless, she indicated that she would not have entered into such an interview about her relationship with the same openness if she were still married. As for Lia, she was married during the interview, but she explained that she and her husband have come to the end of their relationship; a decision made recently at the time of the interview. This has led me to believe that she also felt freer to share more openly or that she at least reflected differently on her relationship than if that decision had not been made. There may have been other participants, of whom I am not aware if their relationship is precarious or in a phase of separation. Others have also exemplified that the man's self-assessment of his career relates to her out-earning him during the course of their relationship. Olivia outlined that she and her husband started out equally in terms of working conditions. She advanced exponentially in making career moves, while he stayed with one employer for a very long time. He eventually

made a career switch that decreased his salary by half, but in this new position he has found his purpose and passion in life. During their careers they also had conflict discussions about their household tasks:

Eventually we resolved our conflicts. I expected that my husband would do more in the household than I do. And now he does. I don't do laundry; I don't fold clothes. (...).

We had a kind of constructive conflict, which you have to come out constructively.

That was a process, but now it's settled; this works, we know this. He handles a lot of PA-like affairs. Someone has to go to the dry cleaners with all kinds of packages and dresses and I don't know what. So, he just takes care of that. (...) So, this works.

(Olivia, 40s, managing director, income group F)

The argument that undoing gender is the biggest stumbling block for those who are not female breadwinner couples from the beginning of their relationship, is mainly based on the likelihood that non-conventional housework arrangements are a given from the start. It does not mean that couples who come together as a female breadwinner couple do not struggle with their non-conventional household model, i.e., the woman being the main breadwinner, this was the case with Lulu and her partner. They have been a couple for over a decade. Lulu said:

My partner had at least four years of difficulty with being in this reversed role; he was just afraid, not so much towards me because I just showed him very often that I do not care, but to the outside world. He was a bit depressed at the beginning. I have very often reassured him (...) Other people sometimes have the idea of 'that is easy, he does not have to do anything'. I bring in all the money, he works a bit and does what he wants. But that's not the way I see it. Because he is a very low maintenance person and in my opinion in no way abuses anything, but just wants to make sure that I can do

what I want to do and even stimulate me in that. With the Supervisory Board, for example, I really doubted whether I should join. And then he would really say: 'yes, do it'. I think it's good for your name. And it is good for yourself to be visible' (...) I see the advantage in not both being high-achievers, but just that one works hard and the other does not feel like doing that and is actually doing what he wants. (Lulu, 50s, firm partner, income group F)

She says about how he evaluates his own career:

He has said before: 'Look how financially independent I was and now I am totally not'. But he also says: 'I was an annoying person when I had a lot of money'. My idea of his current way of thinking is: 'here is where I am now; I am more in balance with myself'.

I asked Lulu to elaborate on the division of their household tasks and having no outsourcing, she said:

You will not bring in any help if someone's at home just reading newspapers or so, that is very strange of course. And we also have a bit of a division in household tasks. Because I'm actually out making money and he is the one mostly at home, he is the one doing the household tasks. Because he says about himself: "otherwise my task here at home does not mean anything at all". He also thinks he should do that, because he wants to make it possible for me to do my work without problems. He likes it too, he always says "I think it's great to be in (x)'s shadow and to make sure she does what she has to do without a grumpy guy sitting at home that says 'are you late at home again?'" He always says: "when I met you, you were already like how you are now, so who am I to change that in any way". "Moreover, you must not change each other", he always says. You like each other in that way, so you should have to leave it that way.

The difference between Lulu and other women is that it is clear that Lulu's partner had an issue with her earning more from the start and not so much that he would be mainly responsible for the household. With regard to the other couples, where the women started earning more during the relationship, the apparent self-evaluation of men that arises or is reinforced by being out-earned is interwoven with his resistance of reorganisation of the household tasks. For these reasons, it is more difficult for these couples to undo gender in housework because of the extra challenge to distinguish the root of his resistance. It goes without saying that the division of housework requires the cooperation of both partners, but as it is not self-evident that this happens it is useful to look into possible conflict resolutions.

4.3.4 Possible Conflict Resolutions

The premise in this thesis is that giving up being a female breadwinner is not an option if conflicts arise, as this did not come to the surface in the interviews. Nor did it emerge that avoiding discussions was seen as a solution, especially not by the women who are confronted with daily routine tasks. Confrontations then seem inevitable, because when a couple's housework is not taken up, this tends to affect the work of the breadwinning women more than the work of their male partners, which is in accordance with literature: "when domestic labor is avoided, women are more likely than men to make concessions in paid work to accommodate domestic labor inequities at home" (Knight & Alberts, 2017, 147; see also: Becker & Moen, 1999; Stone, 2007; Wiesmann et al., 2008). For this reason, possible conflict resolutions are discussed. First, Lia expresses her view that the happiness, or the potential lack of it, that her husband experiences in his own career plays a role between them, but this is not something that is in her hands. Then another man, Peter, outlines what can wane men's happiness in female breadwinners (more information about him is in the previous section Distribution of Housework and Childcare). He adds to what emerged during the interviews

with breadwinning women, namely that the state of mind of men is crucial and that open communication about the unconventional arrangements at home is vital. Even though there were only a few male participants that I had access to for their side of the stories, there is enough evidence to say that space is needed for both the man and the woman in these households to find their way into atypical arrangements at home; the use of outsourcing provides this space, which is evident from how some female breadwinners have applied hired labour to resolve their household conflicts.

It should not be underestimated that becoming a female breadwinner during a relationship has the potential to bring about an unfavourable situation at home. Lia reflects by saying:

I have not made a career to bother him or something. I made those steps because I wanted to, and it came on my path and I went for it. But every time he was confronted with: 'well, I am still just here and I am still just doing this'. And we are actually still working on that now.' [INT: Would it have been different if he would earn more.] No, I think it would have been more equal, if he had a career too. If he had earned more, I think that our relationship would be, crazy to say, equal. [INT: I would like to comment on what you said: if he had made a career. Can I assume that you mean that he has not made any career?] In the standard view of what is making a career, he has not made a career. If you look at the salary; it has remained the same for a long time. If you look at the level; it has remained the same for a long time. And he does not even like what he's doing.

Lia recalled conversations with her husband in which she confronts him with the things he has not achieved for himself, but not because she thinks that he should have achieved them.

When I say: 'I do not care what someone does', it is as if it does not interest me, but it is not that. I am concerned that someone does something that makes that person happy. That's the first.

Happiness for men in female breadwinner relationships can be challenged from a specific angle that perhaps not everyone knows or dares to describe, but Peter brought this angle to light. In the context of the division of childcare discussed earlier, he shared why he felt the urge to catch up in his earning ability to provide for his breadwinner partner since the birth of their first child. Peter said:

She doesn't see herself dependent on me. She doesn't see it that way at all. And some women do, especially if they don't earn anything. But because my partner makes money, she doesn't depend on me at all, and, and that's sometimes, and I can say, it's a little scary for me too. Because basically, she can leave tomorrow if she wants. If she likes someone better, well, then she's gone, because she doesn't depend on me at all. And I think that's often a kind of fear in men. A woman can leave if she earns well. Why would she stay with that man? (Peter, 30s, student, income group A)

The reasoning is that the more she earns compared to him, the easier it would be for her to walk away from the relationship because she is independent of him. This makes it understandable that Peter wants to express his added value in the family by increasing his financial capacity. Whether it makes sense or not, if one feels scared to lose the other because of independent financial means, this is a real fear for the relationship to deal with. Having said that, this reasoning also comes across as being rooted in the typical pattern of male breadwinner households in which the financial dependence of women is the norm. The idea that some men want women to be dependent on them so they do not leave is both sad and scary. On one hand, financial dependence is known for being the reason that women do not

leave their partners, including violent partners, so in a way Peter is right. On the other hand, many men stay with women even though he is financially independent from her; women do not expect men to be tied to them through financial dependence, at least that is not what I found from this study's sample of women.

The success of undoing gender when the woman out-earns her partner during the relationship relies on the cooperation of both partners, whereby the self-evaluation of men about their financial capacity and careers can be detrimental to their relationships. However, the women quoted above have spoken supportively about the work life of their partners. In order to continue in this positive vein, I explore solutions to conflicts and assess possibilities based on Ellis' household. Ellis and her husband were at about the same level in their careers when they met. At the time of the interview, her husband was out of work after a streak of unfortunate employment opportunities, while her career was going very well. She said:

In the context of work-life balance, I am going like a rocket and he isn't, I think that sounds very appealing. There are people who say "oh nice, he does everything for you". That really has its downside though, because when I come home and where I have seen the moon approaching with my rocket, you get hopeless stories about the cauliflowers that are on special offer in the supermarket (...). It's not so black and white, but it just is. (...) And you notice that if someone becomes unemployed, they become more and more lax. Apart from the fact that you can do the shopping, when you get home it's a big mess that you really think: "Seriously? Still my plates? They are still there?"

Later in the interview she said that the worst thing about her husband not having a job, was that they had had a dog walking service five times a week and a cleaning lady twice a week who also ironed everything. She cancelled the dog walking service and joked that she had to keep the cleaner, saying: "Believe me, it's better."

In Ellis' point of view, we can find a possible conflict solution: outsourcing. Her decision seems to be based on the frustration with what she sees as laxity on her husband's part fuelled by his unemployment, but shifting hired support around household tasks could create space for female breadwinner couples that struggle with their new positions in the household to adjust. If affordable, outsourcing has the potential to offer couples household conflict solutions that are satisfying to all (Whillans et al., 2017), provided both parties give something to work with. Lia:

At the end of our relationship, I said: yes, you actually have everything. You have two healthy children; you have a nice wife. We have a nice house, financially it goes well, you have everything. His reaction was: 'Yes, but maybe I do not want everything'.

Well, what am I to do then? What am I to do then?

Lia and I fell silent for a moment, for me it was partly because of the realisation that despite my aim to find a variety of solutions or perhaps even a one-size-fits-all solution, the hard reality is that some relationships will not or no longer benefit from this. The moment of powerlessness on my part was replaced by the strength I experienced to continue unearthing the challenges that female breadwinner couples face, based on Lia's valuable openness.

4.4 Conclusion

Female breadwinners get more than they bargained for in the household –meaning: more money leads to more demands. A logical outcome would be that bringing in the most money results in fewer demands at home as it seems to for men in traditional male-breadwinner households, especially based on the most common resource-based frameworks: the relative resources, absolute resources and time availability approach (Gupta, 2007; Killewald & Gough, 2010; Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021; Van Damme & Dykstra, 2018). These frameworks rely on the idea that the partner with more economic resources and with less time outside paid work is

the one who is able to negotiate a better division of housework. In practice, the frameworks do not always give enough consideration to the significance of gendered divisions in the home and the mechanisms of doing gender, but one of these frameworks does have the most potential to relieve women from their gendered demands at home. In line with the absolute resources approach, the women participating in this study have a high ability in autonomous decision-making, which enables them to outsource their housework so their “second shift” is reduced.

Indeed, hiring domestic support offers breadwinning women relief, and what transpires is that regarding high-status women embodying the “Lean In” ethos (Sandberg, 2013) can be overlooked that their privilege of employing others for domestic chores may potentially exacerbate inequalities in the domestic labour market and ignore work-family policies for all socio-economic backgrounds. Also noteworthy is that women tend to hire other women for this. Judith Rollins (1987) wrote decades ago in her study on the relationship between women employers and employees that: “in no other labor arrangement is it typical for both employer and employee to be female” (pp, 6-7). These households that outsource tasks are keeping gender divided; the men are not taking on a traditionally female roles because most of the work gets passed between women rather than between men and women, according to the participating women who report that their domestic workers are women too. This is not to say that these couples are not undoing gender at all. Cooking, a task that is traditionally more associated with women, has become degendered in female breadwinner households as many participants report that their male partners cook most of the time. Thanks to a change in perception throughout the decades that cooking is also a recreational activity and less associated with femininity, these men more often find their way in the kitchen. With regard to cleaning, there is little noticeable change in perception compared to the conventional concept, which makes this time-consuming and traditionally feminine task to be an unpromising candidate for degendering within female breadwinner households.

Perception is the key word in the discussion of undoing gender among female breadwinner couples and gardening as a household task unveils the ambiguous nature of gender. It is all in the eye of the beholder whether this task is female, male or gender neutral. Considering that men and women do different types of gardening and have different attitudes towards it, they are doing gender. Gardening sets itself apart from other household chores because it is in another social place and it is less gendered compared to cooking or cleaning, causing people to think and talk about it in another way. Yet gardening is complicated as an activity within female breadwinner households. Gardening is not sharply delineated and has the potential to be disassociated from housework: it is relaxation, pleasure, an activity that can be qualified as leisure. In the ambiguity of this task lies the challenge that it is perceived differently in every female breadwinner household interviewed, but beyond that challenge looms on the horizon that gardening as a housework task is quite susceptible to undoing gender.

Childcare is distinct from household tasks, but has not been spared from challenges in undoing gender among the participants of this study. Behind closed doors, childcare in the broad sense of the word is subjected to the traditional view that women are primarily responsible for the day-to-day care of the child, while the man paves the way to financially take care of the child and mother. This is despite the fact that the woman already is the highest earning partner and that she has expressed her wishes for her partner to be more involved in daily childcare. However, if the man believes that childcare implies him pursuing better financial abilities according to traditional lines, then one of the outcomes could be that the woman feels she has no choice but to take on the daily care (such as with Peter and Lily) and possibly make use of outsourcing. In a narrower sense of the word, in female breadwinner couples where both are more closely involved with childcare, it turns out that women devote the most time to physical childcare. Not only that: a previous study by Pinho and Gaunt (2019) indicates that households in which the mother is the main caregiver are less successful in

undoing gender than when the father is the primary caregiver; in the former case tasks are performed more according to the prescribed gender norms and in the latter case more according to the family role. It is plausible that female breadwinners are often not even aware of how involved they are as caregivers, because they experience their tasks differently than men. Caregiving does not only concern the care of children but the care of others in the home by performing household tasks. Exploring female breadwinner couples uncovered that the most crucial difference in experience between men and women is in the experience of leisure. From this I argue that a great gain can be made in undoing gender by addressing the complex role of leisure in household chores and childcare.

For female breadwinners, gaining a broader understanding that both domestic work and leisure experience are gendered, together with having the financial resources available for outsourcing, are no guarantee for avoiding conflict situations. There may be resistance to adapting the division of household tasks to the advancement of the women's career; resistance that cannot always be foreseen or expected from the start of the relationship. A previous study indicates that early communication in the relationship about the division of labour makes women more satisfied than if they had not had this conversation, but I argue that the impact of becoming a female breadwinner during the relationship is not easy to foresee from the beginning of the relationship, which leads to undoing gender being the biggest challenge for these households. The success of undoing gender in household tasks for female breadwinners depends on the communication during the change to the female breadwinner household model and the ability to deal with how the man seems to evaluate his position. Here too I bring outsourcing to light; if financially feasible, hired support could be shifted around the household to give both partners the space to adapt to their changed positions in the household. Undoing gender is not only about the out-earned partner performing the tasks in favour of the woman's well-being, but that his well-being matters too.

In managing household conflicts, it is good to keep in mind that bargaining confirming gender norms is invisible, but if the norms are reversed that justification is needed. Gender thus becomes visible when gender norms are atypical. In many households there is therefore a lot of silence about the division of household tasks, but a change means that the woman would have to challenge the gendered division of the household, which may not be safe for her relationship and the stability of her family. Yet I am not advocating that women continue in an uncertain or undecided state or condition, nor that women should decide to give up their careers. In a last quote below from Lia about the influence of her progress in her career, it appears that doing nothing for these women is not an option either, which is the reason in this thesis to further explore the concept of undoing gender in other areas in the next chapter. Lia said:

You know what it is? I never thought in advance that I was going to make a career. We started at the same level. (...) And then I found out that I could do this and that, and I am good at it. And then there were opportunities. So, we have not started with: how are we going to do this? Because I did not know myself that I had this in me. So, it has grown. Actually, you might have to make agreements about development. Because, I now know better than before, you never stay the same. You start with each other, but you do not stay the same. So how do you ensure that the development of one, does not hold back the other. And that you can do that together. And I do not have the answer to that. Because I did not succeed either.

Reflecting on the participant's narratives, this chapter unveils a multifaceted portrait of gender dynamics in high-earning female households, illustrating the ongoing struggle for gender equity amidst modern feminism's complexities (hooks, 2013; Rahali, 2021, 22; Rottenberg, 2018). The experiences of these couples add depth to understandings of the tensions between individual empowerment and systemic change (Arruzza et al., 2019; Martinez, 2019). In taking

a closer look at these couples, a noteworthy pattern emerges, namely: no matter how successful the women are or how much money they make, they are not shielded from the persistent pressure to conform to conventional gender roles, and this showcases something important. Even with the strides made in women's achievements that should, theoretically, wield significant influence, there remains a pervasive tendency for individuals like Lia, Lily, Sissi, Lieke, Monique, and Zwaantje to feel confined by entrenched gender norms. These norms, deeply rooted in societal perceptions of caregiving and domestic labour (Kluwer et al., 1997; DeRose et al., 2019), reflect the sentiments expressed by the participants in this study. Their experiences reflect broader patterns of gender inequality, aligning with the seminal works of Hays (1998) and O'Reilly & Ruddick (2009). Particularly, the arrival of children and the phenomenon of intensive mothering, as expounded upon in the literature, emphasises the heightened demands and expectations placed on mothers, resulting in a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities (Hays, 1998; O'Reilly & Ruddick, 2009). Drawing from feminist literature, deliberated in Chapter 2, this chapter illuminates the complex negotiations of gender roles within the private sphere, echoing considerations on household management and division of labour. Outsourcing domestic work and the evolving discussions of fatherhood and masculinity underscore broader patterns of gender inequality, while shining a light on the challenges of achieving gender equity, even in the allocation of leisure time (Derks, 2019; Hays, 1998; O'Reilly & Ruddick, 2009). Moreover, the narratives offer insights into the strategies employed to manage conflicts within these households, showing that the balancing act required to navigate conflicting expectations and obligations is not an easy task, with possible negative consequences lurking. In essence, the narratives shared by Lia, Lily, Sissi, Lieke, Mitch, Peter, Monique, Zwaantje, and others, emphasise the pressing need for challenging norms and advocating for equality, resonating deeply with critical discourse on

neoliberal feminism (Fraser, 2022; Grace, 2022; hooks, 2013), calling us to actively engage in reshaping our homes, relationships, and communities for the better.

Chapter 5: Doing Gender in Financial Tasks

Following my discussion of doing gender in domestic work in Chapter 4, I now turn to another aspect of the way couples do gender at home and that is in their financial management. This matters because financial conflicts are likely to be more problematic, more pervasive, recurrent and remain unresolved than other kinds of conflicts in relationships (Cohen & Strong, 2021, 295; see also: Papp et al., 2009). Every couple, regardless of their income, may experience money to have a negative impact on their relationships (Dew, 2015). In order to investigate the role of finances within female breadwinner couples, this chapter begins by examining the financial decisions that the couple Eva and Dre have made in the section Financial Management Styles. Then, Kim shares about her household in the section Distribution of Finance. This is followed by the Financial Conflict Management section which mainly focuses on Olivia's household. Although Olivia and Kim's partners have not been interviewed, these women provide ample insights into their financial tasks at home.

Building upon literature from Chapter 2, this chapter examines the complex connections between gender, income, and relationship dynamics. The Chapter particularly draws on key concepts from the literature on resource theory and financial decision making. Lyonette and Crompton (2015) assert an interactive relationship between the doing gender approach and relative resource theory, while Dunatchik's (2023) nuanced findings posit the variability in the impact of relative income rank on financial decision-making within couples. The diverse narratives and discussions around income disparity that I explore, underscore a delicate balance between success and autonomy (Kluwer et al., 1997; Meester, 2020a; Vollebregt, 2020). Traditional gender dynamics persist even when the female partner earns more, reflecting the possible influence of hegemonic ideals (Connell, 1987; 2003; Foreman, 1999). The reluctance of men to fully accept the woman's income as shared family resources, as seen in couples like Celina and Greetje with their partners, aligns with broader concepts of

“doing gender” and “doing family” (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Finch, 2007; Barber, 1993). From a feminist standpoint, unpaid domestic work is undervalued and needs to be re-evaluated (Simonton, 2006; De Masi, 2014; Federici, 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 1989), which in the findings is made clear. The exploration also considers men’s perceptions of wealth, tied to financial independence and gendered expectations (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Das, 2022; Lawrence-Bourne, 2018).

The sections in this chapter highlight that female breadwinner couples rarely have only a joint account and if they do have a joint account, it is often in combination with separate accounts. I argue that being happy about the financial arrangements is not only increased by having joint accounts but it also goes the other way around: couples who are happy together pool all of their money. Nevertheless, the biggest contributor to the happiness of female breadwinner couples interviewed are substantial conversations and the arrangements that result from this. It is common for male breadwinners couples to have only a joint account, but this rarity among female breadwinner couples does not necessarily mean that they are undoing gender in their financial tasks. There are conflict situations discussed that serve as examples of the experience of a large part of the female participants, revealing that gendered expectations are still present and become more visible when they are acted upon. These couples still do gender, but in less traditional ways.

5.1 Financial Management Styles: Eva and Dre

According to Van Raaij and colleagues (2020), there are four financial management styles that can be distinguished as: syncratic/joint, male-dominant, female-dominant, and autonomous financial management. In the syncratic style, the partners have a joint bank account and take most financial decisions together, whereas in the male/female-dominant styles the male or the female takes the main financial decisions. In the autonomous style, both

partners have their own bank accounts and make their own decisions. While the basic premise in these four management styles assumes that the organisation of a bank account goes hand in hand with who makes the decisions, this can change during the life course within the household, for example when having children or in the event of a decrease in income. In Western countries, women's involvement in household financial decisions has increased in recent decades and most couples make joint decisions about their finances, but women in families are still less likely to report responsibility for household finances decisions than men, which is possible when considering that both partners can have influence on financial decisions even if the influences of male and female are not necessarily equal (Kim et al., 2017, 254). In this section, the focus is on how couples discussed their finances by taking the arrangements of Eva and Dre as an example. Their case shows that a couple's management style is an effective tool for (un)doing gender, whereby they consciously chose to do gender between them. I argue that for female breadwinner couples, managing income disparities are best achieved by having both separate and joint accounts.

Eva is a practicing psychologist and is married to Dre who is a PhD student. I inquired about how they organised their financial responsibilities. Eva said:

The fixed expenses, which are most of the expenses, are debited from his account, except for my own fixed costs like health insurance and such. I already asked him several times “shouldn't I transfer something”? Because he handles the fixed costs, I pay the groceries a little more often. Because yes, I also earn more, so I assume that he would need something from me (Eva, 30s, psychologist, income group C)

I asked Eva how it came about that he pays all the fixed costs. She said:

Well, simply the bank where we have our mortgage is the bank he is with and I'm at another bank. So that's how that happened. And we also have our insurance policies,

such as car, household effects, all those things are also with that same bank. That's why it's all written off to him.

In a separate interview Dre described his view on the organisation of their financial responsibilities:

I pay the mortgage, all the utility bills, taxes, that sort of thing. (...) At the moment, almost all of my income is spent on fixed costs. She earns more and has fewer fixed costs. So, she is also saving more now. But since we regard it as joint money, I don't care. [INT: How did the discussion on this go?] We haven't discussed that very much, it's more that I'm more into the administrative stuff. So, I have the concluded energy contracts, so yes, in the process I will put those in my name. Mortgage, I also put in my name. We haven't really talked about it. (...) I'm now thinking that maybe I just like doing this (...) Maybe because I'm a little more into the business stuff. Perhaps also because I like to take responsibility when it comes to major expenses, including the fixed costs. (Dre, 20s, PhD student, income group B)

Dre's description of the organisation of their financial responsibilities starts out similar to how Eva talks about this, but below is an elaboration that unearths the other layers behind their report on the couple's financial responsibilities.

Dre thinks that in taking on the major expenses, that he has been influenced by the image of traditional families where the husband is the breadwinner and responsible for the money for the family. He said: "So that might be part of it, that I've always seen the man taking charge, taking responsibility." Notably, Dre also shared that his financial responsibilities in the household are inspired by the guidelines of a book called *The Way of the Superior Man*. He explained:

It's a book by David Deida, a typical American book which is a bit stereotypical, but it did help me a lot. That book says: 'We've had the emancipation movement, so man and woman are equal on a lot of points and now they are also doing the same things; the man went to care, the woman went to work and to make a career. But now it is time to rediscover the individuality of the man and the individuality of the woman.' That's the author's take on it.

I asked Dre how he thinks this fits in with the fact that his wife earns more than he does. `he said:

I don't mind that in itself. I'm not necessarily looking to make the most money. I think my self-esteem in our relationship stems most from the fact that I take some responsibility for our finances.

Eva also cited the book that Dre mentioned as one of the sources from which she draws inspiration:

And then also a book by David Deida. But that was on the advice of my husband. Because he had read that book and really liked it... and I just had to read the women's version once. I've also read his version, but the women's version is also good in itself.

I asked her to describe her role in her relationship in terms of femininity and masculinity:

When we got into a relationship (...) I was really a bit into being independent. And I kind of had in my head an image of being independent: that I have to be capable to manage all of my own affairs, and that men and women are truly equal. He thought differently about that. In the beginning we sometimes argued about it, because I thought that his way of thinking was a bit stupid. Anyway, we talked about it and read about it, and so on... and then I got the impression that masculinity and femininity are two different things. That it is simply not crazy that as a woman you are a bit more

dependent, and that as a man you are perhaps a bit more stable, or ... Yes, it is a bit of those stereotypes that quickly sound wrong, but that's not how I mean it, I think...

[INT: What do you mean?] That it both has its strength. It does him good when I'm feminine, in the sense of being close to my feelings, and showing and expressing this. He likes that, so to speak. And I like it when he is there for me a bit, and that he is stable.

Dre and Eva's similarity in reporting on their financial responsibilities is due to the fact that they pursue and maintain a traditional male-female dynamic, despite Eva being the highest-earning partner. For Dre, it is less about who brings in the most money, but more about who pays the most of the household costs. Taking the lead in managing the couple's finances is constitutive of taking on a masculine role in the household according to Dre, who speaks freely about his financial management and reflects openly on what influences his self-esteem. For this female breadwinner couple, an agreement to adopt traditionally gendered financial management roles, amid an unconventional household model, is reflected in the relatively high degree of commonality in how they report individually on their financial management style. Their reporting is in contrast to literature which suggests there are differences in how male and female partners report their responsibilities in financial tasks. An American study reveals that half of men say they are primarily responsible for paying taxes and tracking investments, but women report these responsibilities are more evenly distributed (Fonseca et al., 2012) and a Dutch study shows that 71 per cent of women indicate that financial decisions are taken jointly, while 59 per cent of men say they make joint financial decisions. This could mean that women give their husbands or male partners the idea that they are in charge, or that men find it more difficult to say that they fulfil their traditional roles differently (Van Dongen, 2020). Men could be left with a feeling that they have failed to fulfil the role ascribed to their gender, which includes being independent, autonomous and

better than others (Josephs et al., 1992; Ratliff & Oishi, 2013). In addition, as research shows that certain job-related performance effects are known to influence the quality of committed romantic relationships and that dissatisfaction can be heightened among couples where the woman has a higher occupational status than the man (Beach et al., 1996; Byrne & Barling, 2017b; Hornung & McCullough, 1981), it is therefore possible that couples want to conceal a high-earning woman's income and financial independence and that they might present a different view of the responsibilities in financial tasks that they have among themselves.

Dre sheds light on the propensity of males and females reporting differently on their financial tasks: "It's a very general statement that I can't prove, but I think men like to take responsibility or take charge when it comes to financial matters and determining the direction of where you are going together". Regarding his own relationship Dre said:

I also like to take the lead in determining things and I also find it important for my self-image. That's partly where I get my self-respect, my pride, my appreciation. It gives me a good feeling to set direction, to take charge, to take responsibility, or at least the end responsibility. We decide a lot of things ourselves, but in the end I'm the one who takes the decision. And I notice that Eva likes that too, and that she can relax more and can lean more on me.

Dre makes a clear link between carrying financial responsibilities and fulfilling masculine standards. Despite not being the main breadwinner, he strives to live up to the expectation that men have primary financial responsibility by taking on most financial duties. Not being able to replicate this expectation, Dre says, would have negative consequences, which he believes applies not only to him but to many men. Further information on how they arranged their finances is that Dre and Eva have separate accounts, but they are thinking of having a joint account. Dre said about this:

In principle, we have separate cash flows. We are quite pragmatic about it. So, if we have to buy a new couch, we are like ‘well who has the money for it?’ and that person who has the money for it pays for it. We just consider it as joint money and we do want to make a joint account, because it is now also a bit of a hassle.

According to the literature, taking syncratic/joint decisions as partners is beneficial for the quality of financial management and having a joint instead of a separate bank account correlates with fewer financial problems (Van Raaij et al., 2020). Joint bank accounts are more likely to occur among male breadwinning couples than in dual-income or female breadwinning couples (LeBaron, 2019, 7), but were an arrangement that was used or had been used by a number of the couples participating in my study.

Kim, a managing director, said: “We do not have separate finances. So, everything is just one pile. And we have no agreements about that. We’ve been together for so long too, that’s just joint money.” Lia, a director at a municipality, and her husband also had a joint account before they recently separated. Olivia, a managing director and her husband had decided to switch to having separate accounts because she was spending more than her partner from what is left over in the joint account that they have together, but that switch never happened.

Other interviewees have a combination of separate and joint bank accounts, such as Lieke, who is a head of a department at a large Dutch company. She explains that when she and her husband got married, they both had their separate accounts and one joint account. Now they keep a certain amount in their own separate account and the rest of their money comes together in the joint account: “That has brought us peace of mind, that you have an amount that you simply have at your disposal. You then never have to start the conversation about: ‘should you have bought that jacket?’”. I asked Nathan if it would be possible for them to only have a joint account? Nathan replied:

That's a good question, because you also have the feeling that you want something from yourself. For example, we are not married and it intuitively feels like something that is connected to marriage, because then we are completely together. But I also think it is important that you are together on the one hand, but on the other hand you are your own person.

He explained that he believes that his partner Celina has a more relaxed attitude about this because she earns more, whereas he thinks more consciously about cultivating his own person due to his financial position in the relationship; in Financial Conflict Management, the last section of this chapter, their money matters are discussed from a different angle.

Couples with only separate accounts are Ellis, a partner at a company, and her husband who is a marketing professional. They do not have a joint account anymore as when they did, they worked with receipts to show who has bought what so that they can settle the costs with each other, which she experienced as laborious; they switched over to having separate accounts. Peter, a student and his partner, Lily, a senior manager, do not have a joint account either. They have always kept an Excel file as aid in settling their costs. The only costs they do not settle with each other are groceries for their toddler. Peter said, "We never really thought about a joint account or about openness in what she really has or what I really have. No, we can pay what we can pay and that's fine." Lulu, a partner at a company, arranged a different approach at home; she gives her partner an allowance.

I transfer an amount to his accounts that he actually can run the household with. And we both take out of my account once a month an amount that we both just can spend for ourselves (...) not to be dependent on each other. And what he earns, he just keeps for himself. (Lulu, 50s, Firm Partner, income group F)

Many participants were married at the time of the interview or had been previously married, and among them there are often separate accounts, whether or not in combination with a joint

account. Among the participants who only have separate accounts, it is difficult to determine whether this is related to a couple's relationship status, given that cohabitants generally do not pool their incomes together (Cohen & Strong, 2021, 295). In essence, it seems that only joint accounts are scarce among couples. If couples do have a joint account, then this is most common among married people, but then the joint accounts are in addition to the separate accounts that the couples have.

The above shows that couples manage their finances as follows: separately, jointly, a combination of separate and joint accounts, and with Lulu it is noticeable that there is a variation in what it means to have joint or separate accounts. This can be seen most strongly in the case of Lulu and her partner, who only have separate accounts. Not only does she transfer an allowance for him to run the household, but he can also take spending money from her account, which makes her account not so separate. Likewise, joint accounts may not be as "shared" in the exact way other couples put it. Practice thus shows a wider variety of the types of financial management styles that are known at first glance. Also emerging from among the participants, as we see with Lulu, Ellis, and the couples Dre and Eva, Lily and Peter, is that having separate accounts helps in avoid arguments because this has as the benefit of "not to be dependent on each other" as Lulu said, but takes more planning as it is "also a bit of a hassle" according to Dre. On the other hand, the female participants Kim, Lia and Olivia show that having only a joint account is easier to manage because "everything is just one pile", reported by Kim. The flipside is that full insight into the other's spending habits can lead to resentment, especially if one partner earns more than the other. Managing income disparities would then be best achieved by having both separate and joint accounts, just like Lieke and other female breadwinners do, with the ease of keeping track of household finances that comes with having a joint bank account, while not having to deal with the unequal financial relationship that the woman's higher earning power creates. To further map

how the earnings and financial arrangements of female breadwinners relate to negotiations at home, besides the way in which we have seen that these couples manage their finances, it is also important to know how the financial tasks are divided. This is discussed below.

5.2 Distribution of Finance: Margaret and Aart

An examination of the ways female breadwinner couples distribute their financial management tasks, means looking at the role that gender plays in the distribution of these tasks. Assuming that there are two types of financial tasks: (1) Routine tasks, such as paying monthly bills, and (2) non-routine tasks such as managing savings and investments, a study found that: “There is no evidence that deviation from the male-breadwinner model influences responsibility for either routine or non-routine household finance tasks” (L’Esperance, 2017, 16). L’Esperance (2017) goes on to say: “Women who earn more in a household with a disadvantage, whether in the form of low measured financial literacy or low income, are significantly less likely to be responsible for either routine or non-routine financial tasks” (ibid., 16). In other words, while relative income rank has an effect on who will make financial decisions, the strength of that effect varies by absolute household income. Given this difference within female breadwinner households, below is a discussion of the disparity in income category between the female breadwinners and their partners (see Table 3 for the meaning behind income brackets A to I), starting with what came out of the conversations with the couple Margaret and Aart, and then with Kim who shared the experience of herself and her husband.

Margaret was introduced in Chapter 4 in the Household Bargaining Frames section, where she indicated that she had difficulty seeing her husband as a houseman. In the interview she outlined further how her career went, how she met her husband, and how his career went. On how their work positions related to each other, Margaret said:

Actually, it was completely equivalent. I think we had almost similar incomes with similar responsibilities. [INT: Was there any perspective on who would eventually earn more?] Well, I was a bit younger than he was, but there was actually no idea then that such a big difference would arise. [INT: Did something change when you started earning more than him?] Well, I think it took quite a while to find the right balance again. In the end, there have been times when I have earned ten times what he earned. (...) We finally had to decide that we cannot combine two careers. We were juxtaposing the agendas when the kids were little and because I was the highest earner, I thought my agenda was more important than his, which was not justified in view of his work and the responsibilities that he had. (...) For a long time, he started doing less work (...) and eventually, as it is so nicely called, he took early retirement. (Margaret, 50s, chief compliance officer, income group G)

Margaret also recounted that her husband had a different view of his early retirement, namely that he thought much more about pursuing a hobby outside the home, and that a great deal of effort has gone into getting it to the point where the division of household chores would be largely his responsibility. As for the division of finances, Margaret described this on the basis of how they have arranged their joint and separate accounts:

I deposit my entire income and he deposits his entire income into one account. And that's where all the bonuses are, everything we get goes to that account. Then I deposit from that account an equal amount to his account and to my accounts, and that is pocket money to do fun things with (...). So, both of our entire income is simply joint money. (...) But I do have full control over that. I also honestly think that I might have accepted it less if he was in charge of it. [INT: Why is that?] Well, I guess it is due to the fact that my contribution is many times greater and that I can have control over what happens to it.

Aart gave a similar depiction of their arrangement of joint and separate accounts, namely that they receive income in the joint account and a small amount goes to the separate accounts:

Most of it is joint and both of us have our private account too, but the amounts on those private accounts are small in comparison (...) [INT: Who does what with the joint account?] Margaret does everything; she has a financial background, so she also does the private finances. (Aart, 60s, retired, income group C)

Like Margaret, Aart also expressed during the interview his contentment with their financial arrangement and he added that it makes sense given her background. Further insight from Aart's perspective: "Since I have retired, I have a lot more time of course" and "we still have young children, so it is also nice that when they come home their father welcome them with a cup of tea", which is made possible due to "the shining career that Margaret has made". Hence, for this couple, the agreement for him to enjoy early retirement and for her to govern their finances stems from the fact that she has been earning significantly more than he does, resulting in that they are in income brackets G and C, respectively. The insight that Margaret provided, namely that there is a relationship between, on the one hand, the full financial responsibilities she has and, on the other hand, the income she earns compared to him, is a reason to see whether this relationship is also found between other couples.

Kim and her husband are in the income brackets I respectively A, but it has not always been like this for them either. Kim described:

When we first met, I was completely broke, (...) I also had zero income and at that time my husband paid for everything. I also studied for a long time with zero guilders and he paid for everything. Then I started earning very well, and at a certain point I started paying everything. It always went first from his money, and then after a while from my income, but that went very naturally. (Kim, 40s, board member, income group I)

Due to their age difference of nearly two decades, her husband's income now consists of an AOW, the Dutch basic state pension, while she is in the middle of her career. She said:

He earns nothing now. I mean, he's retired now. Yes, of course he now has his AOW. But he has no income, other than the AOW. We are well. So those fixed costs are simply agreed from the joint account. But there is no division. We have never had this either.

As Kim explained that since her husband no longer has an income and that she does all the financial tasks, she emphasised that she involves him with decisions regarding large expenses. She went on to say:

If I'm being honest, I like the division of our roles. It wouldn't suit me to live with a man who had my part. So, if the roles were reversed, I don't think it would work as easily as it does now. [INT: Why not?] I wouldn't want to depend on anyone else for finances. So, what is not so important to him is important to me, to be independent financially.

When asked if she could elaborate on his dependency, she replied:

Well, my husband is independent. He is also not very attached to a beautiful house, etcetera. He enjoys it. But, he's a different person than me. I don't think he feels dependent (...) But yes, in all honesty, if my husband was the one with my job and I was the artist, ooh, then I would be a different person too. I would find it difficult to depend on anyone else for my finances. Yes, so in that sense he is stronger than me.

Kim praises her husband for being stronger than she would be if the roles were reversed, but precisely because her arrangement is considered unconventional it is interesting to see where he stands in this. About how her husband sees her as a breadwinner, she says:

When I started earning good money, I think he really liked it. He never had a problem with me developing very quickly in status and money, and surpassing him in a certain way in a certain social hierarchy. He just liked that. (...) But I do think he found it difficult at a certain point, when he no longer had an income and he sometimes said that: I can no longer buy you a present, yes, a present from your own money. He thought that was a pity.

Kim and her husband have in common with Margaret and Aart that their husbands are retired and that there is an age difference, but the unequal division of financial tasks has to do with their income difference. Other couples are reviewed below, where the division of financial tasks is discussed in the light of income brackets.

Ellis and her husband are in income brackets G respectively D. She says that he pays for gas, water, lights and electricity, while she covers the children's clothes and family groceries; Sara and her partner are in income brackets F and C. She explains that they do most of the things together but "he does most of the administrative stuff at home, for example with insurances and retirement plans" and it is also her partner that is the most responsible for the groceries. Merel and her husband, income brackets E respectively D, share paying the bills and also the direction and execution for larger expenses almost equally. Lily and her partner Peter, income brackets D and A, do all of their financial tasks separately, also when it comes to grocery shopping. Peter said: "Even though she has the income, she does her own shopping, I do my shopping and that is separate in cupboards and in the fridge." Eva and her husband Dre are in income brackets C and B. Above they shared that he takes on most of the financial responsibilities and uses his money to pay their joint bills. His wife also mentioned that he does 80 per cent of the shopping, but she said "in the end, I think we are jointly responsible, but he may have the last word a little more often" and Dre said "in principle, we decide on everything together, but it is only that I am ultimately responsible which means that

I make the decision”. Although they express that they both decide all financial matters together, Dre is the one who is in control of how their finances are distributed.

Among the participants that are mentioned here, there are indications that women in higher income categories have more say in various financial areas because of their greater contribution to the household income, which resonates with a European study that says: “female breadwinners are significantly more likely to make decisions about major outlays compared to women who earn less than their partner” (Klesment & Van Bavel, 2016, 18). Also, most of these female participants are involved in routine financial decisions, for example about shopping and purchasing clothes, but not to the extent that they do this more than their male partners. This corresponds to another European study that “women reported making more daily household spending decisions, while men reported making the larger household financial decisions” (Kim et al., 2017, 254). Grocery shopping as a financial task appears to be more gender-neutral than gendered among the female breadwinners of this study.

Perhaps more differences may arise among participants who have a large gap between their incomes, such as with Kim and her partner. Lulu and her partner are in income brackets F and A respectively. Earlier on it was discussed that she transfers an amount to his account that he can run the household with. She decides on the small and large expenses and has done so from the beginning of their relationship. “He certainly could not earn what I earn now, but he could have been completely independent (...) we have chosen not to do that”. Hebo is in income bracket E and her estranged husband is in income bracket A. She mentioned that: “His financial contribution was that he paid half of the mortgage in the beginning. That’s it. He didn’t pay anything else because he couldn’t afford it. At one point, he also just stopped paying the mortgage.”

There are several scenarios for female breadwinner couples when it comes to the

division of financial tasks and the income differences between the partners. For those who have a small income difference between them, namely that there are no more than two income brackets between the partners, we see that partners such as Lily and Peter have completely separated their financial tasks from each other. Other couples share their financial responsibilities as equally as possible such as Merel and her husband, and Olivia and her husband, but in the latter household the man makes the final decisions. It seems rare for the man to take on the full financial duties in female breadwinner households, although Eva and Dre's household comes close; while they discuss all financial matters together, they both report that he takes on most of the financial duties, including buying family groceries. Based on the idea that women do this last financial task as a routine household spending decision more frequently than men do, breadwinning women would also be assigned this task more often. However, this was not a striking phenomenon among the participants of this study. A stronger indication for a certain financial distribution among the female breadwinners seems to lie elsewhere. For those who have an income difference of three or more brackets between themselves and their partners – which is the case for Margaret, Hebo, Lulu and Kim – it seems that, amongst my participants at least, these breadwinning women tend to be responsible for financial tasks across the board. This suggests that the higher the female breadwinner's income is compared to her partner's income, the more likely she is to be responsible for both routine and non-routine financial tasks but this is an area that would need further research. Furthermore, it appears that housework tasks and financial tasks are not neatly separable and that understanding the negotiations and distribution of housework helps us to understand some of the practices that underpin financial duties, which also makes it better possible to manage any financial conflicts.

5.3 Financial Conflict Management: Celina and Nathan

Couples may find themselves not being on the same page when it comes to money matters, which can become a source of conflict. Since conflict over money is one of the most commonly cited topics of disagreements within relationships (Shebib & Cupach, 2018; see also: Oggins, 2013) it is good to examine how couples manage this source of conflict and how gendered expectations and behaviour apply to it. This discussion came forth from a few women who mentioned matter-of-factly that the earnings they bring in are not regarded by their partner as “their money”; as money that is for both of them. There was always a sign of disappointment when these women mentioned this, which led me to ask further about this issue. For the women who mentioned this, this topic turned out to be one of the most difficult to discuss from their partner’s point of view which made me want to avoid it and not to rely too much on the women speaking on their partner’s behalf on this point. Given this, I found it all the more important to hear about this topic from both sides. For that reason, this subsection draws only on interviews where both partners participated in the study.

These conversations unveil that men have difficulty with their female partner’s wish to see her earnings as her own money, and that if these men were the main breadwinner, they would want their female partner to see their income as shared money. I argue that the idea of traditional male breadwinner model, where the men are deemed responsible for economic provision for the whole household through employment (Nadim, 2015) is the underlying reason for this, despite the atypical arrangement between the partners. For couples, undoing gender results in ensuring that no matter which gender earns more, both partners should feel free to consider the earnings of the other as joint income. The communication between couples that is needed for this, is looked into in the subsection Possible Conflict Resolutions; Olivia speaks on behalf of herself and her partner that constructive conflict is the best way to go about money matters, but it also emerges here that it is most helpful if both partners can let go of gender stereotypes about earnings.

The topic of financial conflict management came about by talking to Celina. After discussing household chores, financial tasks and leisure time, I asked her if there is anything in the relationship that could be a potential source of conflict. Celina replied:

Income, I think. The difference is quite a sore subject. It's not that I cannot discuss this with him, but I think especially for men it's a feeling of failure or a taboo (...) if he's more successful than now, in the sense that he's making a greater contribution to society, that would make it easier for him; even if it wouldn't even out in terms of income. I think it's not so much about the monetary part, but more about the feeling of being successful. (Celina, 30s, legal professional, income group E)

We talked further about her partner's possible sense of success and she explained that there is a difference between the art sector, which her partner is in, and the commercial sector, which she is in. Celina said:

What counts as success in the art sector is very different from in the commercial sector, so I don't think that can be expressed in monetary terms. What's complicated for him, that's what I think, is the feeling of dependence and I honestly would have the exact same thing. If it were reversed, I wouldn't like it either.

She added that it would be more accepted if it were reversed, so that she would be the dependant one, because in general people are used to seeing women being in a dependent position. She understands very well if her partner finds the feeling of independence difficult, but she could not say for sure if this is his issue with the situation. After the interview, we briefly discussed whether her partner would participate in the interview. She doubted whether he would accept the invitation, as she knows that this is not a fun subject for him. Celina also mentioned that she would like her money to be seen by him as their money, but that this is not the case. His insights on this would therefore be extremely valuable for this study. Celina

and I agreed that if he would accept the interview invitation, that she would contact me. Twenty days after the conversation with Celina, I received a message from her that her partner is open to an interview; this took place not long after.

When I sat across from Nathan, he talked about how he developed as an artist, that he consciously chose that world and was not concerned with making money at the beginning. The moment he and Celina met, they were both already in the sectors they are in now: he in the art sector and she in the commercial sector. As she also described above, these worlds are different from each other. Nathan shared:

I am quite ambitious, but success for me is not even necessarily expressed in money. [INT: So when is there success? Can you make it concrete?] Success would be if I could put my creativity into projects, even if it is only once every two years (...) And if I could earn a good amount, let's say forty or fifty thousand euro per year, that is enough (...) That would be success for me. (Nathan, 40s, artist, B)

At the point in the interview that we spoke about household chores, he remarked that they make use of domestic support in household. Here is where he started to paint a picture of how he sees the money between them:

We have someone who cleans the house once every two weeks. [INT: Who decided that?] She did. [INT: Why did she decide that?] If I decided to do that, I would have to rely on her money. Those are things I can't afford, so in my opinion it is a bonus to make us of this. We can only afford this because she has such a good job.

In the first section of this chapter, Nathan mentioned that his separate account, in addition to their joint account, is a way of cultivating his own person and that he thinks Celina can let go of the distinction between his and her money more easily because she has more money. At one point I explicitly asked Nathan to describe his view on this:

[INT: Earlier on, you talked about “her money”. Does she see it that way?] No, she sees it much more as our money. And I see it much more as, *this* is what I contribute, even if it is much less than what she brings in (...) [INT: What would have to happen for you to see that as your money too?] What would have to happen is, if I earn what she earns, then I don’t really care. But it’s because I don’t earn that much, I’m more conscious about it. [INT: Could you imagine what it would have been like if you earned more than she does? Would you see it as only your money?] No, I think I would see a lot less of it as my money (...) I would think it’s our money.

It seems less acceptable to Nathan as a non-breadwinner to regard the breadwinner’s money as common money. At another moment in the interview, he shared someone’s expression that stuck with him that men have the need to be the provider. Moreover, Nathan contemplated out loud how nature and nurture play a role in the decisions he makes, to which he gave himself the answer “it’s a bit of both”. However, when I presented the notion of male breadwinners (i.e.: the male as sole economic provider for the family) in the context of the “her money” discussion, he indicated, as Celina also indicated, that it is difficult for them to imagine that she could become financially dependent on him. In any case, the conversations with Celina and Nathan gave me enough food for thought to further examine if the breadwinner’s income becomes family income according to the breadwinner’s gender.

The difference between Mathilde and Hans’ opinions regarding their earnings has similarities with the difference of opinion of Celina and Nathan. In addition to their separate accounts, Mathilde and Hans have a joint account of which Mathilde has told him that it is their money, but Hans does not see it that way. Hans told me that:

If I earned the most money or if I was the breadwinner, I would also want a separate account from my wife, but that is more in her interest because then she does not have to

ask me anything. That way she can know for herself if she wants to take a trip to Ibiza for a week with that money, or buy very expensive jewellery or a new car, or whatever. [INT: And if you were the breadwinner, would you or wouldn't you want her to see your money as your money?] That's a good question. True, I wish she would see it as her money, yes, that's true. Because I wouldn't want her to feel guilty about me paying for everything. (Hans, 60s, researcher, income group C)

There seems to be a lightbulb moment with Hans about his resistance to see his wife's money as his money too and that he would not want her to have resistance to see his income as joint income; a realisation that could also be seen in Nathan. After this awareness, Hans went on to outline his thoughts:

I have grown fond on this idea, and that is if I would have to continue with being a houseman⁴⁴, that she could just pay me a certain amount each month as some kind of income. Even if it's 500 euro a month or so, then I can do what I want with it. That would also be a kind of reward for everything I do, because as a houseman you do a lot: cooking, a lot of things in the house, things for the children. I am also constantly dropping off and picking up the kids. I have to take my daughter back to hockey later. [INT: But then you would actually think of it more as a job?] Yes, yes, then I would see that as a form of appreciation and then I would find it less difficult because then I would think: 'That's my money, I am entitled to that, I have worked for it, even if it is for our own children'.

Without quite realising it, Hans has given perhaps one of the most beautifully described acknowledgments of the invisibility of unpaid work, which is mainly done by women. Indeed, the unpaid work within the home may feel like it is not work, while it closely resembles professional work but without promotions and without retirement options.

⁴⁴ See supra note 41.

According to Oxfam International, the yearly unpaid work of women around the world has a value of at least \$10.8 trillion (Oxfam, 2020; Szyk & Jedynak, 2022). It is therefore understandable that Hans prefers to have his domestic work acknowledged as paid work, because he sees that as a way to generate more appreciation, but at the same time, this also indicates how much is taken for granted that many women use their time and energy to do this work that is not always appreciated. Hans further said:

If it were the other way around, then I would also like to suggest it to her. Supposing I would make a lot of money, I would say ‘I give you \$1,000 a month or so, and with it you can do whatever you want. And that is as a reward for all the work you do. You are entitled to that. [INT: If you do that, say you would indeed be the breadwinner and give her an amount for her work at home, wouldn’t you confirm that it’s not your money?] Yes, that’s true yes. I might like it even better if she just thinks ‘oh, that is our money’ [INT: But for yourself?] But it’s difficult for myself, yes, and maybe that’s not fair.

With another couple, Greetje and Zorro, this money matter also emerged as a sensitive issue. While talking to Greetje, this issue surfaced when I asked if they have a segregated account. Greetje’s response was:

That’s a bit of a thing, and Zorro knows that too because we are very open to each other, but I think very much of my money being our money while he finds that very difficult. [INT: Why does he find that difficult?] He says: ‘You work hard for it so I want you to enjoy it and I will do my thing’. And then I say: ‘But if it were the other way around, because that was the case with your ex in the past, why is it that you as a man think it’s normal if the man does that for the woman?’ Because we also know couples where that is the case and then he thinks it’s very normal. But now that it’s a woman, then it’s

another thing? So, we're not quite there yet. (Greetje, 50s, board director, income group F)

Greetje expresses that she clearly sees gendered behaviour taking place, that she pointed this out to him. Therefore, he has heard this and perhaps thought this through, but still her confrontation on this has not led him to change his attitude on this matter as yet. When I spoke to Zorro separately, he also raised this issue himself after telling me about a man who thought Zorro was well off because he is partnered with a rich person and assumed Zorro can do whatever he wants. Zorro did not like that comment and told me that he experiences this differently. Zorro explained:

We sometimes find it complicated and are still trying to find our way. Look, she earns a huge multiple of what I earn, which makes me think: 'I'd rather starve to death at this very fancy table, so to speak, than misuse a dime of her money.' I didn't work for that money. [INT: Where is the line though? When do you feel it is abuse and when is it use?] I haven't framed it that way yet, thank you. I'm still figuring this out, but I do think I need to do something with this. (Zorro, 50s, teacher, income group C)

We talked about it further and I also tried to gauge whether his thinking patterns are based on gendered expectations, but we didn't get any further reasoning about his thinking patterns on this topic. He did say that they recently opened a joint account, which Greetje also told me about, and emphasised that he would like to get rid of his resistance for himself because he acknowledges "it comes across as unkind, of course".

The couples Greetje & Zorro and Mathilde & Hans confirmed the signals that emerged from the couple Celina and Nathan, that doing gender in financial tasks can be framed in terms of whose income is more accepted in becoming the family income. If the non-breadwinner is the woman, then this fits the picture of the male breadwinner household

model where the man is the economic provider in the household and the woman depends on his earnings. If the non-breadwinner is the man, as is the case in female breadwinner families, it is more difficult for the man because taking on her money as “their” money is accompanied by feelings of dependence, fear of being seen as an exploiter and worries of being undervalued for their contribution to the household. It is good for female breadwinner couples to take these gendered aspects into account when managing financial conflicts.

5.3.1 Possible Conflict Resolutions

Financial conflicts predict divorce more efficiently than other conflict areas. Also, among cohabiting couples, conflicts over money predict the eventual dissolution of the relationship more often than other problem areas such as conflicts over household chores, sex, time together, and parents (Cohen & Strong, 2021, 295). Given this, it is worthwhile to consider how female breadwinner couples deal with financial conflicts. I look first at the case of Olivia and her partner, to see how they engage in constructive conflict and afterwards discuss further examples of possible conflict resolutions.

Olivia and her husband have been briefly discussed several times before in this thesis. She is a managing director and he is a teacher. Their income brackets are F respectively C, and they have a joint bank account. She says that in her relationship she strives for equality as much as possible in, for example, the financial tasks, but when it comes to conflict or leadership, her husband makes the final decisions:

In the end he is the one who says: we are not doing this. In fact, if he thinks I’m buying clothes that are too expensive and we have a dialogue about that, and he says ‘it’s not about the clothes and it’s not about we can’t afford it, it’s about that we are sending the wrong message’, then he decides ‘from then and then we won’t do that again’ (...) The kids might say, if they didn’t have any respect, ‘Who are you, isn’t it Mom’s money?’

But that is not the case. My husband has remained in the leadership role anyway.

(Olivia, 40s, managing director, income group F)

Her statement here does not mean that it has always been easy for her to deal with financial conflicts with her husband, as she has also said: “I am a decision maker at work, I am also a decision maker at home. And that clashes enormously (...) but that means I have to bring myself back down to another level at home”. By highlighting these aspects of her life, she draws attention to the fact that disagreements about money can cause discord in relationships. Below is the discussion of how other female breadwinner couples are managing their possible or occurring financial conflicts.

Two participants who are at or beyond the end of their relationship reflect on money conflicts. Lia, described that in the beginning of their relationship, she and her partner earned similar amounts. Then his career went downwards while hers went upwards; that is how it has been until now and they have always contributed the same amount to a joint account, although he gradually has been commenting on her spending.

When I got comments I said yes, ‘but I also have more that remains, so yes, I can do that’. But then I always said: ‘If you want the distribution differently, then I am open to it, so if you think that I should contribute more and you do less, then I think it’s fine’.

But that never happened until now. (Lia, 40s, director, income group E)

Zwaantje has always earned more than her (now ex-) husband from the beginning until the end of their marriage. That gap became large when he stopped being an employee and struggled as an entrepreneur while she made steady progress in her career. Gradually, she started to feel irritated regarding spending decisions when he would decide on vacations and new cars, while she was bringing in all the money.

I have said to him: “yes, but the money does not grow on my back and I’m going to drive in it” and I do not think that is all that important (...), if he earned more, it would sit better with me (...) At a certain moment he brought hardly anything or nothing in, financially speaking. I worked and he determined where we went on vacation or how it was spent. And that started to give me a lot of irritation. (Zwaantje, 50s, firm partner, income group E)

One way for couples to deal with financial conflicts is to make full use of joint bank accounts as a financial management style. Research across five studies found that long-term committed couples who pool all their money into joint bank accounts are happier in their relationship and less likely to break up, compared to couples that keep some or all of their money separate (Gladstone et al., 2022). The researchers found evidence that “joint accounts increase feelings of financial togetherness—making purchases and financial goals feel shared—and this mediates the relationship between joint accounts and well-being”. Nevertheless, during interviews I found that the opposite causal relationship could also be true: couples who are happy together pool all of their money. For example, Olivia, has a joint account with her husband and they intended to switch to separate accounts but never implemented this plan. Just having these kinds of substantive conversations can lead to better relationships, as research shows that “people who engage in more substantial conversations tend to be happier” (Mehl et al., 2010). Olivia often used the term “constructive conflict” to indicate how she handled differences of opinion in her relationship, for example by saying: “We had a kind of constructive conflict, which you have to come out constructively. That was a process, but now it’s settled; this works, we know this” or “I think we have entered into a constructive conflict with each other, in which we often disagree, but can work through it to arrive at a common path”. This illustrates that having substantial conversations about conflicts—including financial conflicts—can be especially important for female breadwinner couples, as

they may face relationship challenges as a result of unconscious behaviour caused by their violation of traditional gender norms.

A conflict reduction effect that emerged during the interviews is if the male participants feel wealthier (and not necessarily richer) than the female breadwinner. “Rich” and “wealth” are often used interchangeably in the English language (Das, 2022), but during the interviews I made a distinction between these terms, based on the idea that wealth consists of financial assets such as property and stocks, whereas being rich is through money earned from working a wage for an employer (ECB; 2020; Shah, 2019). With Gijs it turned out that he does not feel so much richer than his partner, but he does feel wealthier because of his investments in real estate, which plays a role in his confidence in choosing to work less. Gijs says about this:

It's not that it is put on a scale and even if I hadn't had that it would have been no different.

On the other hand, because I have that rental income, it was also easier for me to say 'I'm going to work less'. (Gijs, 40s, civil servant, income group D)

Also, Mitch, who was introduced in the Household Bargaining Frames section at the beginning of this chapter, sees himself wealthier than his partner who earns the most in the household.

I have my own money. I have worked very hard for twenty years. My father always said a good salary is of no use to you, you must have wealth (...) she now has more income but I have more wealth so I can last longer than she does, I am convinced of that. If she stops working tomorrow...and yes, she also has savings, sure... but then she won't last as long as I would. But we don't see it that way; we do everything together. (Mitch, 60s, consultant, income group F)

A striking detail is that both Gijs and Mitch placed themselves in a higher income bracket than their partner did during the interviews and Gijs placed his partner in a lower bracket. Mitch reported that he and his partner are in E/F while his partner Sissi stated D/F. Gijs put himself

and his partner in D/E while Sara gave them C/F. The way in which these partners estimate their income in relation to each other is not entirely consistent. However, it is interesting to see what this inconsistency might entail, which is that the sense of feeling rich or wealthy can be translated into the sense of financial independence and control that gender norms attribute to men. It is good to take this into account when couples are resolving potential conflicts and are having substantial conversations about their financial matters.

5.4 Conclusion

It has been said that money can't buy happiness, but money can turn happy couples against each other. This chapter was therefore devoted to discussing money matters in the sections Financial Management Styles, Distribution of Finance and Financial Conflict Management. In the context of the management styles, I bore in mind that joint bank accounts are more common in male breadwinner couples than in dual earners or female breadwinners (LeBaron, 2019, 7) and found that female breadwinners rarely have only a joint account. If they do have a joint account, it is often in combination with separate accounts, but that variations are also possible such as not officially having a joint account but using the female breadwinner's separate account for all the couple's financial activities. In general, however, I argue that for female breadwinner couples, managing income disparities are best achieved by having both separate and joint accounts; the joint account comes with the ease of keeping track of household finances whereas the separate accounts give space to deal with the unequal financial relationship created by the woman's higher earning capacity.

As well as the way in which these couples manage their finances, I also investigated how financial tasks are divided. With the knowledge that relative income rank has an effect on who will make financial decisions, I saw among most of the participants that there are indications that couples with the highest income gap between partners are the ones where the women have the most say across the board regarding financial tasks because of their greater

contribution to the household income. This requires further research, but a better understanding of gendered expectations and behaviour in performing household tasks leads to a better grip on the division of financial tasks that does not seem to be neatly separated from the division of household tasks.

In the context of financial conflict management I found that men who have difficulty with their female partner's wish to see her earnings as their joint money, would want their female partner to see his income as their money if he were to become the main breadwinner. I claim that this is due to the idea of traditional male breadwinner model, where the men are deemed responsible for economic provision through employment (Nadim, 2015), despite the atypical arrangement between the partners. If expectations of being the primary provider in the relationships are challenged, men may feel a sense of discomfort or a threat to their self-esteem. Personal insecurities about their worth or abilities can trigger feelings of discomfort and the need to compensate for their lower earnings by viewing her earnings differently from his (potential) earnings. Additionally, when their partner earns more, it can challenge traditional notions of masculinity and lead to men's entrenchment in doing gender in their relationship.

As financial conflicts can put more strain on a relationship than other conflict areas, I discuss how, although joint accounts might increase feelings of financial togetherness (Gladstone et al., 2022), my interviews also showed that we should consider that through substantial conversations the converse could also be true: "couples who are happy together pool all of their money". However, I also want to make room for the idea that on the basis of substantial conversations there is a wider range of arrangement opportunities for happy female breadwinner couples. For these couples doing gender seems to be reversing in financial management because fewer couples choose a joint account alone as is common amongst male breadwinner households. At the same time, the conflicts in female breadwinner

households that arise from pushing against gendered expectations reveal that doing gender still applies, as the opposed expectations are shaping the relationship and behaviour into applying untraditional ways of performing gendered division of tasks, rather than undoing gender as such.

Regarding possible conflict resolutions, the imbalance in earnings between female breadwinners and their partners may reduce the chance of financial conflict if the male partner has another important source of financial security through one or more investments. As financial conflicts can also arise from leadership and control, it can make a difference if the men in these households at least feel wealthier. Doing gender comes into play here, with an upside and a downside; it provides an explanation for why men feeling wealthier or richer may play a role in behaviour within female breadwinner households, but this possible explanation also makes it a pity that doing gender affects this financial area too, along with other discussed areas throughout this chapter.

In drawing the curtains on this chapter, the narratives of Celina and Hans, Dre and Eva, and other couples show how gender, income, and relationship dynamics all blend together, which aligns with what Kluwer and colleagues (1997) and Meester (2020a) talk about. The exploration of financial roles and emotional dynamics within relationships is further enriched by insights from the literature on communication about household tasks and earnings, including the studies by Vollebregt (2020). The theoretical backdrop provided by Kupers and Rochlen (2005) regarding traditional gender dynamics, coupled with Connell's (1987) conceptualisation of breadwinning as fundamental to masculine identity, resonates with discussions of the enduring impact of hegemonic ideals on perceptions of gender roles and self-esteem within relationships. Lyonette and Crompton (2015) assert an interactive relationship between the doing gender approach and relative resource theory, while Dunatchik (2023) helps us understand the delicate balance between success and autonomy.

The persistence of traditional gender dynamics, even when the female partner earns more, reflects the influence of hegemonic ideals (Connell, 1987; 2003; Foreman, 1999). Moreover, in gender research, financial negotiations remain largely unexplored, leaving a gap in understanding how money shapes relationships. Also, there is scarce data available on the specific financial arrangements within couples where women are the primary earners. By applying concepts from existing literature, I have been able to contribute to knowledge and demonstrate how these dynamics play out in real life. The reluctance of men to fully accept the woman's income as shared family resources, as seen in couples like Celina and Nathan, and Greetje and Zorro, aligns with broader concepts of "doing gender" and "doing family" (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Finch, 2007). This chapter's exploration also considers men's perceptions of wealth, tied to financial independence and gendered expectations (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002), further emphasising the need for ongoing dialogue on this matter.

Chapter 6: Effects of Family Policies and Cultural Practices on Households

The previous two chapters are devoted to the atypical position of a female breadwinner with regard to the financial and household tasks between them and their male partners at home, where it is evident that this is connected to her atypical position in the professional field. As I also argue above, the home as a gendered space is closely linked to the notion that women are homemakers and nurturers of children; a concept that cannot be separated from the context of female breadwinners in the workplace, as this space is also gendered. The workplace as a gendered space refers to the relative lack of women in top positions and the time-use for paid work by women. This chapter examines breadwinning women's positions in the workplace by first discussing their working hours and their seniority, bearing in mind that the International Labour Organization reports "women account for less than one third of senior and middle management positions in the majority of developed countries and represent less than 5 per cent of chief executive officers (CEOs) of publicly listed companies" (ILO, 2018, 9). The Netherlands, as one of the developed countries, contributes to the labour participation of women through policy making. This is discussed in the section Female Breadwinners at Work in which Sara and Gijs' household is central. The second section, Workforce Biases, focuses on attitudes towards daycare and part-time work in the Netherlands, where policymaking of this country is also discussed here and the case of Erma and her partner are examined in detail. The last section, Conflict Between Work and Home, is based on the interview with the couple Mathilde and Piet. At the end of this section I discuss possible conflict solutions, mostly in the form of tips, that female breadwinners and their partners give to others who in the future could follow in their footsteps. A conflict at country level is also discussed, namely derived from inharmonious policies in the domain of work-care.

Building upon the discord arising from inharmonious policies in the work-care domain, it is essential to explore the multidimensional experiences of female breadwinners

which requires a careful look that goes beyond conventional or established perspectives and assumptions; an examination that captures the interaction between women's agency, societal expectations, and welfare regimes. As noted by Bettio and Verashchagina (2009), women often navigate work dynamics to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, underscoring the profound impact of welfare systems on their lives. Sara's negotiation of work hours and Anna's principled time management offer valuable insights into the challenges that female breadwinners encounter across different welfare contexts, showcasing how societal norms and policy frameworks shape the experiences of women juggling work and caregiving roles. Lily's adjustment of work hours post-motherhood and the varied experiences of Monique, Mathilde, Erma, and others necessitates a holistic understanding of women's roles in the workforce. In undertaking this exploration, it becomes evident that a comprehensive analysis should take into account the interplay of various factors that influence the female breadwinners' experiences, advocating for deeper inquiry into individual stories and welfare state typologies. Central to the exploration is the critical analysis of welfare regimes, which challenges prevailing paradigms associated with Esping-Andersen's work (1990). While influential, Esping-Andersen's typology has received criticism, particularly for neglecting gendered dimensions and the value of unpaid care work. Feminist scholars such as Goijaerts (2022) and Ciccio & Sainsbury (2018) argue that his framework fails to adequately account for welfare regimes' role in perpetuating gender inequalities. Esping-Andersen's categorisation into liberal, social-democratic, and conservative/corporatist welfare regimes oversimplifies the complexities of gender dynamics within welfare states, but this thesis aims to transcend these limitations by integrating insights from this study's findings that confront the inherent contradictions within welfare policies. The findings accentuate the necessity for policymakers to adopt more inclusive approaches within welfare regimes, striking a chord with the critiques articulated by feminist scholars. The Dutch government's encouragement

of female labour force participation (Goijaerts, 2022; Hemerijck, 2018) while simultaneously reinforcing a strong motherhood ideology (Derks, 2019; Veelen, 2020) reflects the inherent tensions within contemporary welfare policies. The promotion of unpaid care tasks, predominantly falling on women, alongside efforts to increase female labour market participation, highlights the disconnect within governmental approaches. The lack of cooperation between ministries and insufficient consideration of gender balance not only exacerbate the challenges faced by female breadwinners in reconciling work and caregiving responsibilities, but also set the stage for a deeper reflection on household dynamics in the sections of this chapter.

The first section argues that despite the fact that most female breadwinners have demanding jobs that involve long working hours, that care should be taken in assuming that the precondition for undoing gender at home for female breadwinner households is an inverted division of roles in paid working hours between partners. The second section claims that there is another task for female breadwinners and their partners to take into account, that is to address and challenge the social norms for gendered careers that they are often confronted with. My research makes apparent that free choice to deviate from the prevailing gendered career paths is not an absolute given. The third section finds that if female breadwinner couples do not fully and willingly engage in their atypical arrangements at home and at work, that conflicts regarding their arrangements may come with an increased risk of couples separating and of suffering burnout; with the latter I found that female breadwinners who accept traditional gender roles are most at risk of work-related burnout. This chapter ends with a selection of advice from female breadwinners and their partners, which also shows that doing gender is the common thread in the complexity of the intersection between work life and home life.

6.1 Female Breadwinner Couples at Work: Sara and Gijs

Sara and Gijs were briefly introduced in chapter 4, in the section Conflict Management in Housework, with the arrival of their children, they decided that he would work less as a civil servant and that Sara would continue to work full-time as an independent lawyer. In this section I look in more detail at the division between them in paid work, specifically their time commitment in working hours, considering the literature that women typically work fewer hours than men during their life phase with children (Roeters, 2019, 33) and that women whose working hours do exceed those of their male partners report lower life satisfaction because they do not spend significantly less time doing household chores (Flèche et al., 2020). By taking Sara's work life as a starting point, I present a perspective on how female breadwinners deal with the demands of long work hours. I discuss how the working time involvement of these women is atypical with respect to many women in the Netherlands. This deviation from the norm is particularly pronounced for this couple, as he works part time, and she works (more than) full-time. I argue, however, that care should be taken in assuming that an inverted division of roles in paid working hours between partners would be the precondition for undoing gender at home for female breadwinner households.

Sara has been a lawyer for over ten years and worked for various law firms. At the last firm, she was one of the partners, which is a highly ranked position. A few years ago, she decided to work for herself. When asked how much she now works as a self-employed lawyer, she replied that she works full-time, Sara said:

It is very flexible. Sometimes I work a bit more or less during the day and evening, but I do work full-time. [INT: What is full-time in your opinion?] I'd say at least forty. I try to limit my hours now. When I was still employed, it was really between forty and sixty, but now I try to keep it at forty. [INT: It is more in your own hands?] Yes, it is

exactly because it is in my own hands that I can do better planning. (Sara, 30s, lawyer, income group F)

Sara was able to reduce her working hours, because she took more control of her time, which she could do better than if she worked as a partner for a law firm. Positions of seniority, held less by women due to vertical segregation (Levanon & Grusky, 2012; Richardson & Robinson, 2020), could bring control of one's time by delegating tasks and making use of secretarial support, but as another female breadwinner, Isa, clarifies:

I can of course easily reschedule appointments in this position, because those people just want an appointment with me. It sounds really stupid, of course but it is true. So, it's easier for me, if I think it really doesn't matter or I really need something, then indeed I also have the luxury of a secretariat to plan or cancel. At the same time, I am also living through my agenda. (Isa, 40s, director, income group E)

Isa describes how seniority plays a positive role in time management, but also how the agenda is controlling her work life. The challenge of work time management in senior positions need not be underestimated. For instance, according to Mathilde, control over her working time is "difficult as a medical specialist, because you always have to do that work yourself" and nearly all the interviewed women indicate job-specifically why they are not able to exercise more control over their work. Several men were asked about their views on their partner's work life. Hans' work advice for Mathilde would be: "Say 'no' more often". Jasper would recommend to Carla: "Limit the work; most of her job is that her time is determined by others". The other male participants have not strongly expressed a wish for their partner's work time management, but the men quoted above did want their partners to take more control of their work time.

The challenges of work time management in senior positions can be linked to expectations specific to the function or industry (Porter & Nohria, 2018), but it is also important to note the relationship between individual work time control and the way a country drives labour participation. Government policy can influence the extent to which individuals have control over their working time; as a result, there is an impact on labour force participation at country level. The labour participation of women in the Netherlands is one of the highest in the world (Christiansen et al., 2016), but at the same time many women work part-time (Van Veelen, 2020). As a matter of fact, both men and women work part-time much more often than in other Western European countries (OECD, 2019). In the first quarter of 2023, underutilised part-time workers consisted of 541,000 people; this is a group of people who are not included in the unemployment figures (CBS, 2023). The high degree of part-time work in the Netherlands is seen as an important cause of the labour market shortage and because it is essential to create a financial foundation for a sustainable welfare state (see also subsection Gender Relations in Welfare States) the government encourages labour participation by men and especially by women. This is done through the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, where there is a department that holds the so-called “emancipation” portfolio. In Dutch tradition, this department is concerned with the equal treatment of women (Goijaerts, 2022, 1411). An interdepartmental policy study shows that almost 50 per cent of the working population in the Netherlands work part-time and that current (fiscal) measures for households with young children, such as the childcare allowance (see next section Workforce Biases for a discussion on daycare), have an effect on the labour supply (Starink, 2022). Despite the fact that this country wants higher labour participation of women, because that brings in taxpayers’ money, the Dutch government finds itself in a contradiction due to inharmonious policies (more on this in the next section Social Norms for Gendered Careers), which leads to the Netherlands also being a frontrunner in Europe when it

comes to part-time working women (UWV, 2022; Van Veelen, 2020). On the one hand, it is therefore not surprising that these women have in common that the breadwinning women have in common that they are full-time employed, having a high involvement in the paid workforce, but on the other hand, it is also not self-evident. Keeping that in mind that the majority of full-time jobs in this country are between 36 and 40 hours a week, but most of the female participants have mentioned that their average work hours are significantly more than 40 hours per week and more than their partner, for example: Monique (40 to 60), Mathilde (45 hours), Erma (45 to 50 hours), Celina (48 hours), Merel (50 hours), Lieke (50 to 55 hours), Greetje (50 to 60), Olivia (60 hours), Carla (60 hours), Sissi (60 to 70) and Ellis (70 hours). Isa works up to 50 hours per week, but explains:

I do try to be really critical about this. There are also weeks when I'm really in the high-end of the 40 hours and something a bit under (...) I do not think I'll be more productive if I work 60,70,80 hours. (Isa, 40s, director, income group E)

Linde works more than 40 hours per week and has the following to say:

I don't believe it when people say they work 80 hours a week. Look, I understand that you work 80 hours a week once, but that you work 80 hours a week 365 days a year with maybe a holiday off here and there? That is not possible. (Linde, 50s, executive board member, income group F)

Linde does recall a previous job that constantly kept her busy in her mind outside working hours, but she did not classify that as working. Anna works 40 hours a week and tries to stay as close as possible to this agreed number of hours in her contract:

I think it's kind of a principle. You agree with each other what kind of goals you will achieve and that also applies to the lower levels at the company. And both parties know from before what needs to be done in 40 hours. If you can't manage that in

those 40 hours, then you can't do your job very well. (Anna, 50s, manager, income group E)

One of the reasons why these women limit their working hours is because of the arrival and care of children (European Commission, 2008; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Meester, 2020b). Lily, who has a new-born child, says: "I always worked much more than forty hours. I used to work in the evening and weekends (...). But over the last few years, especially last year when I was pregnant, I only worked the amount I had to". With the arrival of children, many breadwinning women lowered their time availability by working around or under the forty-hour per week mark, but this change was temporary for many of them as their working hours now exceed forty hours again. Given the above-average number of hours that most of the female breadwinners spend in the labour market, a simple trade-off with domestic division of labour would anticipate a greater parallel between paid working hours of these women and their contribution to domestic work (Garcia & Tomlinson, 2021, 302), but this is often not the case, as we saw in Chapter 4, section "Distribution of Housework and Childcare".

Above, Sara spoke about how she has been able to reduce her paid work commitment to 40 hours per week when she became a self-employed lawyer; this means she still works full-time. Further into the interview, she also indicated that with the arrival of the children, she did not want both her and her partner to be full-time working parents. This opinion was shared by her partner Gijs in the separate interview with him. Gijs said: "She wanted to start for herself and then I said: 'okay, if you become a self-employed lawyer, then at some point we have to choose who will work less.'" He then went on to discuss his consideration if they both should work five or four days per week, but that he had been working full-time for ten years and would rather work less and have more time with their children.

Both Sara and Gijs brought up that they considered one of them working part-time for the sake of their children and that Gijs would be the one to work less than Sara. Gijs reduced his working time in the paid labour force to three days a week and then to 2.5 days a week. In the Netherlands, almost a quarter of men and three quarters of women aged 20 to 65 work part-time (Van den Brakel et al., 2020), which makes it a less common decision Gijs rather than Sara to work less.

Men's considerations for working less may be related to the fact that they have other financial sources for themselves. Gijs also mentioned during the interview that he could better afford to cut down his working hours, because he has some income from renting apartments. In Chapter 5, section Possible Conflict Resolutions, it emerged that this is why he places himself in a higher income bracket (D) than where Sara places him (C). In that same section of Chapter 5, two other members of one household report differently on their income: Mitch states that he is in E and that Sissi is in F, while she states that they are in D and F. Mitch also let it be known that his capital gives him his own money. Linde's partner may also be added to these men, who was not interviewed, but through Linde it can be added to this study that he acquired his own money, which may have made it easier for him to make a career switch, making her practically a sole earner (income brackets: A/F). Still, it would be too simplistic to say that a man's wealth plays the greatest role in deciding to be less involved in the workforce, considering that Gijs said "even if I hadn't had that, it would have been no different" and signalled earlier in the interview that working full-time for ten years was enough for him; Mitch expressed "I'm not ambitious right now, which I used to be", referring to the career aspirations that changed about a decade ago when he realised that he wouldn't want to make it to the top in the corporate world and became an independent consultant; and Linde told on behalf of her husband that he initiated making a career switch because he

wanted to do something that he likes, knowing that this would mean for him to bring in less money into the family income.

Similarly, in couples where the male partner has fewer assets, he could still choose to take a step back from the labour force to be the most responsible for the home; not just when it comes to childcare. For instance, with the couple Greetje and Zorro partly because of his career switch (they do not have any children together and he is mainly responsible for the household chores, but see the last section in chapter 5 for their challenges regarding doing gender in finance). Other men who also had no problem with being less involved in paid working life, but did so because of medical reasons or their retirement age, are not considered. However, for most of the people interviewed for this study, it was mainly because of unforeseen labour market challenges that the men were less involved in the workforce throughout their relationship with the female breadwinners, for example for the partners of Ellis, Lia, Lieke, Merel, Mulan, Olivia, Paulien, Zwaantje and the couples Celina and Nathan, Mathilde and Hans.

Female breadwinners occupy atypical positions in the paid labour market because of their (more than) full-time working hours, as only a quarter of Dutch women work full-time. The position of female breadwinners is all the more unusual in cases where the male partner has deliberately chosen to work part-time; only a quarter of men in the Netherlands do this. In the context of undoing gender at home, the male partner working part-time has the potential to challenge gender norms at home, as he would have more time available to take on domestic tasks. Then, the reversed traditional division of roles would apply to both the field of work and the home front, with the result that the man becomes the homemaker. However, undoing gender means that tasks are not assigned on the basis of gender. Although female breadwinner households may come forth out of a conscious choice or unforeseen labour market circumstances (Drago et al., 2005) that result in the men being less involved in the

labour market, these reasons should not be the only preconditions for couples to perform a degendered division of tasks at home. This way of thinking, that a significantly reduced involvement in the labour market by the male partner needs to be in place for couples to undo gender at home, also does not offer a solution among the female breadwinner households in which both the partners are fully involved in the workforce, as is the case with the couple Carla (60 hours a week) and Jasper (50 hours a week). Carla hinted that she spares Jasper from the mopping and ironing; tasks of which she realises she considers to be feminine. From the lives of my participants, it is clear that a large difference in paid working hours between female breadwinners and their partners should not be a condition for undoing gender at their homes.

Sara and Gijs' conscious decision for him to take steps back in the workforce, allowed him to be more involved in the care of their children. Also, they both reported that he took on the lion's share of household chores as well. Earlier in this study, in the section Men's Self-Confidence in chapter 4, he spoke about how his friends see his atypical position and on his view of the outside world; he said, "I don't really care. It's my life". The experience of other participants with how imposed career expectations affect their atypical positions, and how this can intersect their work and home lives, are discussed in the next section.

6.2 Social Norms for Gendered Careers: Erma and partner

The previous section, Female Breadwinner Couples at Work, showed how a social norm such as part-time working for women does not determine how men and women should govern their careers, although these norms tend to impose how men and women organise their work and family lives. This section takes a closer look at how prevailing standards are conveyed. Especially in a country like the Netherlands that has a relatively high degree of gender equality

according to various rankings⁴⁵, it is interesting how loudly the norms speak to discourage women from focusing too much on their careers, while almost dictating to men to have their careers as a priority. A country's social policies can play a role in shaping gender norms, but they are not the only determining factor. Social norms around gender roles are deeply entrenched and can be influenced by a range of factors, including prevailing societal attitudes and cultural traditions. Drawing on Erma's experience in particular, there is a view of how social norms emphasise unequal roles for men and women in the workforce; other female breadwinners also talk about the expectations they had to deal with as women and mothers. Moreover, from the male partners' perspectives, there is a view of how their position on the labour market is at odds with the prevailing social norms too. These norms are brought to the fore to show that going against the gendered career standards can itself be a tremendous task to undertake. This section reveals the complex reality that renegotiating gender norms requires conscious choices, given the intersection of work life and private life at various points in the lives of female breadwinner households.

Erma is a managing director and her partner is a photographer who as a self-employed person has a variety of assignments. When asked, she elaborated on how their division of roles in work life came about:

I am quite ambitious and he is not at all, he lives, so to speak, in the moment. And because I'm ambitious, I'm going to do more things, and I'm also going to earn more. I think that's in our nature. And in this sense, we are very lucky, because as a man you have to do this or that. (...) What I do notice, of course, is that especially the outside world and especially other women, they think something of it. You can have your job and such, but

⁴⁵ In the Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum, the Netherlands ranks on the 28th place out of 146 countries; in the Women in Work Index 2022 by the accountancy firm PwC the Netherlands sits on the 16th place out of 33 countries (PWC, 2022: WEF, 2022).

you are also expected, especially if there are children, that you are also very involved in a certain way. Particularly at primary school age, there were all kinds of mothers, especially those who were in all kinds of groups. Back then I was asked to join creative groups for Christmas and such. I was actually expected to be there as a participant and I always said in return: ‘yes, but why do you ask me, and not the father?’ I think that’s really crazy. Isn’t it important that there is at least one parent who is committed to these things?’ (Erma, 50s, managing director, income group D)

Other female breadwinners have had the same experience. When I spoke to Mathilde about taking children to school or daycare, she first underlined that her husband Hans has played his part and is very present as a father, but that she has mainly felt responsible in this area.

Mathilde:

And that becomes quite a task put together. Partly I did all of this because I wanted to and thought it was important, but also because this is totally the norm in the Netherlands. These are really considered as things that mothers do: the mother helps at school which I did on my day off, arranging dates and organising treats. It almost made me insecure too because it’s also a place where you have to perform; you really have to meet a certain standard. (Mathilde, 50s, medical specialist, income group E)

Mathilde has personally felt how strong the maternity ideology in the Netherlands can be, prescribing that childcare should be outsourced as little as possible (Derks, 2019), which was also discussed in chapter 2, section Doing Gender in the Context of Domestic Work. This ideology that encompasses cultural and social perspectives on the importance of motherhood, together with the associated expectations and responsibilities, is reflected in various social policies and practices of welfare states. The Netherlands has one of the most generous maternity leave policies in the world in which pregnant employees are entitled to 16 weeks of

paid maternity leave (OECD, 2022a), provides support through child benefit and allowance (OECD, 2022b), and has regulated part-time work both in statutory law and in collective labour agreements (Visser et al., 2004) so Dutch workplaces can have family-friendly policies to support mothers in their dual roles as worker and as caregiver (Portegijs, 2022). However, this part-time culture has become so deeply entrenched in the Netherlands and has become anchored with other institutional and social factors, such as the distribution of unpaid work at home, opening hours of schools and childcare, and social norms about working hours of mothers and fathers (Merens & Iedema, 2020). Only a minority of the Dutch think it is good to outsource care for young children, and then for one or two days a week at the most (Derks, 2019), which is also reflected in the social norms experienced by the female breadwinners in this thesis. Besides Erma's and Mathilde's experience, Greetje shared that: "Women are very mean to each other, very judgmental. I've been asked 'Can you be a good mother if you work so much?'" Another female breadwinner, Linde, said: "It's all in the setting that I work full-time and my husband too, even though he has more flexibility, but people have something to say about this, verbally and non-verbally. Yes, so that was quite difficult". Linde's comment shows that the social norm is sometimes communicated subtly and sometimes emphatically, but for all these breadwinning women it was noticed and for some it affected how they organised their time so that they could conform, and, as Mathilde says "perform".

Erma also touched on another gendered social norm that ties into the norm that the children are taken care of by the mothers as much as possible, having the potential to affect the work life of female breadwinners. The other norm was also discussed in the previous section 6.1 Female Breadwinner Couples at Work, namely that part-time employment is a common undertaking for women. Erma:

When the children were in their baby ages, something huge was going on. Heleen Mees⁴⁶, she threw a cat among the pigeons by saying “ladies, first you all want to have good papers and then go off to work part-time; what nonsense is this? If you want to get higher on the ladder, then you shouldn’t do that”. She really got everyone on her case about this, especially women. Basically, it was just women going after each other, saying that you have to be there for your child. And actually, also in that period, it was not okay if you agreed with her, because that meant that you’d abandon your child. I wondered then: “where are the fathers in that discussion?”. Here were just women at each other’s necks. So, I sent a letter to a national newspaper, in which I pointed out that I find it very strange that the father is not in that discussion at all. (...) What was often said is: “but my husband wants to work that many days”. Well, why could he work so much and you can’t? And what’s also in it is that a lot of women are cutting the ground away from their partners. If you say: “I want you to do a lot too, so that I can simply start working more”, you also have to let that man do it his way. I also wrote an example about that: My partner was also at home a lot with the children. And when I got home, those kids just didn’t look right. The suit he had put on them. The spaghetti was still in her hair, so to speak. You say something about that twice and then you think, yes, if you want him to keep doing that the third time, then I should just keep my mouth shut now. So that’s his way. Then I wrote an article about all that fuss of women wanting to control that. Do you think it’s crazy that those men give up then?

Erma argues that women maintain the norms among themselves, which may be due to the strong maternity ideology in the Netherlands (Derks, 2019), and she proposes that women

⁴⁶ Heleen Mees is a Dutch economist and lawyer, was an adjunct associate professor at New York University’s Wagner Graduate School of Public Policy. In 2006 she published the book “Weg met het deeltijdfeminisme!” (translated: No More Part-Time Feminism!) in which she gives her vision on the lack of labour participation of Dutch women. Her vision received a lot of attention in the Netherlands, partly because it was considered unfriendly to women.

give their male partner more space to take over tasks; something that other female breadwinners also agree with, but also resonates with a male partner. Hans says about female breadwinners such as his wife Mathilde:

These women all have the idea of “I have to keep control” and this is not possible with a busy job. Things will go wrong. Either things go wrong at work and they feel guilty about it, making them work harder, or things go wrong at home and they leave their child at the bus stop. (Hans, 60s, researcher, income group C)

The last example of the child being forgotten at a bus stop was meant as a joke, but his wife also told me that she recognises in other women and in herself the tendency to claim the entire home domain and dictate to men how they should perform domestic tasks, which she said does not work. Mathilde and Hans add to what Erma outlined above that especially women with demanding jobs could let go of more tasks and hand them over to their partner. Also, Celina, who is introduced in the section Financial Conflict Management in Chapter 5, said the following: “What I need to do more is trust him more. And that’s also a bit of a woman thing, I think. It’s quite difficult to leave it to the other person if you’ve figured out how you want it”. The connection between how much a mother gives up control over her male partner’s parenting and how much parenting he does, is also known as “maternal gatekeeping”, a study found that women keep the gate –or rather close the gate– when mothers hold excessively high standards for parenting (see also: 2.2.2 Intra-Household Relations and Dynamics); although other reasons could also apply, such as when fathers lack confidence or when women perceive their relationship as less stable (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Strauss, 2017).

To stay with Hans, he is confronted in a different way with a social norm from the position he finds himself in as a partner of a female breadwinner. Hans took the step to work as an independent researcher and also to work on publishing a book, with the expectation that

the fruits of both activities would yield sufficient work. Unfortunately, this turned out to be disappointing; up to this point he has not been involved in the labour force as he wished. He made it clear that it is not so much about how much money his partner makes, but the fact that he makes almost no money.

It is also true that in conversations with others, with neighbours, it also plays a role that you have no status so that you... everyone talks about his new lease car, his new job, that he had to go abroad, that he made a career, that he got a new team and... I don't have that, so to speak (...). If something bothers me, then it was mainly to the outside world that I found that difficult. In conversations with other men, I actually felt like a loser and thought yes, I have nothing at all, I can't say anything about a salary increase or an annoying boss.

Hans is carrying a burden that social norms seem to impose, which is that he has to live up to a certain income level and status that he feels he does not live up to, which even has him missing an annoying boss to talk about. The next section, Conflict Between Work and Home, brings Hans and his wife Mathilde more in the spotlight, but to reflect on a male partner who consciously chose to withdraw from the labour market and the reactions of the environment based on social norms, it is insightful to pay attention once more to Anna's husband who is mentioned in the fourth chapter, section Household Bargaining Frames. In that section, Anna said on behalf of her husband that he was not uncomfortable with the decision to withdraw from the labour market to become a house husband. He did get a lot of comments from his environment that he as a man should not do this. I asked her what this did to him. She spoke about social norms that were expressed during language lessons for their life abroad. Anna:

We had to say according to the book what the professions were. Like, I'm a doctor, I'm a teacher (...). And then he said, "I'm a houseman." That teacher couldn't get over that,

you couldn't say that as a man. [INT: Really.] I've seen a lot of times that people don't actually find it very acceptable. [INT: How do you react then?] Well, actually I think we're proud of doing it this way, because we have such a clear choice in what works well for us. [INT: Yes, but it happens right in front of you like that?] Then we are just surprised (...) We're just so very strong about that we want it this way. And we have no children. That makes it even more difficult for people to understand that, otherwise you could say he's taking care of the kids. (Anna, 50s, manager, income group E)

Female breadwinner couples deal with social norms for gendered careers that come from different angles and in this section, I have outlined some of the norms with which these women and men are confronted. These norms have been personified by other mothers at the primary school where the children of the female breadwinners attend, by women who verbally attack the opinion of a female economist and lawyer who speaks out against the norm, and also by oneself as a male participant articulates how a social norm affects him in conversation with other men. Considering the gender social stress mechanism, "denoting the process through which social pressures reinforce gender culture and norms, inflicting stress on gender-non-conforming couples that can deteriorate romantic relationships and lead to separations" (Gonalons-Ponsa & Gangl, 2021, 2), these norms display that it is not self-evident for men and women to follow a career path to their liking, because if they deviate from the system of ideas about gendered careers, then a path will have to be consciously and intentionally paved. Since these norms intersect at various levels in both the work and home life of female breadwinner couples, this section reveals the lack of simplicity in this matter. The next section focuses on the said inflicted stress that might cause difficult-to-reconcile conflicts between work and private life, leading to burnout or the end of a relationship.

6.3 Conflict Between Work and Home: Mathilde and Hans

It is clear from the sections and chapters above that female breadwinner couples can find themselves in a split between their atypical positions, both at work and at home. This can lead to conflicts that can have far-reaching consequences. Two of those consequences are described below: burnout and the ending of a relationship. This section first takes the couple Mathilde and Hans as case and relates their experiences to those of other female breadwinner households. Finally, there is a subsection, in which tips and advice provided by participants give insight into possible conflict resolutions when it comes to gendered norms and expectations. Despite the challenges for female breadwinner households to undo gender at home, the participants' advice and recommendations lead to the conclusion that letting go of doing gender is both desirable and necessary for the prosperity of their non-conventional household model.

Hans was already introduced in the section above, Social Norms for Gendered Careers: he is a self-employed researcher who works less than he would have liked. This equates to an average of 20 hours per week. His wife Mathilde is a medical specialist and reported earlier on in this chapter that she works approximately 45 hours a week. However, her husband thinks otherwise; according to him, she works 80 hours a week "she's always working (...) she's actually a workaholic". I asked him what he thought of that. Hans:

I don't like that of course. [INT: why not?] Well, I also want my wife's attention. And if she's always working then I don't get any attention. She's always busy with work. The attention that is left goes to the children. And if she still has attention and time left, then it goes to me. But usually nothing is left by then. It sounds very pathetic, but I'm the end of the chain. (Hans, 60s, researcher, income group C)

Mathilde told me her side of the story:

Most of my energy goes to work and then it goes to my kids, then to my husband and then to myself. (...) Before the summer, our marriage was hanging by a thread. And that's because you grow apart if you no longer have the space and energy to be with each other. (Mathilde, 50s, medical specialist, income group E)

Hans said about this:

It is the first time I talked about a divorce with her (...) that was because I indicated that this is not the relationship I want. I also asked if she had a lover because she was always gone. Why is she always gone? I thought: 'What's going on? Why is she never with me?' She was always absent. Either she was at work; so, physically absent. Or she was mentally absent, like tired, broken, in a coma on the couch, behind the newspaper. I said I don't want that anymore. That if we can't change that together, that we should get divorced.

This couple identifies what the literature overlooks. According to existing research, an increased probability of divorce for female breadwinner households is associated with men's dependence on women, which raises the likelihood of infidelity and in its turn is often a path to divorce (Coop Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Kleine, 2019; Munsch, 2015; Scott et al., 2013). Also, there is the association between an unequal distribution of domestic work with divorce (Cooke, 2006; Ruppner & Maume, 2016, 4; see also: Greenstein, 1995; Oláh & Gähler, 2014; Piña & Bengtson, 1993). Both Mathilde and Hans told me that their relationship is doing better now. They are more consciously concerned with the attention they give each other and with making each other a priority.

Making each other a priority is what Jasper and Carla have already been working with. Until recently, Carla earned more than Jasper, but not too long ago she took on another director's position that, while more highly regarded in status, came with a 40 per cent lower

salary than she previously earned. Also, her working hours increased to 60 hours per week: her husband has work weeks of 50 hours. Jasper gave his take on their relationship:

The sequence of what is important here in the house. First, we are both the most important person to each other. That is very clear in everything. And then the kids and then work. That does not mean that the latter is the least in terms of time, but in sequence and in values it is super clear: first us together, then the children, then the work. (Jasper, 50s, senior manager, income group F)

It may be easier said than done for couples to prioritise each other, especially when other things like work take up so much time and energy. Nevertheless, in particular for couples who go against the grain with their work and home lives, it could be even more significant to adhere to putting their relationship first. In the case of Mathilde and Hans, time could be saved if she were less burdened by feeling most responsible for the household according to social norms and could leave that area more to him, as Hans himself also suggests in the section above, *Social Norms for Gendered Careers*. Moreover, Mathilde says later in this section that the norm for mothers is enormous. Deviating from imposed social norms could help them find the time they need for each other. An aspect that could be taken into account for future research is not that the long working hours that come with the high work the demands are a problem for female breadwinner couples, but that the problem of long working hours is when they work against gender norms, as is the case with Mathilde and Hans. Perhaps it turns out that their case is not an isolated one with regard to the relationship strains and increased likelihood of divorce.

Another possible outcome of conflict between work and home is burnout, defined as the end state of long-term chronic stress (McCormack et al., 2018; see also: Maslach, 2003), which is not too rare among the female breadwinners I interviewed. Mathilde has had one,

Hebo said she has had one too, and also Eva, Paulien and Merel have experienced this. Merel is a general practitioner and has her own practice. Merel:

I have a dispensing general practice and I am the sole owner (...). I work 5 days a week with additional shifts on top of that (...) for sure 50 hours a week, on average. [INT: How would you describe your work-life balance?] Normally it is well balanced. I had a burnout four years ago, just as my colleague left. That had to do with all sorts of things. Not just that he left. And then I thought: 'I have to do things differently'. So, I no longer do six patients per hour, but four. And because I am my own boss, I have a lot of freedom. And that is priceless to me. (Merel, 50s, doctor, income group E)

Paulien has faced three burnouts, one of which was because she felt at her workplace that “you do not treat us as humans here” and “it was only about making long hours; it is was: you are up or out”; the other two burnouts had to do with the illness and death of Paulien’s father. It is good to keep in mind that burnout is not only caused by work, but also by private circumstances, as a study found “de-emphasize individual-level and non-work factors in burnout research is unwise” (Bianchi et al., 2021). For Hebo, her burnout was the time to become a freelancer so that she could have more flexibility in her life “I just want to follow my gut and not go for the money”. Eva would also like more flexibility, namely to work fewer hours because given the aftermath of her burnout “I still feel it, and if it were financially possible, I might want to work a day less; that would be easier if he earned more”. Mathilde, who also had a burnout, outlined how she thinks this can be remedied for others:

Actually, I think that in my profession, in medicine, we should not select people based on their overflowing resumes. You then forget that it is also very valuable to have people in your team who are much more relaxed, who are not about to fall over and who have ensured that they have a nice life. I am very curious how things will continue, because I

am very afraid that there will be a very high risk of consequences, while we desperately need our medical specialists. And of course, this also applies to nurses. They are also people who are always there for everyone; they burnout too. (...) it also applies to people in education; those women do not want to work more hours because they think they will break down, which is actually the case now.

Mathilde would like to see a better balance between work and private life for others, and that this balance is normalised in the hiring and retention of workers. It is good to note that this should also apply to men, since it is already mainly women who use reconciliation facilities such as family leave, flexible working hours, part-time work to reconcile their professional life and their private life (European Commission, 2008, 5).

Looking at what the other women say about their burnout experience, there is a link between burning out at work, what is going on in the private lives of these women and the lack of flexibility to balance between work and private life. In studies in and outside the Netherlands, women are seen as a risk group for burnout (Purvanova & Muros, 2010; TNO, 2020; UNICEF, 2021) and a Dutch study shows that women in leadership positions experience more emotional exhaustion (i.e.: one of the characteristics of burnout)⁴⁷ than their male colleagues. An American study explains why more women experience more job-related burnout than men, including women in non-conventional positions:

Women do not report more burnout due to working harder at home, spending more time on childcare, fearing job loss, working in jobs not equally represented by women, or finding it hard to advance in the job. Typical demographic and job characteristics such as race, age, education, marital and parenthood status, fringe benefits, tenure, hours

⁴⁷ Emotional exhaustion is a state of feeling emotionally worn-out and drained as a result of accumulated stress from your personal or work lives, or a combination of both. Emotional exhaustion is one of the signs of burnout (Cafasso, 2021; Proost & Liesenborghs, 2021).

worked or wages also do not explain away women's propensity to report more job-related burnout than men. Instead, we find that 'progressive' women report job-related burnout at a rate equivalent to that of men, whereas 'traditional' women report substantially more job-related burnout. (Artz et al., 2022, 463)

In the cited study, "progressive" is seen as an antonym of the "traditional" ideology. The study further explains that among progressive workers, higher wages seem to correspond with more burnout and that work expectations can influence perceived burnout. In essence, high-status female breadwinners may have expectations or preferences that are unrealised by their jobs and consequently report more burnout. At the same time, traditional women are far more likely to report job-related burnout, where in the study for this group of women is given as an example:

Women who expect or believe a 'traditional' role for women in the family is best may prefer to spend more time at home with their children and family. Any additional work or challenges related to their paid jobs may be realized as additional burden. (Artz et al., 2022, 451)

I found that female breadwinners who have more similarities with traditional women in their actions and thinking, run the risk of a greater likelihood of job-related burnout. As Mathilde puts into words for herself, "the social norm is enormous, that as a mother you have to be there for your children and take care of the little things", it is admirable when there are breadwinning women who yield unto these social gender norms and do not burn out, but on a broader level, little progress can be made if one merely wants to cope with the burden of social norms. The conflict between work and home for female breadwinners will remain as such if these women do not fully embrace their non-conventional positions.

6.3.1 Possible Conflict Resolutions

Until now, this section has focused on identifying conflicts between work and home and their effects on female breadwinner couples. Before discussing potential conflict resolutions for and by female breadwinners and their partners, a conflict needs to be dealt with at country level. In the first section of this chapter, *Female Breadwinner Couples at Work*, it is outlined that the Dutch government wants women to participate more in the labour market, while the second section, *Social Norms for Gendered Careers*, addresses that the same government reflects the strong motherhood ideology through its social policies. In addition, the government tries to reduce health care costs by encouraging citizens to take on care tasks as much as possible instead of resorting to professional support, which are caring responsibilities that also mainly fall on women (see subsection *Gender Relations in Welfare States*). How this contradiction is possible, –encouraging women as much as possible to work more versus having women taking on more care tasks– while one government might be expected to propagate one policy could be due to the lack of a feminist approach. After all, it is from this angle that the criticism of welfare states that the value of unpaid care by women should be better taken into account comes, so perhaps the issue in the inconsistent social policy also lies here. The fact that care is an issue should be brought more to the fore, as also emerged in a recent study by Goijaerts (2022) in which policymakers from various departments were interviewed about their views on government policy. Although there was a clear pattern among them, namely that the core is to have the labour force participation rate as high as possible, because that ensures that there is a large group that pays taxes and thus contributes to the welfare state; that therefore the government invests in people through education, childcare and re-entry into the labour market. However, the only thing about which there was no clear agreement among the officials was the topic of care. This is due to a lack of cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs, and also that gender balance has not been

sufficiently considered, as in a country where three-quarters of women work part-time it is predominantly women who take on caring responsibilities. (Goijjaerts, 2022; Reid, 2022). In order to correct the gender balance in care and to encourage women to participate more in the labour market, then the topic of part-time work by women in particular is also a point of attention for the government. Dutch policy to increase the labour supply of women focuses mainly on women with young children. If the government wants to get the large group of older, part-time working mothers moving, a broader package of policy measures is needed than just benefits, leave schemes and childcare. Think, for example, of comprehensive day arrangements for school-going children, a care-friendly organisational culture, life career policy at work, making more work more rewarding and employers making it possible to discuss extending working hours. It therefore goes without saying that a possible conflict solution for the government lies in ensuring better cooperation between the ministries on the subject of care and a broader package of policy measures on the closely related subject of part-time work. The question is how this sets people in motion at an individual level, whereby it is important to know how they now organise their paid and unpaid work and what their target situations are. This is demonstrated by also discussing possible conflict resolutions at household level.

As this interview series progressed, I was able to fine-tune how I could help participants to formulate their ideal situations at work and at home. After asking questions that were prepared and emerged about their work life, household chores, childcare (if applicable) and financial responsibilities, it turned out that the best way to bring out the lives that they desire was for them to give a rate on a scale of one to 10. Everyone who was asked this question “how would you rate your life (that you live with your partner?)”, gave a pass grade, i.e., from six and up, and no one gave a ten. I took this grading opportunity to ask after the first mentioned digit: “What would have to be done so that it could go up one digit for you?”. I did this until we got to the ten on the scale and received answers that were all quite close to what has been

discussed earlier in the interview and explored here in this thesis, such as: reducing her workload, more free time among the partners and also wanting to earn more money so that the woman can afford to outsource household tasks or that she could entrust more to her partner for household tasks. In effect, they drew a picture of their ideal lives by summarising their points of improvement through wishes, desires and aspirations. Then, and not always directly after the rating of their lives, they were asked for advice or recommendations that they would give to someone of their own gender who might be on the same path they are on now. With this I wanted to invite them to distance themselves somewhat from their own lives and act as a guardian of other people's lives. The statements that came out of the last question are the basis of this subsection and also inform all the findings chapters. Here, I bring together the possible solutions for female breadwinning households to obtain the best way to intersect work life and private life with the conclusion that undoing gender brings a better quality of life within reach.

Of the 36 participants, 27 give pieces of advice and recommendations because I only thought to include this in the topic guide later in the fieldwork. They were asked what to say to a person of their own gender, who might be concerned about becoming a member of a female breadwinner household. Mathilde:

I would give this advice: choose a houseman who likes doing that work, who supports you completely and who takes pleasure in running that household perfectly. So, leave the running of the household completely to someone else and only do the fun things with your children yourself, so that when you are there, you are not arranging stuff but that you are present. [INT: Are you saying you can't do this with someone who also has a career?] Indeed. Look, if you temper your ambitions in your work, then it is possible. (Mathilde, 50s, medical specialist, income group E)

Mathilde does not recommend that both partners be ambitious because of the potential of them having a high involvement in their work lives. She would even advise someone to be partnered with a male homemaker who would spare the female breadwinner from almost all domestic duties. Her husband, Hans, has a different opinion. During the interview with him, he said when the word housewife came up: “I think no one should be a housewife, or a houseman. No one. I think everyone should earn their own money, whether you are a man or a woman, because this has to do with your self-esteem and your development.” About 40 minutes later in the interview, I specifically asked Hans for his advice:

My advice would be to make sure you stay economically independent and make sure you keep developing even if you can't find a job. If you do this, then it doesn't matter how much your partner earns or how successful she is. But you know, I would give a woman the same advice. If an intelligent woman came to me, I would also tell her: 'you should not be dependent'. (Hans, 60s, researcher, income group C)

Hans added that dependence can mean that you may go beyond your own limits, because the other person is paying for everything and you don't want to upset that person. As a result, the dependent person goes beyond his or her limits.

It may well be that the connotation of “houseman” and “housewife” trips them up. Perhaps, if the genders were disconnected from the division of roles in the home and at work, being: men as the breadwinners and women as homemakers (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Pinho & Gaunt, 2021) as discussed in the second chapter called Contexts of Doing Gender, Mathilde's view and Hans' view would not be as contrasting as they seem. Their statements brought together would mean that one person has more ambition and is mainly active in work life and the other is mainly concerned with domestic tasks but does not renounce his or her self-development. In the case of another participant, Linde, when asked for her advice, I leaned

more into the thought of a female breadwinner's partner who might feel uncomfortable with his position in the household. Her first reaction to this was "Get rid of that man". She took the illustration further to explain herself:

If a woman comes to me and says 'I can make decent career steps, but I know my partner doesn't like that, then I will of course ask some more questions about why he doesn't like that, but if that's on the level of "I don't wish that for you, because that makes me very insecure", then this is not the right man for her. (Linde, 50s, executive board member, income group F)

Linde has little sympathy for a man's discomfort in his part of a female breadwinner couple, in which she acknowledges that it is difficult to team up with someone who has struggles with a deviation from doing gender at work or at home. Other women also point out the importance of being partnered with the right person, such as Margaret who recommended: "Find a good partner. That sounds very lame, but... [INT: What should she pay attention to in finding a good partner?] I think it's mainly about equality and being supportive of each other." Kim said: "If I had had a man who had inhibited my development, I would have fought for it first. But if it had stayed that way, I would have left him. And I would also recommend that to my female colleagues." There are also women who would advise to deal with the discomfort of the female breadwinner's partner differently, like Eva who emphasised staying open for discussion, talk about what something does to you, and "what something does to your partner". Paulien also underscores the need for good communication and added in her advice to other women that something happens when they earn more.

I think it is very important to discuss this with each other, that you are open to it and alert to it, because something does happen [INT: What happens?] In my case I noticed that he linked it to being able to matter, doing something valuable but not being

rewarded for it while seeing the other person carry on as I had all kinds of nice things and stuff on my path. (Paulien, 50s, HR specialist, income group D)

In Paulien's rendering, the focus is on continuing to appreciate the other in what he or she does, regardless of the position that someone takes in the household, which goes hand in hand with Hebo's advice: "always support your man; just see what suits you, and what you can handle, because every person is different. Look at how you feel, and what such a person can offer you besides your career".

Expressing appreciation and communicating about discomfort are ways for people to engage in substantial conversations, which tends to increase happiness (Mehl et al., 2010) but does not mean that women are thought to abandon their career plans as a result. "Keep communicating with each other, but keep going for your own plan, that's the most important thing; it doesn't matter if you earn more" (Monique), "give each other freedom; ultimately, love should not be determined by what the other person earns" (Lieke) and "you shouldn't let yourself be held back (...) you should just keep going, but be open in your communication" (Mulan). Jeanne brought to the attention: "Make everything negotiable (...) and sometimes you just have to use Winnie-the-Pooh language; that's just very simple, very clear, that you understand it all and leave nothing to the imagination." Isa added to the point of view on communication between partners:

It's always such a clincher but it starts with a good conversation to try and figure out how both partners are in it. I see that even though my partner says 'I don't begrudge you', when he feels a little less good about himself, then it could be like 'okay,' I have now become 'just the man of...'. So, one must stand firmly in their shoes. (Isa, 40s, director, income group E)

Being only the man (or the woman) of someone is often used in the Dutch language in reference to a celebrity's partner who is completely in the celebrity's shadow; this partner only bears the professional title 'the man of' or 'the woman of'. Isa indicates that men must have a strong character not to be caught by these kinds of thoughts. Ellis thinks that men will suffer anyway as her advice was:

Prepare to get your man's ego bruised. [INT: How can a woman prepare for that?] By at least accepting it as fact and knowing very few men actually believe it's fantastic if their wife starts earning much more. (Ellis, 40s, firm partner, income group G)

Ellis' advice is perhaps consistent with the literature that is discussed in chapter 2, namely that men who are out-earned are more likely to be negatively impacted on their well-being (Rogers & DeBoer, 2011), but from the conversations with the participants it appears that eliminating gendered expectations and behaviour between couples as much as possible can ensure that negative consequences do not set in. Anna said in her advice: "Actually, I think that is a lack of self-confidence of some men. And then you might have to kind of confirm what he excels at or is strong at; it does not have to be expressed in money." For what men have to say about this themselves, we can turn to Dre who indicated:

Others should know that being a man isn't necessarily about how much money they rake in. Suppose the man earns nothing and the woman earns everything, you still can consider yourself to be a man. Only then it's more into the softer things, like taking responsibility for your relationship, taking charge, setting direction, taking care of your wife, doing everything for her, that sort of thing. (Dre, 20s, PhD student, income group B)

Mitch gave the following advice to other men: "I would say, you have to stay very close to yourself. If you don't do that, it won't work." He gave an example of a man who was acting out of the ordinary to get into a relationship, but could not keep it up because he did not stay

close to himself. Other participants in this study gave similar advice, such as but for women. Sissi said: “Stay in touch with yourself, with what is important to you. And try to find your way in how to grow towards the goals that you have set for yourself”, but she makes a note that it is not always about setting goals, but that we do have a certain image of what you want to have or become. Carla added to this point of view: “My advice would be to look mainly at herself and not so much at the other person to see if this will work. Look at what you have to offer. I wouldn’t want to make myself dependent of anyone around me”, and thus both Carla and Sissi do not want to lose sight of the importance of women who wish to choose a path of independence. Lisa shared:

She has to keep in touch with who she is, what her desires are, and what her heart is telling her. You must be very clear in what you want for your partner. Just see it as a business act. (Lisa, 40s, board chair, income group F)

Lisa brings in an angle to approach the love relationship within female breadwinner couples from a business side. This is indeed a way of organising the relationship between work and private life as well as possible and offers opportunities to take better into account the gender basis of the decisions. A male participant also paid attention in his advice to how partners make agreements. Nathan: “Dare to negotiate with your partner (...) and dare to make unromantic agreements. Not like: we still love each other, you have to sense that, no, people don’t sense that.” In order not to lose sight of the emotional side of these relationships, it is good to also exhibit the advice of Celina “keep doing nice things for yourself and keep wanting this for each other too” or Aart “make sure you devote enough time and energy to you, your partner and your children” and take note of what Greetje said:

Show all your emotions. Say, you have a broom closet, things you like to close the door on. Do you dare to open that door for the other person and share all your doubts,

insecurities and thoughts with each other? That is difficult, but those are often the most intimate moments: there you come together on a deepest level. And if you can have that conversation without judgment, you really get to the heart of the matter. (Greetje, 50s, board director, income group F)

However, the fact that these women recommended to take the feelings of their partners into account does not mean that the women should take more of the household tasks off their partners' hands, as Sara said:

Regardless of what you earn, see what you can solve together and outsource more. And if you both hand in half a day or a full day and outsource more, then it should be possible, right? Why should a woman do more? I also think that a lot of women draw too many things to themselves (...) so pay attention to that from the start, that you don't do this too quickly. (Sara, 30s, lawyer, income group F)

After Sara gave this advice, I asked her if she herself was aware of this from the start too. "I never paid much attention to that, but I think in retrospect that if I had a man who was less inclined to step forward, I would pay attention to that." Sara puts into words that the division of household tasks among female breadwinners should not lead to more homework for women, despite that the literature suggesting that mothers generally do more housework as well as childcare compared to fathers (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Pepin et al., 2018, 13). According to Erma, women with demanding jobs should not even aspire to have much control over domestic work in addition to their career. Her advice was:

Let go. Really, let go. You often see women who want to reach the top and want to get all facets of their lives in order, and that gets tricky. I don't remember who it was but it was an American lady who said: You cannot have it all. (...). You cannot be very successful at work, and you also want to be in control of what happens at home. Or you

have to let go of your work ambition, or of you wanting to be in control at home. Maybe things don't go the way you would like at home and you might be annoyed to death, but that means that there is someone you are not giving enough space to do it their way.

(Erma, 50s, managing director, income group D)

Sara's view and Erma's view open the door to organising female breadwinner households in a more gender-neutral way. A more gender-neutral approach may be the search for a balance in the use of feminine and masculine qualities, as suggested by Jasper. He concludes this series of advice with a look at female breadwinners in the workplace and wants to encourage other female breadwinners to embrace more of their feminine qualities in their leadership roles. It is relevant to highlight the previously discussed literature saying that women are traditionally seen lacking the necessary qualities for leadership (Nieva & Gutek, 1981, 83). Earlier in the interview with him, he discussed what he meant by femininity and linked this to being more sociable, being a better listener and acting less from ego. He also shared that in his opinion each person possesses both feminine and masculine qualities. Jasper's advice for women:

In a general sense, I still see too many women at the top who make a career mainly from their masculine side. And what I really like about (his wife's name) is that she makes a career based on her femininity. If we really want to go further with diversity and inclusion, then women really have to stop making a career through the male part of themselves. That's not good. [INT: Why isn't it good?] Then they mimic men, and we'll get nowhere. Then you still see that apparently being masculine is necessary to make a career. That's really nonsense. There must be many more examples of women making careers with their feminine side. (Jasper, 50s, senior manager, income group F)

With this, Jasper aims to stand up for women who think that the top of the pyramids in the workforce require male-gendered behaviour and therefore behave as the male gender (see chapter 2, in the section Doing Gender at Work for literature on occupational segregation between men and women, and how these challenges for working women are often confirmed biases and beliefs). It is indeed a challenge for female breadwinners not to get too caught up in the expectations of prevailing social norms on gender roles, both at work and at home. Thus, it takes a high degree of willpower, awareness, connection and cooperation between female breadwinner couples to make decisions that disregards gendered expectations. Those who find their way to make decisions without regard to their gender, are the ones who hold the power, namely the ability to fully determine outcomes for their work and home lives. Also, in this section, undoing gender is the common thread to improve the lives in these households as shown in the previous sections and chapters.

6.4 Conclusion

In a country that is European champion in part-time work, Dutch female breadwinners are the odd ones out: they work in positions that often require at least full-time hours, and if anyone works part-time it is the man in the household rather than the woman who does this. Given the misconception that seniority comes with control over one's work hours, her high-demanding position in the workplace affects her time in her home. If she and her partner were to hold on to the belief that she would still have to perform most of the household chores, then this could lay bare their need to uphold conventional gender roles at home. After all, it would be logical and also in line with economic bargaining resources (see Chapter 4, first section Household Bargaining Frames) that the conventional tasks in the household are also reversed and that he takes more care of the house. This does not imply that a large degree of inverted gender roles in the labour market has to be a precondition for the male partner to be

the most responsible for their domestic work. Due to the breadwinner being the one with the most contributing and financially stable job, this should suffice for making the other person turn more toward home life, regardless of gender. So, irrespective of whether there is a male or female breadwinner, it would only make sense that the other is more dedicated towards the home. This chapter outlines that if the male partner is unemployed or works substantially fewer hours than the female breadwinner, men do indeed perform more household tasks, which is striking when considering chapter 4, which shows that female breadwinner couples compensate for their gender deviance by the woman performing a similar or larger share of domestic chores, despite her comparatively higher status. It could be that when men have more available time due to reduced work commitments, they contribute more to domestic tasks (as presumed that time-availability approach is particularly applicable to men, see: subsection 4.1.1 Economic Bargaining Resources), but it also raises the possibility that the man's labour force status may be more influential than the woman's in determining the division of domestic chores. This implies that the dynamics of household labour are not solely determined by the woman's status as the primary earner but are also influenced by the man's employment situation and the value placed on it by social norms.

As the social norms for a gendered career cross the line with home lives, one of the effects for working mothers is that they should keep their children from being at daycare centres as much as possible because of the implicit rule that women should take on the most responsibilities for the children. Herein lies the close connection between work and home in the fact that a woman should be the homemaker or "just a housewife", which may imply a lowly status or an occupation in terms of her relation to a man. The connotation of the word housewife and also houseman could therefore work against the idea that the man mainly fulfils the homemaker role, while this role does not necessarily mean that one's development

should be brought to a standstill. However, the resistance is understandable and perhaps even underestimated given the social norm that weighs on the decisions one makes.

For female breadwinner couples, confronting social norms and continuing to deviate from these norms are a task in itself. This also puts into perspective how free people are to choose a different career path and family arrangement. It can be a constant struggle to walk a path that defies social norms for gendered careers, but because the work life of female breadwinners is intrinsically linked to their home life, these atypical lives can also cause chafing behind closed doors. At home, it can be difficult for couples to stay connected if one is constantly physically and mentally absent from work, which in this study refers to the female partner. This does not alter the fact that also in other cases or in other household types, such as male breadwinner households, if the man has too little time for his partner and family, that this is an issue too. Nevertheless, with women there is often a double role that plays a part and for many of these women the solutions could be within reach, which is: to let go of more domestic tasks, to leave more responsibilities to her partner and basically to undo gender. These solutions are so close and yet so far away, but can be necessary as they reduce the chances of conflict that can lead to divorce and also burnout. With regard to the latter, the argument can be made that women are also more at risk if they feel that a traditional role for them at home should prevail.

Standing out throughout this chapter is that doing gender plays a major role in the entangled intersection between work life and home life, but awareness of this does not guarantee that they can directly make constructive changes in their own work and life positions. With the thought that it may be easier to help others on the way from one's own experience, the last subsection is extremely valuable that possible conflict resolutions are offered, by and for female breadwinners and their partners. From their mouths we hear about the need of the women to have a male partner who could step more into the role of

homemaker, while it clearly emerges from a male perspective that this is not a role that is too comfortable to take on. Even if participants talk about these gendered roles from some distance, it shows that a negative association with the breadwinner-homemaker dyad could underlie the view on those roles. A useful piece of advice from women, in addition to choosing a good partner and to communicating as well as possible, is that women should not expect to have everything, i.e., “you cannot have it all”, and that outsourcing is a good solution for female breadwinners. Yet, there is also a role for men too, as one of them suggested to others that they can support and take care of their female partners. For the men in these households, communication is also important to get across what they need in the relationship. The insights of these men contribute to the realisation that their well-being is also important in finding solutions for the female breadwinners to achieve a better balance between work and private life.

In addition to the insights obtained at household-level, it appears that there is also a deeper understanding on country-level. It has become clearer that, in the dilemma between encouraging women as much as possible to work more and allowing women to take on more care tasks, a possible conflict solution for the government lies in ensuring better cooperation between the ministries and the closely related subject of part-time work and a broader package of policy measures.

Due to time and focus, this chapter that includes the work life of female breadwinner couples paid less attention to other aspects of the women’s work lives that may be linked to gendered social norms, such as missed career opportunities or that they knew people passed over them in their careers, presumably involving a motherhood penalty. However, based on what was touched upon in the interviews about these topics, recommendations are made for further research in the next chapter. That chapter also contains a conclusion in which the research question and sub-questions are central.

When we dive into the lives of women who balance professional work and caregiving responsibilities, it becomes apparent that we need a deeper understanding of their experiences within welfare systems. Bettio and Verashchagina (2009) remind us how welfare policies greatly affect how women manage their jobs alongside caring for their families. As the Dutch welfare state interweaves social-democratic and corporatist/continental models (Arts & Gelissen, 1999), resonances with Derks (2019) and Veelen (2020) emerge, bringing attention to the pervasive dominance of the maternity ideology in the Netherlands –an ideology dictating that mothers bear the primary responsibility for childcare. Erma’s observations illustrated the deeply entrenched nature of this norm. Meanwhile, Hans’ perspective unravelled the intricate challenges confronted by female breadwinners, adding another layer to Derks’ (2019) discourse on gendered effects. Specifically, it highlighted the manifestation of “maternal gatekeeping” as a significant factor shaping parenting dynamics, articulated by Veelen (2020) and echoing the observations of Cannon et al. (2008) and Hauser (2012). This phenomenon details the reluctance of mothers to relinquish control, hindering fathers’ active involvement in parenting. Mathilde and Hans’ experiences echo existing literature highlighting the challenges faced by female breadwinner households (Snijders et al., 2022; Cooke, 2006), exposing the strains arising from long working hours and uneven distribution of domestic responsibilities. Their deliberate efforts to prioritise their relationship, mirroring the insights of Goodwin and colleagues (2009) and Ruppner & Maume (2016), accentuate the transformative power of conscious choices within relationships. Jasper and Carla’s narratives shine a spotlight on the importance of renegotiating domestic responsibilities and fostering mutual understanding, seamlessly aligning with insights from England and Kilbourne (1990), and Piña and Bengtson (1993). Through stories like Sara’s and Anna’s, who juggle work and family responsibilities, and others like Lily, Monique, Mathilde, and Erma, who each have their unique challenges, we see just how complex the lives of female

breadwinners can be. This exploration tells us we need to understand individual narrations and the different kinds of welfare systems out there better. We also need to rethink old ideas like Esping-Andersen's (1990) framework, which often overlooks how gender and unpaid caregiving play into welfare policies. Feminist scholars like Goijaerts (2022) and Ciccia & Sainsbury (2018) rightly criticise these frameworks for not addressing the gender imbalances in welfare policies. While Esping-Andersen's categories simplify things, the Dutch government's push for more women in the workforce while still promoting traditional motherhood roles is what shows the tensions in current policies. There is a gap between expecting women to do unpaid caregiving, which falls mainly on them, and pushing them to join the workforce. Policymakers need to take a more inclusive approach to welfare policies that work for everyone. Therefore, this analysis calls for a rethink of existing ideas and for policymakers to listen to feminist perspectives when shaping welfare policies. By considering the literature, findings and discussions, the hope is to help create policies that better support women who balance work and caregiving in today's world.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This thesis focuses on women who are the highest earning partners at home in the Netherlands: a country that has one of the largest metropolitan regions in North West Europe, is in the mid-range with regard to the position of women on the labour market, but has the lowest proportion of female breadwinners in this part of Europe (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2021; Lopez-Carreiro et al., 2021; PWC, 2022; Randstad Region, 2019). These Dutch female breadwinners are examined in terms of how they negotiate their home and working lives because of the argument that this study makes that both the gendered nature of home and the gendered nature of work are needed to understand these households. Three contexts follow from this, namely the context of work (in particular the contemporary gendered context of paid work in the labour force), the policy and cultural context (including gendered work histories, societal shifts, economic crises, which all reflect ongoing gender inequalities) and the context of home; together they form the context within which the intra-household dynamics of female breadwinner households take place. Globally female headed and female breadwinner households carry the greatest risks of poverty due to the effects of gender norms (Chant, 2014; Klesment & Van de Bavel, 2015; Kowalewska & Vitali, 2019). As the literature tends to focus on the issue of poverty among households in which the woman is the highest earning partner, this study adds to knowledge by placing the centre of attention onto highly paid women and brings perspective to the challenges that they may face when transgressing gender norms in their work and home lives.

This study uses a “doing gender” approach to understand these high paid women and their partners, and a closer discussion of female breadwinner households in Western countries reveals that the practical day-to-day management of this relatively new family structure is under-researched. Moreover, the women’s higher status and income adds to the equation that there is an association between women’s higher earning power, relationship dissatisfaction,

infidelity, and divorce (Blom, 2019; Coop Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Kleine, 2019; Munsch, 2015; Scott et al, 2013). The division of household chores seems to get to the heart of all these possible negative consequences, because between female breadwinner couples it appears that the more she earns compared to him, the more she does in the household and the less he performs household chores, this behaviour indicates compensating for violations of traditional gender norms (Baxter & Hewitt, 2013; Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2014; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Burkeman, 2018; Coltrane, 2000; Grunow et al., 2012; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007).

There are several possible effects that correspond with the gendered division of housework, but for this study attention is mostly focused on the household composition (especially the presence of children), intimacy (in the broad sense of the word), social class (commonly measured on household wealth and income) and outsourcing of domestic tasks. By being aware of these effects, this research sought to get as close as possible to the grounds of gender-related expectations and behaviours; an aim that stands or falls with choosing the most suitable research design.

Individual interviewing accompanied by a feminist approach was the most suitable method because of its recognition of the research topics and the place of the researcher in the production of knowledge. The research approach was fruitful in the study's endeavour to have in-depth interviews with 36 people who live in diverse forms of female breadwinner households. These participants were extremely interesting and very candid to share intimate details about their home and work lives. They offered me an exclusive look behind the scenes with their partner, children, friends, colleagues and others, which enabled me to deeply understand the intertwined effects of work and home on the ways that gender is done by female breadwinner couples. Based on their cases, I now reflect on each of the research questions presented at the outset of the study.

7.1 Discussion of Research Questions

In this interdisciplinary study—drawing on and contributing to gender studies, feminist theory, social geography, sociology, and social policy—one main research question guided my exploration of how gender is done by female breadwinner households, namely “How do Dutch female breadwinner households do gender at home?” Three sub-questions then provided an initial framework for examining the connection between home and work in terms of gendered household dynamics. The main question is answered by first covering the subquestions separately which correspond with the three findings chapters, they make clear how domestic work, finance and the influence of paid work are linked to answer the main question of this study.

7.1.1 Research Subquestion 1

What is “doing gender” in the context of domestic work for female breadwinner couples?

The academic contribution of the first subquestion stands out in its nuanced exploration of “doing gender” within the specific context of female breadwinner couples and domestic work. This contribution can be situated within the landscape of research on gender studies, feminist theory, and social research. The thesis engages critically with foundational feminist literature, drawing on the works of Federici (2012), Hochschild & Machung (1989; 2012), hooks (2000; 2013), and Oakley (1974; 1981). By grounding the study in these theoretical perspectives, it establishes a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the historical and conceptual underpinnings of women's oppression in domestic work. Also, this study challenges prevalent economic resource-based frameworks that suggest female breadwinners should have greater bargaining power in negotiating domestic responsibilities. The empirical findings reveal a disjuncture between these frameworks and the lived experiences of high-

status female breadwinners, thus contributing a nuanced critique to existing feminist knowledge. Furthermore, the utilisation of detailed case studies allows for a rich exploration of the complexities within female breadwinner households. This methodological approach contributes to the qualitative depth of the research, offering insights into the negotiation processes, perceptions, and experiences of different couples, and contributing to methodological discussions within social research by emphasising the importance of case studies in understanding intricate social phenomena. Another aspect of this research's academic contribution is the attention paid to the intersectionality of gender, socioeconomic status, and household dynamics. By examining the experiences of high-earning female households, this thesis contributes to the analysis of neoliberal feminism and its impact on women's lives. The study highlights the complex negotiations between individual empowerment and systemic change, aligning with contemporary debates in feminist theory. Not to be overlooked, is the discussion on the arrival of children and the phenomenon of intensive mothering contributes to existing literature on caregiving responsibilities. Drawing on work by Hays (1998) and O'Reilly & Ruddick (2009), the thesis places its findings in conversation with existing research on gender inequality in caregiving roles, emphasising the continued challenges faced by women despite professional advancements. Additionally, the exploration of outsourcing within female breadwinner households contributes to social research knowledge on the gendered division of labour. The thesis highlights how outsourcing, while offering relief to women, may perpetuate traditional gender roles, aligning with discussions on the complexities of work-family policies and gender equity. Not unimportant is the introduction of a nuanced perspective on leisure as a gendered construct within the context of domestic work. By emphasising the differential experiences of leisure and caregiving between men and women, it adds a valuable dimension to discussions on gendered perceptions of time allocation within households (García Román & Garcia, 2022;

Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Thijs et al., 2022). As a further matter, this research unearths the challenges of undoing gender within female breadwinner households and emphasises the significance of negotiation, communication, and adaptation, which contributes to social research knowledge on gender dynamics within relationships and challenges assumptions about the invisibility of gender norms in domestic arrangements. Last, but certainly not least, the thesis goes beyond theoretical contributions by offering practical implications for undoing gender in household tasks. The discussion on outsourcing, early communication, and the impact of becoming a female breadwinner during a relationship provides valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and individuals navigating non-conventional gender roles. With the academic groundwork in place, the path is laid to explore the practical realities of gender dynamics within female breadwinner households, directly addressing the subquestion at hand.

It is clear from my research that despite women reaching the pinnacles of professional success, the battle for equality at home remains a relentless struggle. Feminist voices have rightly asserted that the burden of domestic work serves as the cornerstone of women's oppression (Federici, 2012, 16; Hochschild & Machung, 1989, hooks, 2000, Oakley, 1974). According to economic resource-based frameworks (Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2021; Sánchez-Mira, 2021), female breadwinners should have greater bargaining power than their male partners to perform less domestic work because of their income, occupational and educational prestige or social standing. In practice, high-status breadwinning women tend to do more domestic tasks than their male partner and I found that gender norms underlie their arrangements at home. While it was not easy to pinpoint exactly how these norms develop between couples, this study did find that a woman's dissatisfaction with their arrangement at home, shifted for example by the arrival of children, tends to lead to self-blame rather than behavioural change between partners that challenges gender norms.

Narrowing in on separate household tasks that are distributed among partners, I found that the chores classified as routine largely explain the gendered expectations and behaviour that were apparent. These tasks are traditionally more associated with women and it should be noted that the use of the term “traditional” in this study refers to the gendering of these tasks without the intention to reinstate gender norms but to indicate strongly gendered patterns. Such patterns can be found in various chores, but a closer analysis of cooking and cleaning as household tasks unveils that men and women experience these tasks differently, because of the role that leisure plays. This study argues that there is much to be gained in recognising the complex role of leisure and the awareness of the difference in time perception by genders with regard to performing routine household tasks and, for households with children, also concerning childcare.

In the confrontation of assumptions about gendered roles in the home, I found that those who struggle the most are the couples where the woman was not the breadwinner from the start of their relationship, because they have to deal with gender norms that were previously invisible. Ergo, early communication about possible future household arrangements is helpful, but this study also makes clear that the impact of becoming a female breadwinner during a relationship is difficult to foresee, although non-conventional housework arrangements also come with struggles for those who come together as a female breadwinner couple. It can be concluded that undoing gender at home is in itself a major challenge for female breadwinner households, but what comes through in the study is that not every couple is willing or able to do this: few of the women want to perform fewer chores but do not necessarily want to go against gendered behaviour or expectations at home, on the grounds that they would rather not rock the boat or do not know how to go about it. In addition to the fact that the impact of non-conventional arrangements is more difficult for a couple when the woman becomes the breadwinner during the relationship, the impact can

also lead to more conflict when the self-confidence of the male partner is compromised, leading me to conclude that undoing gender at home is not only about keeping an eye on the well-being of the females, but also not losing sight of the well-being of the males in these households.

The implications for practice are that undoing gender at home develops from being a process to becoming a result, dividing tasks between couples without regard to gender; at the same time, undoing gender is always a work in progress according to the developments between the partners. This study argues that the female breadwinners' ability to make autonomous financial decisions enables them to outsource the chores that fall to them at home, which, at least temporarily while they negotiate and find ways to do and "undo" gender that are acceptable to both partners, could relieve breadwinning women of the housework which they do more of compared to men due to hyper-conventional behaviours.

Doing gender is not the same for every female breadwinner couple, but domestic work is clearly an important arena in which gender is done. The participants had different levels of agreements and conflicts about how they do gender at home, and different ways in which they got to their conclusions and solutions.

7.1.2 Research Subquestion 2

How do the earnings and financial arrangements of female breadwinners relate to negotiations at home?

The thesis also puts forth its academic value by addressing this second subquestion, which looks at the complex relationship between the earnings and financial arrangements of female breadwinners and negotiations within their households. This research is crucial in filling a significant gap in the literature, especially when it comes to the realm of household finances

and the intersection with gender roles. The thesis goes beyond the traditional focus on domestic work and adds to this the dynamics of financial tasks, bringing clarity to how couples negotiate and navigate financial responsibilities. The exploration of financial management styles, distribution of finance, and financial conflict management within female breadwinner couples provides a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender, income, and relationship dynamics. By incorporating real-life narratives of individuals such as Kim, and Olivia, and couples like Eva and Dre, the thesis grounds its academic inquiry in lived experiences, enhancing the richness of the findings. The inclusion of diverse narratives helps capture the complexity of financial arrangements within these couples, emphasising the relevance and depth of the research. Chapter 5 effectively positions the research in relation to existing literature, drawing on insights from Lyonette and Crompton (2015), Dunatchik (2023), Kluwer and colleagues (1997), Meester (2020a), and others. This integration of diverse literature enhances the theoretical framework, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted connections between gender, income, and relationship dynamics. Through the second subquestion, this thesis builds upon these theoretical foundations, weaving together a narrative that highlights the persistence of traditional gender dynamics, even when the female partner is the primary earner. The conclusion of Chapter 5 further strengthens the academic contribution by summarising key findings and offering insightful reflections. The argument that financial conflicts can strain relationships more than other conflict areas, coupled with the discussion on joint and separate accounts, challenges conventional wisdom and introduces novel perspectives. The acknowledgment that doing gender in financial tasks is not about “undoing gender” but rather adopting untraditional ways of performing gendered division of tasks adds depth to the academic discourse. The thesis not only addresses Research Subquestion 2 effectively but also aligns the findings with broader social research knowledge, showcasing the relevance and significance of understanding

financial dynamics in female breadwinner couples. By connecting the research to established theories and incorporating diverse literature, the thesis contributes to the ongoing dialogue on gender, income, and relationship dynamics, offering valuable insights for future research and policy considerations. Overall, the comprehensive exploration of financial aspects within female breadwinner households positions the thesis as a noteworthy academic contribution to the field. Having set the stage with theoretical underpinnings, we can now venture further into how the intersection of financial dynamics with gender roles in households directly engages with the subquestion in focus.

There is a dearth of research in the area of household finances, particularly concerning the interaction of financial responsibilities and other tasks (such as housework responsibilities) within couples. This research gap underscores the broader context that financial dynamics contribute to the negotiation of gender roles at home. Therefore, in addition to domestic work, this study acknowledges that an aspect of the way couples do gender at home is in their financial tasks. It turns out that the arrangements of finances, how they are negotiated and how each partner feels about them, matter and was discussed in explicitly gendered terms. Female breadwinner couples rarely only have a joint account and if they do have such an account, it is in combination with separate accounts. A starting point from the literature (Gladstone et al., 2022), stating that being happy about the financial arrangements is increased by having joint accounts, is challenged in this study to ask whether it could also be the other way around: couples who are happy together pool their money. At the same time, I found there were benefits for female breadwinners and their partners to also having separate accounts to manage income disparities, since in addition to the joint tracking of household finances, the separate accounts give the female breadwinner couples room to deal with the unequal financial relationship that arises due to the higher earnings of the women, a form of inequality that some of the male partners found it difficult to accept.

In the division of financial tasks, I discovered that it was most often that couples with the highest income gap between partners, are the ones where the women have the most say in financial tasks across the board because of their greater contribution to the household income. Although this requires further research, it emerged that a deeper understanding of doing gender in household chores gives better insight into the gendered dynamics in financial tasks, as financial and household tasks do not seem to be neatly separated from each other.

Another consideration in understanding how female breadwinners' earnings and financial arrangements relate to negotiations at home, concerns men who have difficulty with the women's wish to see her earnings as joint money; it is striking that the same men would want their female partner to view his income as their money if he were to become the main breadwinner. I argue that the idea that men are deemed responsible for economic provision for the household through employment, is a strong influence in doing gender in couples' finances. For high-status female breadwinner couples, because they have good incomes, financial conflict appears to be about leadership or control and closely relates to gendered roles, this is similar to the discussion regarding household tasks and the self-confidence of the male partner being compromised by his partner's status and earnings. Financial management among some female breadwinner couples seems to be about men's need for economic valuation when their female partner earns more, which surfaced when it was found that confidence can be drawn from the fact that men in these households at least feel wealthier than their counterpart due to other important sources of wealth through one or more economic investments.

These cases of domestic life illustrate that doing gender becomes visible when pushing against gendered expectations. Rather than 'undoing gender' as such, unconventional situations at home are shaping the relationship and behaviour into applying untraditional

ways of performing gendered division of tasks.

7.1.3 Research Subquestion 3

How do state-level family policies and related cultural practices impact how female breadwinners are “doing gender” at home?

Through the third subquestion, this thesis goes into a crucial area of social research inquiry, examining the interplay between state-level family policies, cultural practices, and the lived experiences of female breadwinners. The thesis offers an analysis that casts light upon the tensions and contradictions inherent in contemporary gender dynamics within households and workplaces and how these relate to state-level policies. Firstly, there is an underscore of the need for a feminist approach in policy-making to address the gendered division of labour and for the recognition of the value of unpaid care work performed by women. By synthesising insights from interviews with female breadwinners and their partners, the study illuminates how societal expectations intersect with government policies, influencing the dynamics of gender roles within households. This feminist lens reveals the complexities of women’s experiences in navigating work and caregiving responsibilities, emphasising the necessity for policy frameworks that support gender equality and acknowledge the diverse needs of households. Secondly, the thesis comes with a contribution to the critique of prevailing welfare state typologies, particularly Esping-Andersen’s framework, by highlighting its limitations in capturing the gendered dimensions of welfare policies. Drawing on feminist scholarship (Ciccia & Sainsbury, 2018; Goijaerts; 2022), this study challenges the oversimplification of welfare regimes and underlines the importance of integrating insights from lived experiences to inform policy development. By analysing the Dutch government’s promotion of female labour force participation alongside traditional motherhood ideologies, the thesis exposes inherent tensions within contemporary welfare policies, urging

policymakers to adopt more inclusive approaches. Furthermore, the thesis advances our understanding of the dynamics within female breadwinner households, highlighting the negotiations and conflicts surrounding gender roles and domestic responsibilities. Via in-depth case studies and interviews, this study elucidates how societal norms intersect with individual choices and structural constraints, forming the experiences of female breadwinners and their partners. By uncovering patterns of gendered behaviour and power dynamics within households, the thesis offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between work and home life.

Identifying the tensions and contradictions between government policies aiming to increase women's labour market participation and societal expectations for women's caregiving responsibilities, comes with an acknowledgement of the need for a feminist approach in policy-making to address the gendered division of labour and recognise the value of unpaid care work performed by women. The suggestion for better cooperation between government ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and Education and Social Affairs, offers opportunities for research and policy development. At the individual level, understanding the experiences of members within a female breadwinner households can help develop effective conflict resolutions and policies promoting gender equality and a supportive societal framework. With this, the study makes the argument that the home lives of female breadwinners cannot be separated from the context of these women in the workplace; a place that is also gendered due to the disparity between men and women in top positions and the time use for paid work by women. Given that most female breadwinners in this study have demanding jobs with long working hours, it emerged that men perform more household tasks when they are unemployed or works substantially fewer hours than the female breadwinner. This is a valuable addition to the understanding that female breadwinner couples make up for gender "deviance" by having a woman do an equal or greater proportion

of household work. It suggests that the division of labour is influenced not only by the woman's status as the primary earner but also by the man's employment situation and related social norms.

A requirement for female breadwinner couples to succeed in their atypical arrangements at home and at work is for them to be fully and willingly committed to their arrangements, as conflicts heighten the risk of couples breaking up and of suffering burnout; with the latter, this study finds that accepting traditional gender roles might put female breadwinners at even greater risk in work-related burnout.

7.1.4 Main Research Question

How do Dutch female breadwinner households do gender at home?

The main research question of the thesis covers the complexities of gender dynamics within a specific socio-cultural context. Each subquestion has a significant scholarly contribution, and taken as a whole, they expand our understanding of gender studies, feminist theory, and social research more broadly. Firstly, the exploration of gender dynamics within Dutch female breadwinner households provides a deeper understanding of how couples negotiate and navigate traditional gender roles. This inquiry contributes to feminist theory by challenging prevailing assumptions about gender and power dynamics within relationships. By drawing on foundational feminist literature and theoretical perspectives, the thesis situates itself within broader discussions on gender studies and social research knowledge, enriching the theoretical framework for understanding women's experiences in domestic and professional spheres. This thesis also contributes to the literature on neoliberal feminism by examining the intersectionality of gender, socioeconomic status, and household dynamics. Through detailed case studies and empirical findings, it brings to the surface the complexities of negotiating gender roles within the context of female breadwinner households,

highlighting the challenges and tensions inherent in defying traditional gender norms. Furthermore, the examination of financial arrangements and negotiations within female breadwinner households improves our understanding of the interplay between income, gender, and relationship dynamics. By incorporating real-life narratives and diverse perspectives, the thesis fills a significant gap in literature through its contribution to knowledge about managing finances and navigating power dynamics within couples where the woman is the primary earner. In addition, the analysis of state-level family policies and cultural practices indicate the importance of policy frameworks that support gender equality and recognise the value of unpaid care work performed by women. By critiquing prevailing welfare state typologies and highlighting the limitations of existing policy frameworks, the thesis advocates for more inclusive approaches to policymaking that take into account the diverse needs and experiences of female breadwinner households. Collectively, the academic contributions of the thesis extend beyond theoretical insights to offer practical implications for practitioners, policymakers, and individuals navigating non-conventional gender roles. By displaying the complexities of gender dynamics within Dutch female breadwinner households, the thesis advances our understanding of how couples negotiate and navigate traditional gender roles in the 21st century, contributing to ongoing discussions on gender equality, family dynamics, and social policy.

The over-arching research question was to explore the dynamics of female breadwinner households, specifically examining how couples engage with gender roles and expectations within their relationships. In the course of investigating Dutch female breadwinner households, a significant revelation emerges: the diverse array of ways these couples engage with “gender”, exhibiting varying degrees of success in negotiating ways to do and undo gender that make both partners happy. It becomes evident that these couples deal with gender dynamics in multifaceted ways, displaying a spectrum that ranges from highly

effective negotiations yielding mutual growth, to the struggles that some face, leading to exhaustion and, at times, even relationship breakdowns. Living outside the boundaries of conventional gender norms, these couples find themselves compelled to invest additional effort into their negotiations, occasionally overlooking arrangements that do not resonate with their desires, all the while grappling with some degree of psychological discomfort that questions their sense of self. While one might assume that thriving in a prosperous heterosexual partnership should be straightforward, many of these couples still found it difficult to defy the assumed male breadwinner model, even in the 21st century. This is especially noteworthy for women who have emerged as “winners” in many feminist battles.

Diving into the heart of this exploration, I was able to observe the intricate dance of gender dynamics within Dutch female breadwinner households, revealing the interplay of domestic chores, financial arrangements, and societal influences that sculpt the way that couples are doing gender. Despite a reasonable awareness among female breadwinners and their partners about how gender is done in their lives, they also encounter challenges to implementing constructive changes for their professional and especially their private lives. Important points that they put forward regarding how Dutch female breadwinner households do gender at home include issues related to the male partner as a “houseman”, open and effective communication, use of outsourcing and that income earned by women from working life should not be a barrier between partners. These are issues that touch on the gendered expectations and behaviours between partners that were raised and explored during the interviews for this study, showing that the context of atypicality for women in work life (i.e., holding a male dominated, high-status job) cannot be separated from the atypical relation to her male partner at home (i.e., that it is not the male but the female who is the highest earning partner in the household).

This study shows that only by understanding female breadwinners' households within the broader context of work and public policy, that their individual negotiations and challenges can be better understood. As to addressing the title "She brings home the bacon, but should he cook it?", it marks the tension between the woman's dominant financial contribution and the expectation for the man to take on domestic responsibilities. The conclusion is that despite challenging conventional gender roles as female breadwinner couples, men and women in these partnerships still experience pressure to conform to societal expectations of gender. Based on the findings, the suggestion that even in cases where the woman is the primary earner, there is a tendency for couples to retain established gender norms, including the expectation that the man should not be responsible for domestic work. Couples who actively renegotiate gender norms through open communication and negotiation can potentially answer the title question positively if they distribute domestic responsibilities in a way that aligns with their preferences and values. Conversely, if they decide to maintain established gender norms, the title could be negatively answered, indicating they have not renegotiated gender expectations. The answer depends on the couple's precise decisions during the renegotiating process and household-by-household allocation of tasks. By allowing female breadwinners and their partners to have their say, this thesis bridges the gap in literature about this under-researched group. By exploring the nature of work, both in the workforce and especially at home, and locating this in the context of (ambivalent) social policy and related national-scale cultural expectations of gendered roles, it has provided knowledge about the ways these atypical households do gender and the extent to which they are able to conform to or challenge gender norms.

7.2 Limitations and Further Research

As with any research, this new study has some limitations. First, this thesis is unable to encompass comprehensive areas of concern related to doing gender in female breadwinner households, but has listed possible areas which can be explored in future research such as: the differing effects of cohabitation and marriage (Asare, 2019; Braun et al., 2008; Dominguez Folgueras, 2012; Doorten, 2008; Kandil & Périvier, 2021; Oomes, 2007; Pepin et al., 2018; Ruppanner & Maume, 2016; Sassler & Miller, 2011; Van Berkum & Janssen, 2011), ethnicity and migration (Kan & Laurie, 2018; Lafeber, 2016), and educational attainment.

Second, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine lesbian or gay couples because of the notion that gender roles are defaulted to men and women in relation to each other, but as there are indications, for example, that lesbians, in particular, tend to distribute housework more evenly than gay and straight households (Taylor et al., 2015, 1507; see also: Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Kurdek, 1993; Sullivan, 1996) there are opportunities for future studies to investigate gender and domestic practices among non-heterosexual households.

Third, given the space and time limitations, this study admittedly narrows the attention regarding potential labour market responsibilities that may be related to social norms for gendered careers. For instance, it is not that the long working hours that come with high status work demands are a problem for female breadwinner couples, but that the problem of long working hours is when they work against gender norms –also those norms that apply to the labour market. While missed career opportunities may be somewhat influenced by adherence to traditional career paths based on gender, this aspect of alignment with conventional male or female career paths warrants compelling grounds for further investigation.

Fourth, the challenge of including men in this study, the fact that their self-esteem is a recurring theme in the findings and that undoing gender requires couples to be aligned where the well-being of both should be paramount, requires research to reach both men and women in their relationships. A number of participants indicated at the end of the interview that they experienced the conversation as a therapy, which was a compliment but certainly unintentional. Perhaps further research can reveal how tools of self-reflection and partners' reflection can be made available specifically for female breadwinner couples.

The final limitation is the geographical and cultural context in which this study was conducted. The study is constructed around the literature and experience regarding female breadwinners and their partners in the Netherlands. Examining gendered domestic practices in female breadwinner households in other countries would help to gain a broader perspective on current practices across the globe.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for Participation in the Study

Identification of project

She brings home the bacon, but should he cook it?

An exploration on how female breadwinners and their partners are 'doing gender' at home.

Purpose of the research

This is a research project to study female breadwinner couples in the Netherlands, which means that the woman earns substantially more than her male partner. You are being invited to participate in this study by purposeful sampling.

Procedures

You will be asked open questions about your thoughts, feelings and experiences concerning the research project. This process should take approximately an hour. All interviews will be audio taped. The results of the interviews will be used solely for the researcher's doctoral thesis and all personal information will be kept confidential.

Risks and/or discomforts

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits

There is no particular benefit to you for participating in the study. The benefits are to provide the researcher and institution, in particular the Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies, with knowledge and understanding of the researched context.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained during this research that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be given to all participants to protect their identity. Only the researcher will have access to the list of the actual names and the assigned pseudonyms.

This information will be kept separate from the data and will be coded; the key linking the code and the participant's identity will be kept in a separate locked space, together with the transcripts and all other possible data with identifying information. The data will be kept for 24 months from the date of publication, before being destroyed. The information obtained in this research may be presented at professional conferences or published in scientific journals, but the data will be reported as anonymous.

Compensation

You will receive no compensation for participating in this research study.

Opportunity to ask questions

You may ask any questions concerning this research at any time. If you have questions before agreeing to participate in the survey, please email the researcher at the contact information below. If you have any questions regarding your rights as research participants or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy (SSHP) Ethics Committee at sshpethics@bbk.ac.uk.

Freedom to withdraw

Participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher or with Birkbeck, University of London.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You may print out a copy of this informed consent form to keep.

Name of Research Participant: _____

Please initial if you agree to be audio recorded during the interview: _____

Please sign to confirm that you are over 18 years of age, that you have read and understand the information on this informed consent form and that you are willing to participate in this study. Signature of Research Participant: _____

Date of signature: _____

Name, Phone and Email of researcher: Lexter N. Woodley, 07508606402, lwoodl02@mail.bbk.ac.uk

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Phase	Action	Notes / Check
Preparation	Bring along: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notebook • pen • two hard copies of informed consent form • hard copy of interview protocol • two audio recorders (one for back-up) • charger for audio recorders • phone number of interviewee in case of unforeseen circumstances • charged mobile phone 	
Arrival	Arrive at the designated location 10 to 15 minutes ahead of scheduled time.	
	Observe if the location is distraction-free and provides sufficient privacy for the interview.	
Pre-interview	Review the study with the participant.	
	Discuss informed consent form.	
	Obtain a signed informed consent form from participant.	
	Make sure that there is an initial on the form regarding audio recording.	
	Inform about privacy and anonymity.	
	Assign a pseudonym to the participant.	
	Reinforce that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the information is confidential; • the participant should feel free to ask for clarification if a question is not understood; • the participant can stop at any time. 	
Interview	Start audio recording.	
	Have pen ready for additional notes in hard copy of interview questions and/or notebook.	
	Start interview questions with regard for the topic guide (see: Appendix C).	
	End after 45 minutes, max. an hour.	
Post-interview	Provide opportunity for participant to return to an interview question.	
	Inform about the rest of procedure (transcription, analysis, etc.).	
	Give indication for completion of research and publication.	
	Express gratitude for participation, double-check for all the brought along items and ensure that participant has contact details for any questions that may arise after this interview encounter.	

Appendix C

Topic guide

Date:

Pseudonym:

WORK LIFE

- Current work title and organisation type
- Hierarchy and responsibilities of current work position

WORK LIFE BALANCE

- Working hours
- Possible work demands

HOME LIFE

- Household composition: members –(step)children and partner, ages, ethnicity
- Partner: length of relationship, how they met, education/work life, current work position

HOUSEHOLD CHORES

- Development of household chores throughout relationship
- Possible outsourcing
- Specificity on the allocation of household chores: cooking, grocery shopping, dish washing, laundry, dusting/sweeping/vacuuming, cleaning bathroom/toilet, taking out the trash, reparations in and around the house, gardening, childcare, etc.

FINANCIAL TASKS

- Joint, separate or both
- Decision-making process

LEISURE TIME

- Leisure versus own time
- Any challenges

POSSIBLE CONFLICTS

- Household chores / financial tasks / leisure time
- Conflict resolutions and conflict avoidance

SOCIAL NORMS

- Upbringing / gender roles of participants' parents,
- Masculinity versus femininity

INCOME BRACKET (see appendix D)

- Participant
- Participant's partner, according to the participant

SATISFACTION AND ADVICE

- Future plans, wishes and desires
- Regarding participant's own life: on a scale of 1 to ten
- Advice for a potential upcoming member of female breadwinner households

Appendix D



Income brackets

A	up to £ 10,000	/ € 12.000
B	£ 10,000 - £ 25,000	/ € 12.000 - € 30.000
C	£ 25,000 - £ 50,000	/ € 30.000 - € 55.000
D	£ 50,000 - £ 100,000	/ € 55.000 - € 115.000
E	£ 100,000 - £ 200,000	/ € 115.000 - € 225.000
F	£ 200,000 - £ 300,000	/ € 225.000 - € 350.000
G	£ 300,000 - £ 400,000	/ € 350.000 - € 450.000
H	£ 400,000 - £ 500,000	/ € 450.000 - € 550.000
I	over £ 500,000	/ € 550.000